

TO: Mr. John Barker, Chairman
Kansas House Committee on Judiciary

Re **HOUSE BILL NO. 2161**

I respectfully submit this written testimony in connection with your consideration of House Bill No. 2161. I am lead pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Salina, which is part of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) I write in opposition to this measure.

The Belhar Confession, written during the apartheid era in South Africa, says that “unity is ... both a **gift** and an **obligation** for the church of Jesus Christ. ... through the working of God’s Spirit, it is a **binding force**, yet simultaneously a reality, which must be earnestly pursued and sought; one which the people of God must continually be built up to attain.” Any separation of the body of Christ, particularly when those of a particular church leave the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), is cause for grief. That grief is deepened when a departing congregation, dissatisfied with an ecclesiastical constitution and verdict, seeks to change the rules and replace church polity with secular law to suit its own needs through a bill introduced by a member of that same congregation.

Denominations ought to be allowed to govern themselves, based upon their own constitutions. This bill will interfere with that process. To replace church polity with neutral law principals would disrupt the gift and obligation of unity in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), as well as the binding force of the church’s Trust Clause, which holds that “all property held by or for a congregation ... is held in trust ... for the use and benefit of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)” (G-4.0203)

Proponents of the bill contend that it would leave the state out of deciding ecclesiastical issues and would make church property disputes fairer, cleaner and clearer. I believe that neither is true. I urge you to vote against this measure.

Respectfully submitted,

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