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Dear Colleagues in Ministry,

Greetings! I want to invite you and your presbytery to participate in a convocation sponsored by Pittsburgh Presbytery entitled "Our Freedom of Religion at Risk" on Thursday, February 19, 2009.

These are challenging times for presbyteries around the nation. Churches are seeking to leave the PC(USA). Radical individualism has taken form in a radical congregationalism that challenges our connectionalism as Presbyterians. More and more churches look to the secular courts to settle ecclesiastical matters resulting in a weakening of our religious freedom to "be and act as the church" independent from state interference.

In response to these issues, Pittsburgh Presbytery invites you and your presbytery to participate in an online convocation (i.e. a webinar) on February 19, 2009 from 2:00-5:30 PM eastern standard time. For those who cannot attend the host site in Pittsburgh at Beulah Presbyterian Church, we encourage you to do the following: Please consider hosting your own local gathering site in your presbytery and make arrangements to log-in to the online event for a minimal registration cost of \$200 (per presbytery). Note: All you need is a meeting site with internet access, a lap-top computer, and a projector for group viewing. Directions for hosting your own site, a presbytery registration form, an outline of the event, speaker biographies, a press release and how your presbytery participants can ask speakers questions during the event can be found at [www.presbyterianconvocation.org](http://www.presbyterianconvocation.org).

We have arranged for a panel of experts on Presbyterian Church history, governance, belief and religious liberty to discuss these topics:

The Westminster Assembly – the biblical basis for Presbyterianism and rejection of Congregationalism by Dr. Joseph Small, Director, Theology, Worship and Education Ministries, PC(USA), Louisville, KY

Covenant and Freedom of Conscience – the historic tensions between Scottish and Scots-Irish Presbyterianism by Dr. Euan Cameron, Professor of Reformation Church History and Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Faculty, Union Theological Seminary, New York, NY

The Adopting Act of 1729 – the colonial application of freedom of conscience under the rubric of scrupling and its historical limits by Dr. Beau Weston, Professor of Sociology, Centre College, Danville, KY and author of the book, "Leading from the Center, Strengthening the Pillars of the Church"

Religious Liberty: A Legal History – deference and neutral principles doctrines in Constitutional interpretation by attorney the Rev. Mark Tamman, Director of Constitutional Services, Office of the General Assembly, PC(USA), Louisville, KY

The Application of Neutral Principles congregation-based claims to property – the Rev. Jeff Tindall, pastor of Carnegie (PA) Presbyterian Church and Attorney of Counsel on Mediation and Alternative Dispute Resolution

Attached to this email you will find 1) a press release, 2) a presbytery registration form and 3) the convocation outline. You will also find more information, bulletin inserts and speaker bios at the web site [www.presbyterianconvocation.org](http://www.presbyterianconvocation.org).

I hope you and members of your presbytery will participate. If you have any questions you may call me, Rev. Dr. Doug Portz, Associate Pastor to Mid-sized Churches of Pittsburgh Presbytery, at 412-323-1400 X 318 or email me at [dportz@pghpresbytery.org](mailto:dportz@pghpresbytery.org).