

Position Statement of the Session of Community Presbyterian Church Danville Regarding Our Relationship with the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America

Approved by Session February 2, 2010

I. Summary of the Session's Actions and Recommendations

During the past 16 months, your Session has labored to understand the theological direction of the Presbyterian Church United States of America (PCUSA) and to consider how CPC should respond to continuing trends which do not align with our core beliefs. It has now become clear that our association with the PCUSA is no longer the most effective path to further CPC's mission and Four Fold Purpose. Reaching this conclusion has been a difficult journey, one that none of your Session members have welcomed. Based upon our thorough investigation of the alternatives, the Session has concluded that the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) is best aligned with CPC's purpose, direction, and mission.

The Session unanimously voted to recommend to the congregation that Community Presbyterian Church seek dismissal from the PCUSA and seek affiliation with the EPC. The final decision to seek dismissal from the PCUSA rests with the Congregation of CPC. Dismissal is granted by a concurring vote of the Presbytery of San Francisco. The process we will use to seek a "gracious dismissal" has been approved by the Presbytery of San Francisco. Gracious Dismissal refers to the policy established by the Presbytery of San Francisco that among other things allows a congregation to be dismissed while still retaining ownership of its property.

Our recommendation is not just about departing, but also about a desire to affiliate with another Presbyterian denomination which is aligned with our theological beliefs, our mission outreach, our vision and calling to fulfill the Great Commission. We believe God has led us to the EPC.

The EPC is a young, growing community of Presbyterian churches established in 1981 who hold to the essential beliefs of the Christian faith as we do at CPC. As part of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, CPC can actively lead and participate in charting the course for this growing branch of the church. Moreover, CPC will be able to apply more of its time, talent and resources to working with like-minded evangelical churches, committed to expanding the Kingdom of God and spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Over its 150 plus year history, CPC has operated in a number of locations and organizational structures. Through it all, CPC has been steadfast in its purpose that people meet Christ and grow in faith in Him. Our purpose will remain the same as part of the EPC.

This document explains the process and findings that led to our decision. Your Session would like you to begin your process of discernment by asking our Lord to give you an open heart, to

help you reason through the alternatives, to be humble in your discussions, and to join us in a season of prayer as we begin this journey with you and with our Presbytery.

II. Historical context and process for reaching the above decision to seek dismissal was as follows:

Despite our concerns throughout the years about the troubling theological diversity we have within the PCUSA, we have actively engaged in the life of the denomination. In response to theological and ethical confusion created by PCUSA's theological diversity, past CPC Sessions have felt compelled to issue clarifying statements such as our Witness for Biblical Morality and our Sanctity of Life Statement.

Over the years, CPC Elders and Pastors have actively participated in the larger PCUSA in various roles, including Moderator of the SF Presbytery, delegates to the General Assembly, and in committees of the San Francisco Presbytery. In every role we have given effort to influence the direction at the Presbytery, Synod, and General Assembly (GA) levels. We have worked for renewal of the denomination to orthodox theology and effective mission and ministry.

CPC leaders have participated in a variety of reform groups within the PCUSA and provided leadership and financial resources to these groups. These groups have included Presbyterians for Renewal, the Presbyterian Coalition, The San Francisco Presbytery Evangelical Caucus, Presbyterian Frontier Fellowship, Presbyterians Pro-life, the Confessing Church Movement, the Tall Steeple Group, and the Presbyterian Global Fellowship. We continue to be active in these groups.

In recent years the internal conflict in the PCUSA has continued to grow. In response the Session appointed two Task Forces, composed of elders, pastors and members of our congregation for the purpose of understanding issues arising within the larger denomination and to make recommendations to the Session regarding our relationship to the PCUSA. Now, following a season of study, prayer, and discernment your Session has made its recommendation.

III. Underlying Reasons for our Recommendation:

As a church, CPC is and always has been, united in its deep commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, to the authority of scripture, the unity of the church, and to the mission of God's Kingdom in our world.

We believe the Scriptures are the church's first and final authority on faith and life. We are guided by the historic confessions of the church as found in our Book of Confessions. We believe that Jesus Christ is Lord of all and the only way of salvation.

We grieve that time and again a minority within the PCUSA has sought to compromise the authority of scripture and the uniqueness and Lordship of Christ. The trend we see is disturbing and turns our focus away from our primary mission of proclaiming the "Good News" of the saving Grace of Jesus Christ.

A key reason for our recommendation includes **a creeping tolerance of theological pluralism**. An increasingly large percentage of PCUSA pastors are taking positions that are inconsistent with the historical tenets of our faith. The renewal groups within the PCUSA mentioned above have tried for many years to restore the confessional unity and integrity of the denomination, but all attempts have been largely unsuccessful.

In 2001 the General Assembly established a Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity and Purity [PUP]. They were directed to lead the PCUSA in spiritual discernment of our Christian identity in and for the 21st century. This task force labored for five years, trying to reach consensus on four major issues dividing our denomination: Christology, biblical authority and interpretation, ordination standards, and power. In the end, PUP did not resolve any of the tensions; rather it urged us to live together with them.

The PUP report acknowledges theological diversity, calls for unity and mutual respect but failed to address essential matters of faith preferring to push the issue to the local level for church by church determination. This results in the final deterioration of the denomination's theological unity. We are now bound only by a governance structure that promotes the celebration of diversity while failing to clearly define and enforce common essential beliefs. In effect, and ironically, the PCUSA has promoted unity only for the issue of theological diversity.

Because of this diversity, the PCUSA has created a **conflicted witness to the world** and by extension to the local churches of the PCUSA. Churches like CPC are continually called to explain that they are not like other parts of the denomination that embrace non-orthodox positions. This defensive posture reduces the impact of the ministries and mission of CPC.

The leadership of CPC values the connectionalism that our denomination promises, but the fact of the matter is that the PCUSA has devolved into a fractured denomination with **divided loyalties**. Mistrust of our denominational leaders becomes visible in the lack of financial support. While CPC contributes our per capita to maintain basic church structures, not a dime is entrusted for general mission due to the expectation that funds could be used to support efforts counter to CPC's values. National PCUSA mission efforts have dwindled in recent decades due to similar mistrust across our denomination. Locally, support for General Mission of our San Francisco Presbytery has plummeted because of the same divided missional vision.

Evangelical churches within the PCUSA seek one another out and value our relationship, but there is little relationship with a significant number of PCUSA churches that embrace an opposing agenda. The connections that CPC enjoys with other evangelical churches in the PCUSA are not based only upon denominational affiliation, but primarily upon a common theology and mission.

PCUSA is on a downward spiral in membership and is losing scale. As church leaders, we have lost hope that CPC can affect change in the PCUSA. CPC members exhibit little enthusiasm for denominational service, except in renewal groups or defensive votes.

We find similar loss of hope and enthusiasm across the denomination. Those among us who have given the most effort are among the most discouraged. The **passion and energy that has been**

diverted to an interminable internal struggle must now be released to create a new denominational alliance for discipleship and mission.

We believe the Great Commission is not about particular denominations. CPC belongs first to Jesus Christ who is Lord of the church. PCUSA was originally a powerful representation of churches that shared essential beliefs, traditions and common mission. The disagreements within the denomination have now eroded these long standing commitments of membership in the PCUSA.

In the EPC, CPC's theology will be supported, our commitment to evangelism will be encouraged, and CPC's commitment to the Presbyterian form of church government and Reformed Theology will continue. Changing denominations from one Presbyterian body to another will remove the tension over denominational issues, the distraction from our mission, and the time demands on our pastors required to deal with PCUSA developments.

IV. Next Steps for Our Congregation.

The process ahead will involve considerable prayer and discernment from each of our members. The Session of CPC will lead you in a series of informational forums, open Q&A dialogue, and prayerful listening as we together seek to discern our path ahead. The process will culminate with a Congregational Meeting and official vote to either stay the course with the PCUSA or follow the recommendation of Session and seek dismissal.

In pursuit of dismissal from PCUSA, CPC will follow a series of steps that are part of the San Francisco Presbytery's Gracious Dismissal Process:

CPC's Session contacts the leadership of the San Francisco Presbytery to initiate the process.

1. San Francisco Presbytery begins to follow its published "Gracious Dismissal Process" for Congregations considering leaving the PCUSA.
 - a. The Presbytery appoints a Presbytery Engagement Team (PET) who will meet with CPC leadership.
 - b. The PET and CPC will then engage in a period of prayerful discussion.
 - c. If the PET determines that reconciliation is not possible, then the PET and a Special Committee of CPC's congregation will engage in negotiation regarding terms of dismissal.
 - d. The members of the congregation will be given at least 30 days prior notice of a Congregational vote and meeting.
3. The Presbytery of San Francisco calls for a congregational meeting to act on the Session recommendation to be dismissed from the PCUSA and pursue affiliation with the EPC and to approve the terms of dismissal..
4. SF Presbytery will then vote at a regularly scheduled Presbytery meeting regarding approval of the dismissal and the terms of the negotiated agreement.
5. A transition of CPC people, property and pastors will then occur:

- a. A transition process will be established for people who do not want to transition with CPC to EPC.
- b. The ordained Presbyterian pastors, Scott Farmer, Mark Wollan, Cathy Burkholder, Bill Haslim, Dick Sanner and Ben Joyce will seek to be received by the EPC. Mark Howard is ordained with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and will retain his ordination with that body.
- c. Legal documents will be executed to transfer our assets to CPC.

V. Conclusion

We hope and pray that this statement provides the essential materials and starting points needed to understand the background of Session’s recommendation. To make an informed decision about this critical issue, we strongly recommend that you make use of all the resources and opportunities we provide in the coming months. We are aware that our members and others may have many questions on particular points, and we expect to answer those questions both through publications and in face-to-face meetings.

May God be glorified as we move forward together to worship and serve Him.

Amen

Approved by Session February 2, 2010

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Rev. Cathy Burkholder

Rev. Bill Haslim

Elder Clerk of Session Rhea Serpan

Elder Paul Bianchi

Elder Roland Burchard

Elder Craig Farrill

Elder Marilee Goodykoontz

Elder Mike Iverson

Rev. Mark Howard

Rev. Ben Joyce

Elder Kit King

Karin Lovejoy

Elder Erny Malakoff

Elder Bob McKee

Elder Karen Nelson

Elder Debra Prince

Elder Kim Ray

Rev. Dick Sanner

Rev. Mark Wollan

Elder Michael Redemer

Elder Gary Roberts

Elder Ruth Ann Thompson

Elder Rita van Rijn

Elder Larry Wiens