

Reasons For Change # 5
WHY JOIN THE EPC?
(EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH)

This is the fifth in a series of papers addressing the central reasons that the Session of CPC recommends to the congregation that Community Presbyterian Church seek dismissal from the PCUSA and seek affiliation with the EPC. This paper addresses question of why Session is recommending affiliation with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.

BACKGROUND:

1. The CPC Session has concluded that our association with the PCUSA is no longer the most effective path to further CPC's mission and Four Fold Purpose. The reasons to seek dismissal from the PCUSA are outlined in CPC's position statement regarding the PCUSA.
2. Why join another denomination? The PCUSA requires that a church seeking dismissal must be released to a reformed body of believers such as the EPC. (Becoming a non-denominational church is not an option.)
3. What other denominations did the Session evaluate? Several reformed denominations were evaluated including: Christian Reformed Church, Evangelical Covenant Church, and Presbyterian Church in America.
4. Many factors were considered in evaluating potential denominations including their form of government, confessions of faith, history, and their positions on key issues such as women in leadership, biblical morality, peace and unity, and the sanctity of life.

SUMMARY FINDINGS AFTER A 16 MONTH REVIEW:

1. EPC is better aligned with CPC's core beliefs, purpose, direction, and mission than any other reformed denomination,
2. EPC is a reformed body of believers, with a strong missional focus who uphold denominational standards, align with other churches, have trust and mutual support and differ in a positive manner from PCUSA, and
3. EPC affiliation will enable CPC to unify its witness to the un-churched; connect and collaborate with a growing community of evangelical churches; remove the tension over denominational conflicts, the distraction from our mission, and the time demands on our leaders required to deal with ongoing PCUSA issues.

WHAT IS ATTRACTIVE ABOUT THE EPC:

1. **CPC and EPC are better aligned on core beliefs, mission and outreach**
 - a. A shared commitment to Jesus Christ as outlined in *CPC's Reason for Change - Christology*
 - b. A shared view of the authority and interpretation of scripture as outlined in *CPC's Reason for Change - Authority of Scripture* (Available 3/27/10)
 - c. A shared commitment to the Great Commission - domestic and international missions - and reaching the world for Christ.
 1. The EPC has one full-time missionary for every 2.3 churches; PCUSA has only one full-time missionary for every 43.7 churches.
 2. EPC Presbytery of the West, for example, spends 39 percent of its annual budget on mission outreach.
 3. The EPC encourages and equips new church start ups across the United States and especially in urban communities and college towns. (Vision 21, GA Assembly

Reasons For Change # 5
WHY JOIN THE EPC?
(EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH)

minutes, June 2001) www.epc.org/vision-21/

- d. CPC's positions on key issues such as biblical morality, peace and unity, and the sanctity of life are aligned with EPC (see www.epc.org/about-the-epc/beliefs/ or www.cpcdanville.org) This is further outlined in *CPC's Reason for Change – Conflicted Witness* (Available 4/4/10)

2. EPC churches have common theological values and the EPC actively upholds their denominational standards

- a. EPC believes that accountability (doctrinal, ethical, and ministry practice) is vital to the church's integrity and witness to the world. As such, prior to ordination they require officers to affirm the "Essentials of Our Faith" (EPC's core beliefs) and the Westminster Confession of Faith. (see www.cpcdanville.org/NewToCPC/Presbytery and click on EPC beliefs)
- b. The EPC upholds denominational standards for professionally trained, regionally ordained and nationally recognized ministers and enforces those standards prior to the ordination of ministers and during their service as ministers with the EPC.

3. CPC and EPC are both committed to extend God's Kingdom

- a. The EPC is a growing family of churches that seek to remain faithful to Jesus Christ and biblical authority. Starting with 15 churches in 1981 the EPC is now a denomination of 279 churches growing from 183 in the past 5 years.
- b. The EPC upholds the standards of our traditional reformed and biblically based Presbyterian form of government, maintaining a consistent witness to the world.
- c. The EPC continues to have a deep desire to see the kingdom of God extended through energetic church planting and evangelism. CPC is excited about EPC's efforts to make something great. (www.epc.org/vision-21/)

4. CPC and EPC churches can grow together and learn from each other based on common goals, beliefs and governance in an environment of trust and mutual support.

- a. We expect CPC will experience an encouraging environment of trust and mutual support within the EPC. This will release a significant burden from CPC's leadership and liberate our church to serve with new freedom. See *CPC's Reason for Change – Divided Loyalties* (Available 4/11/10).
- b. By joining with EPC, our church would have the opportunity to learn and grow with other churches and leaders with whom we share common beliefs. CPC would be linked arm-in-arm with a network of churches working together with shared interests and ideologies, to bring people to Christ.

SUMMARY

The CPC Session (including elders and pastors) unanimously recommends to the congregation that CPC seek dismissal from the PCUSA and seek affiliation with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC). After considerable investigation, discussion, prayer and discernment, we are convinced that the EPC represents the best denominational affiliation.

To God be the Glory

Reasons For Change # 5
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ATTACHMENTS

APPENDIX #I

APPENDIX #II

APPENDIX # 1
FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND STUDY

FACTS ABOUT THE EPC:

1. The EPC is Presbyterian in government, reformed in theology and evangelical in spirit. (See the Appendix for expanded definitions of terms.)
2. The Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) is headquartered in Livonia, Michigan (near Detroit) and was founded 29 years ago in 1981, two years prior to the reunion of the Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA) in 1983.
3. Today, the EPC is a growing denomination with 279 reformed Presbyterian churches, ten Presbyteries, over 85,000 active members and with 90 missionaries serving in roughly 20 different countries.
4. EPC's Presbytery of the West serves congregations in 17 western states, including California churches. Presbytery of the West recently affirmed plans to begin a new Presbytery of the Pacific by 2011 to serve California, Oregon and Washington States

WHERE EPC AND PCUSA DIFFER:

The EPC differs from PCUSA in several positive respects.

1. To protect the new denomination from needless strife, the EPC founders promoted an understanding of freedom in which matters not essential to salvation were left to the conscience of individual churches and believers.
2. EPC has chosen to leave the decision of women in leadership to the Spirit-guided consciences of individual congregations concerning the ordination of women as Elders and Deacons, and to the presbyteries concerning the ordination of women as Ministers. This right is guaranteed in perpetuity (forever) to all the churches in the EPC (EPC Book of Order 7-2). EPC Presbytery of the West, of which CPC would be a member church, supports the ordination of women as Elders, Deacons and Ministers.
3. With respect to church property, EPC policy is that each church has the exclusive, inalienable right to own and control its own property.
4. EPC is a financially well-managed and stable organization which operates within its budget and is less costly than PCUSA; the recommended annual CPC contribution to the EPC would be \$45,000 versus \$62,000 for PCUSA.

Reasons For Change # 5
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APPENDIX #2
FOR FURTHER REFLECTION AND STUDY

EXPANDED DEFINITIONS:

Presbyterian:

To be Presbyterian is to be governed according to the pattern of elders seen in the Old and New Testaments. We are ruled neither by bishops in a hierarchical model nor by members in a congregational model. Biblically qualified elders are elected by the congregation, along with ministers, to rule the church corporately. Presbyterian also means to be connected in mutual accountability and responsibility. Just as individual Christians are connected to one another as members of the body of Christ, so also individual congregations are connected under Christ as the great Head of the Church.

Reformed:

To be “Reformed” means several things. Historically, it means that we trace our roots to the Reformation, when John Calvin and others led the movement to reform the Church according to Scripture. Theologically, it means belief in the absolute sovereignty of God and that the highest good is God’s glory. The historical and theological heritage is often expressed in the ‘solas’ of the Reformation. These five theological truths were consistent across the reformed movement. God’s *grace alone* as the only way to be reconciled to God, *faith alone* as the only means of receiving God’s grace, *Christ alone* as the ground of God’s saving grace, *Scripture alone* as the only infallible authority for belief and *God’s glory alone* as the ultimate purpose for the lives of men and women.

Evangelical:

“Evangelical” means to believe in the importance of sharing the good news that through Jesus Christ the kingdom of God has been inaugurated, freeing people from the guilt and power of sin through personal faith and repentance. EPC expresses their priority on evangelism by stating it in their governing documents as the first work of the church. This priority is evidenced in their emphasis on church planting and world missions.

For other questions about the EPC, please visit their website as www.epc.org/about-the-epc

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES FOR CONSIDERATION TO DISMISS FROM PCUSA:

Mark 3:24 (NIV) ²⁴If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.

Matthew 12:25 (NIV) ²⁵Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand."

1 Timothy 6:3-6 (NIV) ³If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, ⁴he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions ⁵and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain. ⁶But godliness with contentment is great gain.

Romans 16:17 (NIV) ¹⁷I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.