

CRC Report to Session  
April 14, 2014

At last month's Session meeting, I came before you with a report that the CRC had reached a number of preliminary conclusions that we wanted to share with you, the Session, at whose pleasure we serve. Tonight, I come before you again after the CRC has had more time to deliberate and, having reached a consensus, to present a report and to ask for direction from the Session after hearing this report.

Among the considerations and conclusions we have reached are the following:

1. While there are many wonderful things about the PC(USA), there are, nonetheless, a number of issues with which many members of FPC, including officers, have serious concerns. These issues have caused a distraction from the mission of FPC. I won't go into all of those issues now, but Kelley Terry has done an admirable job compiling many of those issues, which you can find below in Appendix I. As a result of those concerns, FPC has lost, and will continue to lose, members of this church, including a number of officers. I am happy to point out the obvious, that, so far at least, we have not lost any of our beloved pastoral staff. At our three Listening Sessions we heard from many of our members on BOTH sides of the issues. These issues have caused a distraction from the mission of FPC.
2. This church has been a witness to the Lord Jesus Christ in San Antonio, the State of Texas, and indeed, throughout the world since 1846. We have an on-going rich history of preaching the saving Gospel of Jesus, which we MUST continue to do. I feel that there are very few within our membership, and I would dare say, within our city, who do not approve of what this church, this wonderful congregation at Fourth and Alamo, has been, and is still, about.
3. The Session of this church, consistently and over many years, has stood with other Presbyterians in opposition to various decisions of the PC(USA) when we felt that doing so was the right thing to do. Such was the case when we voted to affirm our loyalty to the causes of the Confessing Church Movement, the Presbyterian Global Fellowship, and most recently to the Fellowship of Presbyterians. The CRC anticipates there will be actions coming out of the GA meeting this June with which many on this Session will not approve. Tripp Stuart has put together a highly informative presentation on these matters, which is found below in Appendix II.

4. Many Presbyterian churches have made the decision to disaffiliate from the PC(USA) in recent years because of disagreements over ecclesial and polity issues, and many of these churches have been dismissed to other denominations. Attached below as Appendix III is an informative piece composed by David West, which discusses the experiences of many churches that have attempted to leave the denomination with various degrees of success. The lesson is that those congregations which have a significant majority desiring to leave the denomination have been served well by this strategy; those which are more diverse in their beliefs have become divided and weakened. The CRC would define a significant majority – being of one mind – as somewhere in the 85 to 90 percent range. By the way, many of you may not have heard that it appears that FPC-Houston will have a second vote on disaffiliation because of a problem with their vote which their Clerk of the Session would not certify. Please know, also, that we will continue to closely monitor the unfolding situation at HPPC. We will also continue to discuss and evaluate other means by which to make our displeasure with some of the actions of the PC(USA) known such as "defecting in place".

5. The Gracious Separation Policy of Mission Presbytery is a long, complex, expensive and intentionally difficult process designed to encourage reconciliation and discourage separation. You will find an attachment I have written giving an overview on the Gracious Separation Policy of Mission Presbytery below as Appendix IV. The facts are that in order for our church to leave the PC(USA), a quorum of at least 35 percent of our membership must be present, with a minimum of 80 percent voting to leave. The CRC believes that achieving that large a quorum and that high vote level would be very difficult at this time. To attempt that process and fail would be very detrimental to this wonderful body of believers!

6. The consensus of the Church Relations Committee is that First Presbyterian Church is NOT of one mind on denominational issues, and because of that the CRC believes that FPC should NOT enter the formal discernment process at this time. We believe that to do so would further divide and weaken this congregation and perhaps even jeopardize the very existence of many of the fruitful ministries of this church, some of which this church has supported for generations. We are unanimous in our belief that attempting to utilize the Gracious Separation Policy to leave the PC(USA) is neither productive nor viable at this time. However, if this situation should change in the future, then reconsideration might be in order.

7. The CRC feels that, in the meantime, FPC should have as our goal something along the line of "Unity in Action for the Cause of Jesus Christ." We should proceed with our mission as we always have. Fortunately, even during the distractions and interruptions of these denominational issues, we have never stopped carrying out the ministry to which we have been called. We should focus on the things we are "for" rather than "against". Let us now recommit to the call of the Great Commission, and to the Great Commandment to love the Lord our God with all our heart and all our soul and all our mind, and to love our neighbor as our self.

8. The CRC feels our task of educating the congregation has momentum at this time and our efforts have been fruitful. The CRC thanks the Session for the liberty to continue to meet and to monitor the affairs of the denomination and to educate and respond to the Session and congregation at the appropriate times. The CRC feels that it is important that we get this information to the congregation as quickly and effectively as possible.

The Church Relations Committee (CRC)  
A Committee of the Session of First Presbyterian Church, San Antonio

Dirk DeKoch, Chair  
Trey Little, Staff  
David Peebles  
George Spencer  
Tripp Stuart  
Sandy Sturch  
Kelley Terry  
David West

## Areas of Concern

- Areas of Concern:
  - The PC(USA) provides *Uncritical* Support for Palestine and *unilateral opposition to Israel*
  - PC(USA) has called for the purging of investment portfolios of companies that do business with Israel,
    - including Caterpillar, Hewlett Packard and Motorola
    - In the past boycotts of Nestle and Taco Bell
  - PC(USA) provided support for the *Occupy Wall Street Movement* and they advocate for the investigation of banking and financial institutions.
  - PC(USA) advocates for *labor unions* and *collective bargaining*.
  - PC(USA) supports the passage of the *DREAM act*.
  - PC(USA) *boycotts* states that enforce *federal immigration law*.
  - PC(USA) advocates for and lobbies for *gun control*.
  - PC(USA) endorses *Obamacare*.
  - PC(USA) advocates for an unconditional continuing resolution to raise the US debt ceiling without preconditions.
  - PC(USA) supports and has donated money to *ACORN* (association for community organizations for reform now)
  - PC(USA) advocates for *legal abortions* including partial birth abortions. Further, our denomination is a member of the *Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice*, which in turn supports and **donates money** to Planned Parenthood. In fact, all PC(USA) churches pay dues to the board of Pensions. Those funds are used to pay benefits including coverage of abortion of all kinds and for any reason. Those funds are also used to pay benefits to same sex partners of plan members.

- The PC(USA) has supported Marxist rebels in Latin America and has supported Castro in Cuba.
- At the 2001 General Assembly, one commissioner offered a motion that the assembly declare "*the singular saving lordship of Jesus Christ*". It was defeated because it was considered "disrespectful to other religions".
  - In a survey done by PC(USA) in 2011, 45% of PC(USA) pastors do not agree with the statement "only followers of Christ will be saved". Further 56% of special ministers *do not believe that Christ is necessary for salvation*.
- At the 2012 General Assembly, the assembly was prayed over by a Hindu priest and took counsel from a Muslim.
- In the 2010 General Assembly, what has become known as **10A** passed. It was later ratified by a majority of the presbyteries in May of 2011. Amendment 10A removed the "fidelity in marriage" and "chastity for single persons" language from our constitution. This allowed local presbyteries to ordain as pastors and elders practicing homosexual persons engaging in homosexual behaviors.
- These are some examples of the theological drift.
  - Is not a complete list.
  - All are encouraged to do further investigation.
  - There is a great deal of information available.
  - We all need to increase our awareness.

*Sources:*

- *pcusa.org*
- *presbyterianmission.org*
- *rcrc.org*
- *layman.org*
- *ppl.org*
- *officeofpublicwitness.blogspot.com*

## **What has First Presbyterian, San Antonio been doing to stand up for:**

**The Lordship of Jesus Christ,**

**The Authority of Scripture, &**

**Traditional Presbyterian Beliefs as expressed in the PC(USA) Confessions?**

In **2001**, The Session of FPC San Antonio voted to join the **Confessing Church Movement** within the PC(USA), which advocated three main beliefs:

- 1) Jesus Christ alone is Lord of all and the way of salvation,
- 2) The Bible is the Church's only infallible rule of faith and life,
- 3) Christians are called either to sexual abstinence in singleness or to sexual purity within the confines of marriage between one man and one woman.

In **2006**, The Session of FPC San Antonio voted to become one of the founding members of the **Presbyterian Global Fellowship**, a group of like-minded PC(USA) churches, who in concert with renewal groups already within the denomination, purposed to turn their backs on denominational struggles, and concentrate on missional church work, i.e. fulfilling the Great Commission, while holding to traditional belief in our confessions.

In **2011**, The Session of FPC San Antonio voted to join the **Fellowship of Presbyterians**, a group within the PC(USA) which seeks to differentiate itself by:

- 1) Stopping all fighting about denominational issues
- 2) Concentrating on Missional work as directed by the Great Commission
- 3) Defining and teaching the “Essential Tenets” of the Reformed Faith
- 4) Working and cooperating with like-minded similar churches within the umbrella of the Fellowship and the Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians (ECO)

To clarify, The Fellowship of Presbyterians is a group wholly within the PC(USA) denomination. ECO is a new Presbyterian denomination which works closely with The Fellowship. Membership in the Fellowship does not encourage nor require leaving the PC(USA) and joining ECO.

## **Overtures Coming Before the 221<sup>st</sup> General Assembly of the PC(USA) in Detroit, this June 14<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup>**

- 5 have to do with pro-Palestinian, anti-Israel actions
- 3 have to do with Cuba
- 2 have to do with gun violence, limiting possession of firearms
- 1 has to do with divestment from fossil fuel companies
- 1 has to do with halting the use of drones for any purpose
- 1 has to do with stopping all executions

It would seem that our denomination, instead of concentrating on the Great Commission we received from Christ Jesus, has become a liberal political action committee, and has lost its first love.

Two overtures seek to redefine marriage from between a man and a woman to two non-gender specific people:

1. Ovt 011: Would separate the civil marriage and the blessing of a Christian Covenant, the latter of which is defined as a couple as opposed to a man and a woman.
2. Ovt 021: Strikes the entire BOO text of W-4.9000 and replaces it with inclusive language of marriage as a unique commitment between two people.

Authoritative Interpretations become church law immediately, they do not require the assent of a majority of the presbyteries to become church law. Two overtures seek to issue Authoritative Interpretations allowing teaching elders (pastors) the discretion to perform any marriage that is legal in their particular state:

1. Ovt 024
2. Ovt 027

Both refer to the participants as “a couple.” Both require the session to approve the use of their building for such purposes. Both require that the laws of the particular state allow such a marriage. Both require that the conscience of the teaching elder be bound by only their understanding of the Word, and the leading of the Holy Spirit.

One seeks to strike the Authoritative Interpretation of 1991 which prohibits teaching elders from performing marriages for same gender couples, and prohibits Sessions from permitting the use of church facilities for this purpose.

Ovt 036

By striking an authoritative interpretation, this overture essentially functions as a new authoritative interpretation allowing such activities.

One overture seeks to stop all action on same gender marriage until after more study by a task force, and more discussion by the General Assembly.

Ovt 047

The task force would study the Biblical and Confessional understandings of same gender marriage and seek to identify common ground and reconcilable differences before any further action on the subject is taken.

Websites which may be of interest:

[www.pcusa.org](http://www.pcusa.org)

[www.fellowship-pres.org](http://www.fellowship-pres.org)

[www.eco-pres.org](http://www.eco-pres.org)

[www.epc.org](http://www.epc.org)

[www.pcanet.org](http://www.pcanet.org)

PC(USA)

The Fellowship of Presbyterians

The Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church

The Presbyterian Church in America

## How Other Churches in the PCUSA are Responding to Denominational Issues.

Background. The Presbyterian form of government is a “connectional” system. Presbyterian churches do not operate as independent units, but are connected with other churches through presbyteries, synods and the General Assembly. While Presbyterians are “connectional,” splits and mergers are not new to Presbyterians.

The major split relevant to what is going on today was in 1861, when the civil war split the northern and southern churches. The northern churches became known as the United Presbyterian Church of the USA or **UPCUSA**. The southern churches became the Presbyterian Church of US or **PCUS**. They remained separated for 122 years. First Presbyterian Church of San Antonio (FPC) was part of the PCUS for 122 years of its history. In 1983, the northern and southern churches merged to form the current denomination, the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America, or **PCUSA**.

Recent History. In the past three years, over 400 churches either have left or are in the process of leaving the denomination. See [www.layman.org/wp-content](http://www.layman.org/wp-content). These tend to be the larger, more orthodox or conservative churches. These churches have left the denomination in one of three ways: (1) the “gracious separation” process issued by each presbytery; (2) through legal proceedings; and (3) “renunciation of jurisdiction.” The “gracious separation” process (authorized by General Assembly) varies from presbytery to presbytery. Although the courts cannot get involved in theological or polity issues under the First Amendment of the U. S. Constitution, they can decide property disputes. The results in court vary from state to state, depending on property laws. Renunciation of jurisdiction means the members of the churches reject the authority of the church and leave the denomination, abandoning their church property.

Where Are They Going? Presbyterian churches must be dismissed to another denomination. Initially, most churches seemed to be joining the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, or **EPC**, a denomination that broke away from the UPCUSA in 1981. Recently, more churches are joining a new denomination formed in 2012, called the Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians, or **ECO**. Jim Singleton, former associate pastor at First Presbyterian Church of San Antonio was instrumental in forming that new denomination. A few churches have joined the Presbyterian Church of America or **PCA**, which split off from the PCUS in 1972, and others have joined other denominations.

Note: The Fellowship of Presbyterians is not a separate denomination. It is an affiliation of Presbyterian churches that may be members of the PCUSA, EPC or ECO, but who hold certain theological views in common. Churches can join the Fellowship without ever leaving the PCUSA.

Some of the churches who voted to leave the denomination and affiliate with other Presbyterian denominations are the following:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Members</b>	<b>Vote</b>	<b>Denomination</b>	<b>Cost</b>
First Presbyterian	Orlando	3951	90%	EPC	\$900,000
Kirk of the Hills	Tulsa	2800	96%	EPC	\$1,750,000
First Presbyterian	Colorado Sp.	4108	90%	ECO	\$700,000
St. Andrews PC (straw poll)	Newport B.	4000	88.5%	ECO	NA
Menlo Park PC	CA	3010	93%	ECO	\$8,890,000
<b><u>In Texas:</u></b>					
Highland Park	Dallas	4896	91%	ECO	in negotiations
First Presbyterian	Kingwood	1611	68.5%	ECO	unknown
First Presbyterian	Amarillo	1043	96.5%	ECO	unknown
First Presbyterian	Houston	4300	65%	ECO	see below
First Presbyterian	Longview	708	71%	EPC	see below
Iglesia Presbiteriana	San Benito	178	90%+	EPC	NA
El Principe de Pas	Mercedes	55	90%+	EPC	NA
San Pablo PC	Brownsville	20	90%+	EPC	NA
Faith PC	Brownsville	50			
<b><u>In Formal Discernment Process:</u></b>					
Grace Presbyterian	Houston	2631	552/64	NA	NA

See [www.layman.org/wp-content](http://www.layman.org/wp-content).

Highland Park PC (HPPC). HPPC did not use the “gracious separation” process of its presbytery. The trustees (who held title to church property) filed suit against the presbytery to declare that HPPC owned its property free and clear from any claim of the “trust clause” in the Book of Order. The congregation then voted on disaffiliation. While the legal dispute is still pending, HPPC and the presbytery are currently in settlement negotiations.

FPC Houston. First Presbyterian Church of Houston recently voted to leave the PCUSA and affiliate with ECO. While 1085 members, or 65%, voted to leave the PCUSA, this was 36 votes short of the 67% requirement to leave under their presbytery’s “gracious separation” process. As a result, the vote failed. Recently, however, FPC Houston sent a notice to members saying that an error in the voting process had occurred.

FPC Longview. At First Presbyterian Church of Longview, 71% of its members present at the congregational meeting voted to leave the denomination. An administrative commission from presbytery reportedly recommended that the church property remain with the members who voted to stay with the denomination, recognized as the “true church” under the Book of Order. The 71% who vote to leave the PCUSA left the church and formed a new church under the EPC. The minority now meets at the church building, with reduced attendance.

#### Mission Presbytery.

Three Hispanic churches in the Rio Grande Valley (Iglesia Presbiteriana, El Principe de Pas and San Pablo Presbyterian Church) left the PCUSA by renunciation of jurisdiction. They sent a letter to Mission Presbytery renouncing the jurisdiction of the PCUSA, but asking the presbytery if it would allow them to take property with them because they were poor churches in poor neighborhoods. Presbytery required the churches to turn over all real property, bank accounts and personal property. With more than 90% of the members leaving the churches, all three church sites were unable to continue in operation. The churches have been closed and the real property is in the process of being sold by Mission Presbytery.

#### Conclusions.

There are more than 10,000 churches in the PCUSA. Although more than 400 churches are leaving the denomination, most churches have not. Memorial Drive Presbyterian Church in Houston joined the Fellowship; it has not taken action to disaffiliate from the denomination. Peachtree Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, the largest church in the denomination, has not taken actions to disaffiliate from the denomination.

What is important for First Presbyterian Church of San Antonio to learn is this:

1. A church should have a significant majority to leave the denomination. As the examples above illustrate, a vote of 65% or 71% to leave the denomination may not be sufficient. Most of the churches that have left successfully have had votes of 90% to 96% in favor of such action. FPC needs to be of one mind.
2. Leaving the denomination can be a difficult process. While many churches have left intact in recent years, it can be a risky business. If not handled properly, it can destroy or seriously weaken a church, as some of the examples above illustrate.
3. There is a cost. A church must be willing to go through either the gracious separation process or a legal process, which can take up to two years. There is also a financial cost, which may range from several hundred thousand to millions of dollars.
4. Whatever your view on denominational issues, the PCUSA will look different in the future.
  - a. It likely will be smaller. In 2012, the PCUSA lost 180,941 members and gained 78,150 members. Four new churches were added, 86 were dissolved and 110 were dismissed to other denominations. *Source: PCUSA Office of General Assembly, Statistical Reporting.* The numbers for 2013 are not yet available.
  - b. It may be more liberal in its theological and political views. With the departure of many of the more orthodox or conservative churches and members, there may be less balance on theological and political views. Many are of the opinion that the conservative voice in the denomination has been lost.
  - c. Presbyteries may exercise greater control over local churches through greater control over the selection of pastors, additional changes using the new form of government (nFOG) and additional changes to the Book of Order.

The most important lesson for FPC: We should do nothing to divide the congregation. This church has been a witness to the Lord Jesus Christ in San Antonio, the State of Texas and throughout the world since 1846. Whatever course FPC may take now or in the future, pastors and members should be of one mind. This requires treating each other with deference and respect, diligent study of the scriptures and constant prayer. Throughout this debate, First Presbyterian Church of San Antonio must continue its mission, acting as the hands and feet of Jesus Christ, and demonstrating the love of God and the love of our neighbors as ourselves.

## **Overview of the Gracious Separation Policy of Mission Presbytery**

What do the words “Gracious Separation Policy” mean and what it could potentially mean to all of us here at FPC San Antonio?

Definition & Overview: In a thumbnail sketch, “Gracious Separation Policy” is the phrase used to describe the defined process by which a congregation may remove or “disaffiliate” itself from the PC(USA). The stated intent is that, even in times of disagreement, the congregation and presbytery can work together with respect and love to the end that the mission of Christ is fulfilled.

More specifically, according to our own Mission Presbytery, Gracious Separation is a process which occurs "when a congregation questions PC(USA) doctrine, policy or practice to the extent that disaffiliation from the denomination is being discussed or considered" and the matter is taken up with the presbytery, which holds the responsibility of providing a “ministry of reconciliation”. It is the prerogative of each individual presbytery to determine and define its own Gracious Separation Policy, with its own unique steps and requirements. There is no one-size-fits-all standard within the PC(USA); each individual presbytery makes its own rules.

Key Quotes: Mission Presbytery’s Gracious Separation Policy states, and I quote, “It is the will of this presbytery to create both a spirit and process of graciousness, in which the will of God is sought, with reconciliation as a goal, and in a manner of graciousness and forbearance befitting those who claim Jesus as Lord.” Take care to note that our presbytery clearly states the goal of its Gracious Separation Policy is reconciliation, read as meaning to prevent disaffiliation, and not to provide an easy means to leave the denomination. “Mission Presbytery asks that any session seeking or considering disaffiliation from the PC(USA) will covenant with Mission Presbytery to enter into a defined process of mutual discernment to determine God’s purpose. To seek God’s will requires significant time and energy. We believe that a matter of this magnitude deserves focused attention and prayer by the presbytery and the particular congregation whatever the specific outcome may be. This process should take no less than four months.” Mission Presbytery’s Gracious Separation Policy also states “the following question shall be paramount: How is God leading this congregation and the presbytery to walk together into a future that honors Jesus Christ and strengthens both the congregation and the presbytery?”

Complex Process: Suffice it to say that the steps in the Gracious Separation process are enumerated, long, and highly-complicated and they involve a Listening Team, a Resolution Team, Congregational Meetings, Presbytery Meetings and Negotiated Agreements and finally, a vote for or against dismissal to another Presbyterian Denomination. Furthermore, Mission Presbytery always has the option of the formation of an Administrative Commission should they determine that the leadership of the congregation is not acting in good faith. Nowhere does it state the congregation has a similar recourse, should it deem Mission Presbytery is not acting in good faith. In the end, the takeaway is that this is not a simple process; it is akin to a lengthy legal case.

Details & Numbers – What this means to us: Let us now turn to some of the details and numbers that are relevant and worth noting to members of FPC-San Antonio. In our own Mission Presbytery, if a vote should ever be taken to disaffiliate from the PC(USA), there are two critical numeric factors – hurdles, if you will – determining the outcome of the vote. (Obviously, there are many ecclesial and theological issues, which are not the purview of this discussion!) The first factor, or hurdle, is reaching a quorum, while the second factor, or hurdle, is reaching the necessary vote requirement. In order to vote to disaffiliate those two things must BOTH happen, whereas in order to vote to stay EITHER one OR the other would be sufficient to stop a move to disaffiliate. (Disaffiliation would require that both hurdles be cleared; a “stumble” on either hurdle would prevent disaffiliation.) Mission Presbytery states that there would need to be a quorum of a minimum of 35 percent of our membership, and of that quorum present and voting, the percentage needing to vote to disaffiliate is at least 80 percent. Now, let’s look at what this would mean at First Pres. To vote to disaffiliate the two things which must happen are: First a quorum of at least 35 percent of our 2100 members must be present – that’s a minimum of 735 members – AND, secondly, a minimum of 80 percent – that’s at least 588 members – must vote to disaffiliate. On the other hand, in order to stay within the PC(USA), if a vote should ever be taken by this congregation to disaffiliate from the PC(USA), only one of two things must happen: No quorum is reached – that means less than 755 members show up – OR only 20 percent of those present and voting must vote to stay – that’s only 147 members voting not to disaffiliate. I trust this gives a clear picture of what would be necessary for FPC-SA to vote to disaffiliate from the PC(USA).

Furthermore, our guidelines for "Negotiated Terms of Disaffiliation Pursuant to the Gracious Separation Policy of Mission Presbytery" call for, inter alia, “A tithe of all assets [real property and monetary!] of the disaffiliating congregation is to be made to Mission Presbytery to support the continued mission of the presbytery in that place. This tithe must be at least equal to the percentage of the congregation who voted not to disaffiliate, but no less than 10 percent.” It then goes on to say, “This tithe must be paid within 60 months of the disaffiliation. If the amount owed to Mission Presbytery is not paid by the end of 60 months all assets will revert to the presbytery.”

As you can now understand, Gracious Separation is a long and intentionally difficult process designed to encourage reconciliation and to discourage disaffiliation.

Learn More: For more details, visit the website of Mission Presbytery at [www.mission-presbytery.org](http://www.mission-presbytery.org) and click on "Resources" near the upper right corner. Then click on "Policies & Procedures" near the bottom of the dropdown. Finally, click on "Gracious Separation Policy June 9, 2012" near the top and also "Manual of Operations, Appendix I, Attach I-1 Disaffiliation & Property" near the bottom.

As you consider these matters, I remind you that the need for prayer, reflection, patience and mutual forbearance is still great, so I leave you with that task and responsibility.