

P-10 GUIDELINES FOR DISAFFECTED CHURCHES

JOHN 17:21

I PRAY THAT THEY MAY ALL BE ONE. FATHER! MAY THEY BE IN US, JUST AS YOU ARE IN ME AND I AM IN YOU. MAY THEY BE ONE, SO THAT THE WORLD WILL BELIEVE THAT YOU SENT ME.

THE PRESBYTERY OF DETROIT GUIDELINES FOR DISAFFECTED CHURCHES

1. THE CHURCH AND ITS UNITY

Universal and Particular (G-4.102)

Since this whole company cannot meet together in one place to worship and to serve, it is reasonable that it be divided into particular congregations. The particular church is, therefore, understood as a local expression of the universal Church.

A Particular Presbyterian Church (G-4.104)

Each particular church of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) shall be governed by this Constitution. Its government and guidance are the responsibility of the session. It shall fulfill its responsibilities as the local unit of mission for the service of all people, for the upbuilding of the whole church, and for the glory of God.

Oneness (G-4.0402)

There is one Church. As the Bible speaks of the one body which is the Church living under the one Spirit of God known through Christ, it reminds us that we have “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all.” (Ephesians 4: 5-6)

2. INTRODUCTION

The Church of Jesus Christ has never been free of conflict. As people of the church struggle with tension, they are periodically polarized.

Whatever is happening at any given time that might cause individuals or churches to contemplate separation, the Detroit Presbytery is firmly committed to unity, diversity, reconciliation, justice, peace, love, mercy, values that lead to harmony.

There is a confessional mandate for unity in our Confession of 1967, which calls for reconciliation across various lines of conflict.

When faced with the possibility of any kind of organized separation, the Presbytery of Detroit is obligated to facilitate the maintenance and integrity of the Presbyterian system. We are a connectional church, which does not readily provide for the unilateral separation of a segment of the body from the rest of the body.

3. PROCESS

A. When the leadership of the presbytery receives word that a congregation is discussing whether to leave the denomination, either through formal congregational action or through informal contacts with church leaders or members, the Executive Presbyter will, as soon as possible, ask for a pastoral visit to hear concerns and offer the assistance of a Denominational Concerns Task Force appointed by the Moderator of Presbytery. The Denominational Concerns Task Force shall consist of three people. This action shall be reported to the Coordinating Cabinet and Presbytery at the next meeting. The purpose of the Denominational Concerns Task Force would be to engage either the leaders of the congregation, or the congregation as a whole, in a time of prayer and conversation aimed at understanding the conflict or identifying steps toward reconciliation. If the Denominational

Concerns Task Force determines that progress can be made toward reconciliation through continued dialogue this will be reported to the Executive Presbyter, Coordinating Cabinet, and Presbytery. If this effort leads to resolution of the situation, no further action is required. If the visit is refused or unsuccessful the Denominational Task Force shall recommend to Presbytery that an Administrative Commission be nominated by the Moderator of the presbytery and elected by the presbytery as soon as possible. The Denominational Task Force shall recommend to presbytery the specific powers that should be given the Administrative Commission. Ordinarily the power to remove a pastor would require a specific request by the Commission after it is formed. The Administrative Commission shall consist of 3 ministers and 4 elders, directed to report its progress at Coordinating Cabinet meetings and Presbytery meetings. The commission shall complete its work and make recommendations with all deliberate dispatch as outlined herein. There shall be no session meetings without the Administrative Commission.

If the Denominational Concerns Task Force finds that no resolution is likely and that the congregation, sincerely bound by conscience and Scripture, wishes to work with Presbytery to seek dismissal to another Reformed denomination in correspondence with the General Assembly, the Task Force shall request the Administrative Commission facilitate the procedure under E below while not assuming original jurisdiction.

B. The Administrative Commission of the presbytery will meet with the session and minister of the church in disagreement to resolve the issues. The commission could listen to the concerns of the congregation at large and with the session offer a pastoral presence. The commission and the session would agree to work within the system to affect changes they mutually see as beneficial to the life of the denomination and the work of the Gospel. Should this strategy succeed the relationship between the congregation and presbytery could be preserved. The commission would continue to work with the congregation for an additional two months as a support. In the event that this option is unsuccessful the commission must consider other alternatives within the powers given it or request additional powers from Presbytery. (G-4.0301f)

C. If the commission has been given the authority to do it and finds that all or part of the ordained leadership unable or unwilling to function within the Presbyterian Church (USA) it shall assume original jurisdiction pursuant to G-11.0103s. If the commission finds it necessary it could recommend the Presbytery dissolve the pastoral relationship.

D. If a congregation requests to be dismissed by Presbytery to another Christian body, it must be one recognized by the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly (PCUSA) and the procedure in E (below) be followed.

E. If a congregation requests to be dismissed by Presbytery the commission shall follow this procedure: (G-11.0103i)

a. The session shall meet with representatives from the Administrative Commission elected by Presbytery. All financial records, minutes and any other correspondence shall be made available to the commission.

b. The session shall call a Congregational Meeting within a month of the meeting with the commission. Prior notice shall be given orally from the pulpit on two successive Sundays.

Notice shall be in the parish newsletter and a letter sent to all active members stating the purpose of the meeting. At least twenty-five percent (25%) of the active members of the congregation shall be present. Representatives of the Administrative Commission shall be present throughout and have the right to speak. The question to be discussed is “Shall the -----Presbyterian Church be dismissed from the Presbyterian Church (USA)?” Ample time shall be provided for speakers wanting dismissal and those wanting to stay with the PCUSA.

No type of vote for any purpose shall be taken at this meeting.

c. The session, no later than three months after the first meeting described above, shall call a second congregational meeting. Prior notice shall be given orally from the pulpit on two successive Sundays. Notice shall be in the parish newsletter and a letter sent to all active members stating the purpose of the meeting. At least seventy-five (75%) of the active members shall be present. Representatives of the Administrative Commission shall be present throughout and have the right to speak. The question to be discussed is “Shall the -----Presbyterian Church be dismissed from the Presbyterian Church (USA)?” Ample time shall be provided for both speakers wanting dismissal and those wanting to stay with the PCUSA.

After discussion and prayer, a secret written ballot shall be taken on this question, the only choices being “Request dismissal” or “Do NOT request dismissal.”

If the vote is three-quarters (75%) of those active members present and voting vote to request dismissal, the request shall go to presbytery. If the vote fails, the commission will report this to the presbytery and offer suggestions on healing within the congregation.

If any member, present and voting, contests the regularity of the second meeting, he/she shall send the details of the allegation to the Stated Clerk of Presbytery, who shall convene the Permanent Judicial Commission to render a decision.

d. If the vote is to dismiss the commission shall immediately contact the Board of Trustees and offer its recommendation concerning THE CHURCH AND ITS PROPERTY, (G-8.000) A full written report shall be submitted to the Coordinating Cabinet Moderator, Moderator of Presbytery, Stated Clerk of Presbytery and the Executive Presbyter within a week of the deciding vote.

CORINTHIANS 12: 12-13

CHRIST IS LIKE A SINGLE BODY, WHICH HAS MANY PARTS; IT IS STILL ONE BODY, EVEN THROUGH IT IS MADE UP OF DIFFERENT PARTS. IN THE SAME WAY ALL OF US, WHETHER JEWS OR GENTILES WHETHER SLAVES OR FREE, HAVE BEEN BAPTIZED INTO THE ONE BODY BY THE SAME SPIRIT, AND WE HAVE ALL BEEN GIVEN THE ONE SPIRIT TO DRINK

Amended by substitution 11/27/07.