

The Presbytery of Hudson River Gracious Dismissal Guidelines

Prologue

As members of the body of Christ, Hudson River Presbytery is called to live resurrection with passion and partnership in a changing world. The Presbytery of Hudson River seeks to facilitate worship, mission, and other shared ministries by engaging all of our churches in carrying out this calling. We also believe the mission of God as expressed in the Great Ends of the Church is greater than the PC (U.S.A.).

Recognizing that changes to our constitution have caused some congregations to reflect on their participation in the PC (U.S.A.) and where their passion for mission is as a congregation, the Presbytery has adopted these Gracious Dismissal Guidelines. A fundamental understanding of our Presbyterian heritage is one of connection rather than division. We believe that we discern the will of God more clearly in any particular time and place when we are in communion with each other than when we are separated. Yet the Presbytery acknowledges that the particular forms of communion may shift over time, always reforming to better serve the mission of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Presbytery of Hudson River has devised the following procedures for dismissing churches from the Presbyterian Church (USA). We dismiss you with great sorrow because we have enjoyed our connection with you over many years. While there are some issues that may presently divide faithful believers, we trust that there are many more that unite us in the love of Christ. Nevertheless, we provide you with a way to move away from our fellowship, but we do so sadly and reluctantly.

The Presbytery and congregation will be continually guided by these three principles:

1. The Mission of God as expressed in the Great Ends of the Church is greater than the PC (U.S.A.). Therefore, we affirm that should Presbytery dismiss a congregation to another Reformed body, the unity of the one Church of Jesus Christ has not been diminished. (F-1.0302 and F-1.0304)
2. The exercise of “mutual forbearance” is of utmost importance in our process. Therefore, all will treat each other with respect regardless of theological and ecclesiological differences.
3. We will pray and work for fairness to all parties in our decisions.

It is the Presbytery’s belief that in adopting these guidelines congregations who faithfully follow them as a way of discerning if God would have them affiliate with another Reformed denomination are not engaged in schism and therefore the Presbytery’s understanding is that G-4.0207 (Property of a Church in Schism) does not apply to congregations faithfully following these guidelines.

Suggested Process

A session wishing to initiate this process shall vote to do so at a regularly called meeting of the session and this action will be recorded in the minutes. The Clerk of Session shall contact the Presbytery office in writing and inform the Stated Clerk of this request.

The Stated Clerk will inform the Moderator(s) of the Committee on Ministry, who, working with the Moderator of the Presbytery and the General Presbyter, shall appoint a five person Discernment Team, one of whom shall be an active elder currently serving on the session of the church making the request.

The Discernment Team will choose its own moderator who will arrange a meeting between the Team and the Session, and request the Session to provide the Discernment Team with a written statement outlining the concerns and issues that have brought the session to the place of considering withdrawal from the Presbyterian Church (USA) that they would like the Discernment Team to address. At this meeting the Discernment Team, along with the General Presbyter, will respond to the concerns raised and seek to answer any questions. The Session will then be asked if they still desire to continue with the Gracious Dismissal Process.

The Discernment Team will then engage the congregation in a small group process of discernment designed in consultation with the Presbytery's Mediation Team. Once the congregation has had sufficient opportunity to discuss the matter of leaving the PC (USA) and of prayerfully discerning whether they believe that is God's will for them as a congregation, the Session will then call a Congregational meeting for the purpose of discerning the strength of the Congregation's desire to leave the PC (USA) for the reasons stated. The members of the congregation will then be asked to participate in a non-binding vote to sense the will of the congregation. Quorums for this and any other congregational meeting will be those established by the church's by-laws.

If the congregation chooses to proceed, the Presbytery Trustees will provide the Session with a list of one or more approved property appraisers. The Session will then secure and pay for an appraisal and provide it to the Discernment Team along with a copy of the Church's current financial statements and a list of all other church assets, including value of building(s) contents, endowment funds, etc. Upon review of the appraisal and financial reports the Discernment Team may accept the evaluation provided or request a second appraisal at the expense of the Presbytery.

The Session will then call another congregational meeting at which the Congregation will be asked to vote to accept the terms of dismissal as prepared by the Discernment Team or to remain with the PC(USA). If the Congregation votes by a 2/3's majority to continue the process of being dismissed from the PC(USA) the Discernment Team will report this to the Presbytery for final approval.

Specific Guidelines Concerning Settlements

1. In order to maintain fairness and equity, when it is clear that the congregation will be separating from Hudson River Presbytery, the terms of separation will normally be set according to the following terms:
 - A vote of the congregation will be taken by written ballot.
 - Repayment of all outstanding loans from Hudson River Presbytery, the Synod, or the General Assembly.
 - Repayment of any back per-capita which has not been paid.
 - All minutes and records of the congregation must be sent to the Presbytery.
2. Moreover, in order to acknowledge and honor the legacy of the generations of Presbyterians who served Christ through the life of the congregation, and in keeping with the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission ruling (10/28/12) which says that in considering whether to dismiss a congregation to another denomination, a presbytery must take into account the financial worth of the congregation's property, which is regarded as held in trust for the benefit of the PC (USA), the congregation is encouraged to make a love gift or tithe to the Presbytery. (One suggestion for the size of the gift would be to make a tithe of 10% of the assets of the congregation.) The use of these funds is to be determined by a Presbytery-wide discernment process including a representative of the departing congregation with the recommendation being acted upon by the Presbytery at one of its Stated Meetings.