

January 24, 2016

Dear Members and Friends of Central Presbyterian Church,

This letter is our attempt in a reasonable and heartfelt way to share with you our process as the Administrative Commission (AC) in coming to the decisions we have made. No one on this commission finds this work easy or joyful; rather, we have done our work recognizing all along that serious matters are at hand and lives impacted by our conclusions. As Moderator-elect Helen Epps said to the congregation last Sunday at worship – with Paul we affirm “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it” (I Corinthians 12:26).

First a few words about the members of the Administrative Commission – we are a diverse group of Presbyterians. The nine of us (four “Ruling Elders” and five “Teaching Elders”) come from small, medium, and large churches. We are five women and four men. We range in age from ... to mid-eighties. All have been very involved in his or her own local church and many of us very involved in the work of the presbytery. It is also important to note that we do not all share the same theological mind-set when it comes to some of the controversial topics being addressed in the church today. If we had a vote, for example, on same-gender marriage it would be split much like the Supreme Court of the United States. We do, however, share at least two very significant similarities: We all are seeking to serve the Lord Jesus Christ and we all believe God is using the PCUSA to further the mission of God’s love in the world!

This diverse group of individuals was formed after the presbytery received a copy of the report the session of Central Presbyterian wrote, signed, and distributed to each of you. The report called for a period of discernment in your congregation while laying before you the conviction of the session that Central could no longer flourish in the PCUSA. After a period of training, the AC met with the session to hear their perspective (December 3, 2015) and then met with the congregation (December 10, 2015) and then met with some more members and former members at Oconee PC (December 17, 2015). We then took time to read again all the materials we had received by email, mail, and from the above meetings. On January 6th we received a letter from the session stating that they had called a congregational meeting on January 24 to vote on the idea of the congregation requesting dismissal with property to the ECO – Evangelical Order of Presbyterians.

The AC then met on January 7, 2016 for five hours. Again we prayed, read materials, discussed our thoughts, feelings and wrestled with our options. The decisions we came to were unanimous. Given that all congregational property is held in trust for the work and ministry of the PCUSA and because there is a PCUSA presence within and without Central Presbyterian Church that has the strong potential to flourish, we decided Central Presbyterian Church would stay a congregation within the PCUSA. We made this decision known to the session and had a meeting with them (January 12, 2016) to ask if they could reconcile with the PCUSA and cease working to lead the congregation out of the denomination. Each one affirmed in a conditional statement that they have always seen their work as consistent with the PCUSA Constitution but no one affirmed he/she would desist from the work to lead the church into ECO. This led us to the painful, sorrowful decision to dismiss the session. We took no joy in the action but felt it was necessary because they remained committed to their belief that Central could no longer flourish in the PCUSA.

There has been some talk that our decision and the dismissing of the session was an ambush and an unmerited interruption into the discernment process of the congregation. We

understand the pain, disappointment, and anger some are feeling. It is important to note, however, that a discernment process to seek dismissal is also a presbytery time of discernment. Governed by the presbytery in the hierarchical nature of the church, the presbytery is the body that is given the authority to dismiss a congregation and can gift property. When we came to the end of our investigation we felt it was appropriate to share our decision in a timely way so that the discernment of the congregation would be fully informed. What is now before the members of Central Presbyterian Church is whether you would care to stay and serve within the congregation of Central Presbyterian Church that will remain affiliated with the PCUSA or whether you, for reasons of conscience, would like to be transferred to ECO or another denomination. As we shared with your pastor in an email on Thursday, “the property of Central Presbyterian Church is held in trust for the use and benefit of the PCUSA and nothing that occurs at this meeting will affect the property.”

The intention of the AC is not now nor has it ever been to make negative judgments about the convictions of your minds and hearts. Our coming to the decision we made and to sharing it when we did was meant to be straight forward, honest, and timely. Our hearts ache with those of you who are hurting or angry or sorrowful. We, like each of you, are trying to do the best we can to serve the Lord Jesus Christ who is our peace and who commands us to love one another as he has loved us. May it be so.

Grace and peace,
AC