

Proposal for Horizon Presbyterian Church Dismissal/Settlement

Horizon Presbyterian Church Administrative Commission – Grand Canyon Presbytery

Sept 10, 2016

Background/History

Horizon Presbyterian Church began as a New Church Development on behalf of the Presbytery of Grand Canyon in 1988. At that time, the Presbytery purchased the acreage on which the church now stands. The Rev Kay Brown was called as organizing pastor. During the early years, the church met in office space, a shopping mall area and a school. In 1992, the church was officially chartered with 90 members and they began to make plans for the construction of their first phase building. During the first few years, the presbytery helped to provide significant support by providing funds for the salary of the pastor until the congregation gained in membership. In 1994, Pastor Brown resigned as pastor and the Rev. Barrie Gray was called as Interim Pastor. Under Pastor Gray's leadership, and with the help of many volunteers, the first phase of the building was completed in time for Easter services in 1996. Since that time, the church has been served by Pastor Jim Uhley (1995-2005) and Rev. Ron Hawkins (2007 to Aug. 31, 2016). The church was able to complete a phase 2 classroom building in 1998, which houses God's Garden, a very important children's ministry to the community.

The church has an active ministry outreach which includes a shared relationship with Gila Crossing PC, supporting mission trips to Honduras and Mexico, supporting various food and family ministries in the area, and providing some support for a former PC (USA) New Worshipping Community called the Spring.

In more recent years, the session and leadership of the church has felt a growing discomfort with the PCUSA, and in the end, requested a season of discernment with the Presbytery of Grand Canyon in the Fall of 2015. The Administrative Commission has been at work since early 2016 to follow the mandate of the Presbytery to determine the future of our relationship with Horizon Presbyterian Church.

Discernment

- It is noted that the congregation did go through a season of its own discernment without the knowledge or participation of the Presbytery of Grand Canyon in early 2015. These meetings were in town hall meetings to share information and in small groups for dialogue about the issues, especially issues raised by actions of the 2014 General Assembly
- We met first of all with the session (9 Members) and Pastor Ron Hawkins, (who since moved away), both privately and together. In that gathering we learned that as early as 2010-11, when they began to follow the work of the Fellowship of Presbyterians, that the church was beginning to be concerned about the direction of the denomination and their relationship to it. In 2012, the session began to have more heartfelt conversations about what they believe as a church and the various issues on which they felt the denomination was not in the same place that they were. By the 2014 GA, more issues arose which pressed the session and pastor to take more active steps to determine whether it was time to leave or not. The church has struggled to decide how to move, which has caused some people to leave due to the slow pace of action or not wanting to deal with conflict about the issues. From the end of 2013 – 2015 the membership dropped from 200 to 124.

- The Administrative Commission, having not been part of these conversations and in order to complete our work to determine the true will of the people, set up times for people to come on two different days to meet with the commission members and express their views about the future of Horizon PC and their relationship with PCUSA. During those meetings, we met with 43 people, of whom 34 expressed the desire to leave and 9 want to remain or are undecided.
- Issues raised in the discussions were:
 1. The PC (USA) has become too involved in politics, especially decisions related to Israel and divestment from American Companies;
 2. Issues related to same-sex marriage and the definition of marriage
 3. Feeling that the PC (USA) does not have clear doctrines or beliefs that can be called essential tenets to which all can agree
 4. They feel the PC (USA) has left them, not the other way around.
 5. Concerned about not believing in the divinity of Christ – “Christ has been de-throned”.
 6. Want to be part of an church that has common goals and beliefs

Issues for Consideration

- During the church’s 25+ years, there has been considerable support for their ministry, including the purchase of the land (with a net equity of \$130,000), 5 years of support for the organizing pastor’s salary (estimated at \$85,000), a loan from Sunnyslope Presbyterian Church for \$250,000 to get them through a difficult time in 1995; allowed to not have to pay principle on their loan with GA for a period of time so they could support their program; received funds from Synod Claude Morton fund in the amount of \$25,000 in 1995. **Note:** The church has repaid both the Sunnyslope and Claude Morton loans.
- The Commission acknowledges that Horizon PC has, over the years, supported the Presbytery and the PCUSA with per capita and mission giving. From 1998 -2015, Horizon contributed no less than 10% of its’ operating budget to these causes, totaling \$422,546. Horizon also gave approximately \$10,000 to support the Seminary Education fund in the early 2000’s. Horizon is up to date with regards to per capita, except for 2015, for which \$6200 is owed, along with \$5780 for 2016.
- The Presbytery has supported the church in its early development, especially at the time when the new pastor needed to step down and the church was about to build their first building. The Presbytery helped to provide a dynamic, creative leader in the person of the Rev. Barrie Gray, who helped them move forward with the building and help create a viable mission in preparation for the arrival of a new pastor in 1995. The congregation has been further supported by Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program in helping them consolidate two previous loans into one account, with a balance yet to be paid of \$660,000 or less by now.
- The Gracious Dismissal Policy of Grand Canyon Presbytery and the Trust Clause of the Book of Order require that the AC take into account the value of the church’s property and also recognize the burden of history which allows the congregation to get to the place where it is now. In this case, we recognize that all congregations emerge and grow from the collective gifts of God’s people, and they often include the direct gifts of individuals (through their labors or their money); gifts from other congregations (furniture and supplies), along with the work of the Synod and GA. As highlighted above, this church has been richly blessed by the support and connection with the PC (USA) since it was birthed until now.
- The Commission is very concerned about the overall financial health and stability of this congregation, due to the recent loss of membership as noted above, the small number of

pledging units (only 33 for 2016), a dependency on plate (loose) offerings to balance a deficit budget (\$17,000 deficit) and the recent loss of their pastor. Historically, interim periods are often not financially stable times for churches. With that in mind, the Commission has considered the equity value of the property, which is not required by the Gracious Dismissal policy. But we feel it is necessary if we are to hope the church can continue.

- It was our responsibility to obtain an appraisal of the property, which was provided by Valbridge Property Advisors. After a thorough analysis of the property and the region in relation to church property, it was valued a \$1,725,000 (\$100/sq.ft.) The equity value of the property is estimated to be \$1,065,000 (\$1,725,000-\$660,000 loan).
- We understand that Horizon Presbyterian Church desires to leave the PCUSA and become members of ECO (Evangelical Covenant of Presbyterians).
- Their pastor, Ron Hawkins, has resigned to join the staff of an ECO congregation in Texas, so his transfer to ECO has already happened through that call process.

Therefore: the Horizon Presbyterian Church Commission concludes

Proposed Dismissal Terms:

In keeping with the Gracious Dismissal Policy of the Presbytery of Grand Canyon and in keeping with the charge to our commission, especially item (e): “in consultation with the session, to seek a mutually agreeable proposal for the disposition of all property, contents, and historical documents, with the aim of furthering the mission of Christ through good stewardship of resources”, we propose the following:

1. That the Horizon Presbyterian Church be dismissed from the PC (USA) and allowed to become a member of ECO(Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians) when the way is clear.
2. That the church will be responsible for the following costs for this process:
 - \$2750 – Appraisal cost
 - \$1000 – Cost for Commission operations/attorney fees
 - \$1000 - Cost for copying all of church documents for historical records – all records concerning membership records, session minutes, lists of officers/pastors, all legal transactions, etc. (approx.)*
 - \$1000 - cost for transfer property ownership to Horizon Presbyterian Church (Est)*
 - \$11,980 – per capita for 2015& 2016
 - \$106,500 – This is the value of the PC (USA)’s portion of the property valuation based on the equity value of the property (10% - A biblical tithe)

Total Settlement Amount = \$124,230

3. We propose that the Presbytery of Grand Canyon take action to approve the above financial terms of dismissal for Horizon Presbyterian Church so that the church can pursue the refinancing of their existing PILP loan and pay off that loan. We ask for a period of 90 days for the church to complete this process. This agreement will not be complete until the loan is approved and all documents are signed, all fees and costs are paid (\$124,230) and approved by the title company handling the Presbytery’s property issues. At that time of closing, the title to the property will be signed over to Horizon Presbyterian Church.

4. If no such loan is forthcoming, then the AC will commence a new proposal for the possible dismissal of Horizon Presbyterian Church to ECO, which could mean dismissal without the property. Should the process stop completely, Horizon would be responsible for the costs incurred by the Commission up to this point (commission expenses, appraisal of the property, etc.) plus per capita for 2015 and 2016. There would be no costs for copying church records, or closing costs, or transfer of title, since these would not be needed.