



Presbytery of Boston
Administrative Commission Newton Presbyterian Church
Presbyterian Church (USA)
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Members of the Congregation of the Newton Presbyterian Church
75 Vernon St.
Newton, MA 02458

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On behalf of the Administrative Commission of the Presbytery of Boston for the Newton Presbyterian Church, I am writing to each of the members of the Newton congregation listed in your church's 2016 Directory.

As many of you know, this Administrative Commission was formed by unanimous vote of the Presbytery of Boston in November 2016, due to the concern of elders and ministers across the Presbytery that divisive issues had developed in the discernment of how your church may be called into new life and service in the name of Jesus Christ. We understand that the church with a presbytery Response Team as your partner has done significant preliminary work. However, the two-part presbytery process requested by NPC halted at the point at which the session was to request that a presbytery commission be empowered to assist in refining your church's goals so that the Presbytery could take the constitutional and legal steps necessary to accomplish them with you. Therefore the Presbytery— your presbytery — appointed this Administrative Commission to work with the NPC session and congregation to resolve certain issues, under delegated presbytery powers specified by the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

This week the Administrative Commission received notice that a special meeting of the Corporation of the Newton Presbyterian Church has been publicly called for next Sunday, January 15, 2017, for the purposes of voting as members of the church's Corporation on (1) withdrawing from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), (2) affiliating with the Evangelical Covenant Church denominational network, and (3) amending the Corporation's bylaws to remove existing denominational references.

We are disappointed that the Session has chosen to call this meeting without involving the Commission that serves as a resource on constitutional matters and orderly process. We are concerned that members of the congregation are being asked to resign their individual memberships in the PCUSA without fully understanding the consequences of this action and we believe that this gathering does not facilitate the work towards unity and reconciliation that we are committed to do.

Through this letter the Administrative Commission does not seek to tell you what to do or how to vote as a member of the Newton Presbyterian Church. **Our intention is to assist the session and congregation in its discernment of the church's future by providing you with information about the motions that you are being asked to consider as a member of the Newton church corporation.**

Please note:

(1) Under the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) of which the Newton Presbyterian Church is a long-time member through the Presbytery of Boston, a church cannot withdraw itself from the

denomination: ***“The relationship to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) of a congregation can be severed only by constitutional action on the part of the presbytery (G-3.0303b).”*** (Form of Government, G-4.0207). The Administrative Commission advises that a vote of NPC’s Corporation cannot accomplish a change of denominations (nor can a vote of the church’s Congregation). The discernment process originally requested by the session and now partly completed can, however, lead to a request that the presbytery dismiss the church to another Reformed denomination with which the PC(USA) is in full communion (G-5.05c).

(2) In a January 5, 2017, letter the Administrative Commission reminded the Session that “under our Constitution’s Form of Government, a congregation may only be transferred to a denomination with which the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is in full communion as voted by the General Assembly (G-5.05c). The Office of the General Assembly has confirmed that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is not in full communion with the Evangelical Covenant Church. Accordingly, it is simply not within the authority of the Administrative Commission or any other body to recommend dismissal to the Evangelical Covenant Church.” **The Presbytery of Boston may not dismiss a church to the ECC and a church’s corporation cannot and may not take the church into the ECC.**

(3) The powers of a Presbyterian church’s corporation are *“all subject to the authority of the session and under the provisions of the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)”* (Form of Government, G-4.0101). **A vote to edit the corporation’s bylaws would not remove a church from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).**

Finally, we remind our brothers and sisters in the Newton congregation that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is structured by our Constitution to be a steward of the covenanted unity of our part of the Body of Christ. When there is an irreconcilable division within a congregation, such as in a case where one group is determined to leave the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and other members wish to continue in the congregation, we have a tested, responsive constitutional process created by the wider church:

“If there is a schism within the membership of a congregation and the presbytery is unable to effect a reconciliation or a division into separate congregations within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the presbytery shall determine if one of the factions is entitled to the property because it is identified by the presbytery as the true church within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). This determination does not depend upon which faction received the majority vote within the congregation.” (Form of Government, G-4.0207)

This Administrative Commission is committed to working alongside the Session and with the congregation of the Newton Presbyterian Church as you continue the discernment process for your church’s future, and we hope that schism can be avoided so that we will be able to recommend next steps to the Presbytery concerning dismissal under the Constitution. We continue to support you in efforts toward the reconciliation of church members with one another. We look forward to an opportunity to meet with members at the church, and we encourage you to contact us with your questions and concerns.

Yours in Christ,
The Administrative Commission of the
Presbytery of Boston for the Newton Presbyterian Church

Ruling Elder Sharon Wright, Chair
Reverend Samuel Chung,
Reverend Cathy Macdonald,
Ruling Elder Mary Lou Smith

