

FAQ

Dismissal Process from PCUSA

On Tuesday, February 2, 2010, Community Presbyterian Church Session unanimously voted to initiate a process of gracious dismissal from the PCUSA and seek affiliation with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC). This is a historic time for our church and we expect our members have questions about this decision and next steps moving forward.

To inform and educate our members through this process we have created a list of frequently asked questions (FAQs).

We want to hear from you and encourage questions you might have that are not listed below by e-mailing questions@cpcdanville.org. This will allow us to respond to you and continue to build a thorough listing of FAQs for our members.

General Questions

1. CPC is a Presbyterian Church. What does it mean to be Presbyterian?

Presbyterian churches are based on a representative form of government and a connection to other churches. Each congregation appoints elders to sit with pastors on a Session which governs their own church. Each church belongs to a Presbytery, a regional body designed to supervise and serve the local churches in its area. Representatives from each Presbytery come together every other year at General Assembly, a national meeting, where denomination-wide policies are created or modified by vote. The next General Assembly will be held in July of 2010.

2. What is the PCUSA?

Presbyterian Church (USA) or PCUSA is the branch of Presbyterianism to which CPC belongs. It was born of a merger between two Presbyterian denominations in 1983 to become the fifth largest Protestant denomination in the United States. The PCUSA is one of nine Presbyterian denominations in the United States. The national offices are in Louisville, Kentucky. The PCUSA is governed by its constitution, made up of The Book of Order and The Book of Confessions. For more information visit www.pcusa.org.

3. **What influence does the PCUSA have over our church?**

The influence of the PCUSA over CPC comes in both how we govern the church (polity) and in our theology.

We have a Book of Order which contains sections on church government, discipline and worship. We also have a Book of Confessions which consists of 11 historic confessions of faith that we agree to be guided by. The continuing tension we live under in the PCUSA is that both of these important documents are subject to change. Many of our differences center on the ongoing proposals for change in The Book of Order and Book of Confessions.

Questions Regarding Decision to Depart from the PCUSA:

4. **Why are we considering leaving the PCUSA?**

There are several reasons for our decision to depart the PCUSA. They include:

a) **A creeping tolerance of theological pluralism** An increasingly large percentage of PCUSA Pastors and leaders are taking positions that are inconsistent with the historical tenets of our faith. Rather than complying with the Book of Order, the denomination has urged us to live together with an ever-increasing theological diversity.

b) **A conflicted witness to the world.** CPC is continually called to explain how we are not like other parts of our denomination. This defensive posture both confuses those inquiring about our church and reduces the impact of our ministry and mission.

c) **Divided loyalty.** Mistrust of our denominational leaders has forced us to limit our financial support to the maintenance of basic church structures. No CPC dollars go toward general mission support because of the expectation that funds would be used for efforts counter to CPC's values.

d) **Our passion and energy has been diverted.** For years we have been dedicating time, talent and resources to internal struggles. We would like to be released to more effective ministry and mission.

5. **Why have we decided to depart now, at this time?**

Despite our concerns throughout the years about troubling theological diversity, we have actively engaged in the life of our denomination locally and nationally. Internal conflict has continued to grow. Last Fall, the San Francisco Presbytery passed a "Gracious Dismissal Process" which provides a means of amicable dismissal from the PCUSA. We believe that leaving under this process preserves the unity of the church, honors Christ and also those with whom we differ.

6. **Why did we begin the Imagine Campaign if we were considering leaving the PCUSA?**

We have a strong, clear sense of what God is calling us to be and do as a church in our particular community. IMAGINE has been our response to our calling as a church, which remains unchanged by this reaffiliation.

7. What are the non-negotiable issues that cause us to request dismissal?

Biblical Authority is the primary issue. Over the years, increasingly unique interpretations of Scripture has had a ripple affect and has called into question foundational Christian beliefs such as the Lordship of Christ, the place of Scripture in church discipline, Jesus Christ as the only means of salvation and Biblical teaching on marriage.

8. What was involved in the discernment process that CPC went through to make this decision?

For the past 16 months the Session has labored to understand the theological direction of the PCUSA and considered how CPC should respond to continuing trends. This discernment process has included the formation of a Denominational Task Force which has done extensive research and offered periodic reports to Session. Most recently, our process led us into a 40 day period of Scripture reading, reflection, prayer and discussion.

9. What is involved in the process of leaving?

The process ahead will involve considerable prayer and discernment from each of our members. The Session of CPC will lead you in a series of informational forums, open Q&A dialogue and prayerful listening, as we together, seek to discern our path ahead. The process will culminate with a Congregational Meeting and official vote to either stay the course with the PCUSA or follow the recommendation of Session and seek dismissal.

In pursuit of dismissal, CPC will follow a series of steps that are part of the San Francisco Presbytery's Gracious Dismissal Process. Please refer to the Position Paper for this process.

10. How many people need to vote in order for CPC to leave the PCUSA?

The Gracious Dismissal Process reads:

“While the quorum for congregational meetings is set by the Book of Order and by the bylaws of particular congregations, at least 50% of the active members of the congregation (for CPC about 1,000 members) be in attendance for a congregational meeting where the vote to accept the terms of dismissal agreement are voted on and thereby voting to leave the PCUSA..

If the results of the vote to request dismissal and to accept the terms of the negotiated agreement is 75% or greater, (for CPC about 750 members) the dismissal request is considered validated, and then will be scheduled for a vote at an upcoming Presbytery meeting.”

11. What if not enough people turn out to vote?

This vote is perhaps the most important in CPC's history. Every effort will be made to inform the congregation of its importance and to make a way for all to attend. We believe CPC members will attend and will vote. However, if not enough people turn out to vote, CPC would not meet the requirements for dismissal and CPC would remain in the PCUSA.

12. Are we going to lose a lot of people over this?

The information, education and discernment process we are engaged in is intended to be unifying, not divisive. It is our prayer that even those who do not agree with the decision will continue to worship and fellowship with us.

13. What is the financial cost of leaving the PCUSA?

The San Francisco Gracious Dismissal Process identifies two actions departing churches are expected, but not required, to take to help mitigate the impact on the SF Presbytery and allow them to adjust to the churches departing.

1. Commit to pay a declining per capital contribution over a 5 year span. This means 100% of the current per capita in the year the church leaves, 80% the first year after departure, 60% the second year, 40% the third year, 20% the fourth year and nothing in the fifth year. Since CPC is already "committed" to the per capita in the current year, the incremental financial impact would be the amounts paid in year one through five. The PCUSA per capita is based upon CPC membership two years prior (2007) of 2,276 and a per capita of \$28. The cost post departure would be \$127,456 for CPC.
2. The second voluntary commitment is to continue on a similar declining scale, to contribute to the mission budget of the Presbytery. The request permit the departing church to directly contribute to specific ministries in the same manner as CPC does today. Currently CPC supports these ministries not because it is required to, but because we consider these ministries to be worthy of our support. This would continue to be the case post departure, so this commitment would not result in a net increase in CPC's mission expenditure.

14. How will our relationships with churches in the PCUSA change once we are dismissed?

We will continue to work with PCUSA churches with whom we have a theological kinship. We have decades of ministry history with many of these churches and leaders. We believe that our partnership in the Gospel transcends denominational affiliation.

15. How will our missionaries be affected by our departure?

None of our current missionaries should be affected. We do not send any undesignated money through the larger PCUSA denomination; therefore, we will be able to maintain spiritual and financial relationships with all of our current missionaries.

16. Who owns CPC property?

CPC holds legal title to all its property. However, the Presbyterian Book of Order provides that all local church property is held in trust for the whole denomination (the “Trust Clause”). Most recently, the San Francisco Presbytery has adopted a “Gracious Dismissal Policy” in which they affirm the following principles that will guide the Presbytery’s use of the Trust Clause:

- a. It will not be used to shackle churches to the institution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) if a church genuinely desires to depart.
- b. It will not be used as a weapon to threaten civil action against a congregation over issues of conscience. (G-1.0300)
- c. It reflects a tangible exhibition of the inter-connected relationship organically existing between the Presbytery and its congregations.

17. Will we lose our property if we leave the PCUSA?

No. The recently adopted “Gracious Dismissal Policy” of the San Francisco Presbytery states “Because the trust clause is meant as a means of witness to our unity in the covenant of common mission, it is incumbent upon the Presbytery to act ministerially rather than adversarially to its member churches in regard to its provisions.” It is also the right of a congregation to seek and to request dismissal with its property to another Reformed denomination. Further, the Gracious Dismissal Policy establishes a policy for releasing claims to property which in part states, “Prior to the Presbytery voting on the dismissal, the SCC shall provide the PET details regarding to whom the church property shall be transferred, such that the appropriate legal documentation can be prepared. Such transfer should occur no later than 90 days of the vote taken by Presbytery to dismiss.”

Questions Regarding the EPC

18. What is the Evangelical Presbyterian Church?

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) is a denomination formed 29 years ago. It is a reformed denomination unified in their commitment to the essentials of the historic Christian faith taught in the Bible.

19. Why is the Session recommending EPC and did it consider any other affiliation?

Yes, we considered several other denominations including the Christian Reformed Church and the Evangelical Covenant Church. The primary reasons for selecting the EPC were:

- a. Reformed in their theology (required in order for dismissal according to the PCUSA Book of Order).
- b. Alignment in theology, confessions, mission and form of government.
- c. Emphasis on missions.
- d. Well supported transition of pastors and staff.
- e. The opportunity to be a part of a young and growing denomination.

20. What does the EPC believe and how different is it from the PCUSA?

The EPC has a more consolidated statement of beliefs, choosing the Westminster Confession as their core belief document. Including the longer and shorter catechisms. By contrast, the PCUSA has a Book of Confessions which includes 11 historic confessions of faith (one of which is the Westminster Confession). In addition, the EPC has developed a document called “The Essentials of our Faith”. This document sets forth core beliefs of the Christian faith upon which there must be agreement. A copy of the document is available at www.epc.org/about-the-epc/beliefs/

21. How will membership in the EPC differ from the PCUSA?

There will be no discernable difference from the perspective of the average member in our congregation.

22. Where is the EPC headquarters located?

The headquarters of the EPC is in Livonia, Michigan, a suburb of Detroit.

23. How many EPC churches are there in California and is there an EPC Presbytery in Northern California?

There are currently 17 EPC churches in California. These churches are part of the EPC’s Presbytery of the West, which reaches from California all the way east to Colorado. There is currently discussion about establishing a Presbytery of the Pacific in the EPC. The Presbytery would consist of churches in California, Oregon and Washington. This new Presbytery may be in place by the time CPC is dismissed from the PCUSA.

24. Is “Evangelical” a synonym for conservative?

Evangelical means to believe in the importance of sharing the Good News of the gospel, that through Jesus Christ, the Kingdom of God has been inaugurated, freeing people from the build and power of sin through personal faith and repentance. This aligns with our passion that people meet Christ, through the members and ministry of CPC.

25. What is governance like in the EPC?

The EPC has a similar structure as the PCUSA, with Presbyteries overseeing regions and a general assembly that oversees Presbyteries. Though smaller, it is still accountable to one another and connected in discipline. Ordination of church leaders is handled on the Presbytery and Session levels.

26. What types of changes might we see in our CPC structure if we affiliate with EPC?

There would be no changes in our church structure.

27. What is the current size of the EPC?

There are currently 260 churches and 85,000 members in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church as quoted on the EPC webpage.

28. What is unique about the EPC?

The EPC is unique among American Presbyterians with its self-conscious attempt to balance essential and non-essential matters within a confessional heritage. The EPC is unified in its commitment to the essentials of the historic Christian faith taught in the Bible, but allows liberty of conscience on those matters which are not central to the Bible's teaching.

29. Does the EPC have a commitment to missions?

Yes! The EPC has a World Church Committee that oversees about 80 missionaries who are serving in 20 different countries.

We plan to maintain our high commitment to our mission partners and also explore new partnerships the EPC may provide.

30. Does the EPC have a Book of Confessions?

The essential beliefs of the EPC are contained in the Westminster Confession. By contrast, The PCUSA Book of Confessions contains 11 historic confessions of faith.

31. Does the EPC have a Book of Order?

Yes. The EPC Book of Order is similar to what we know in the PCUSA. CPC's Session has received copies and is beginning the process of learning and understanding the EPC Book of Order.

32. What is the position of the EPC regarding the property of the local church?

The congregation has the exclusive, inalienable right to own and control its own property.

33. How is the EPC's position on marriage, divorce and remarriage different than that of the PCUSA? What is CPC's position?

It is not different. The EPC uses The Westminster Confession of Faith as their standard of doctrine. Marriage is covered in Chapter 24 - 24:1 to 24.7 which is verbatim to the PCUSA Book of Confessions - The Westminster Confession of Faith - Chapter 26 - 6:131-6:137. EPC's position papers on Sanctity of Marriage (www.epc.org/about-the-epc/position-papers/sanctity-of-marriage/) and on Divorce and Remarriage (www.epc.org/about-the-epc/position-papers/divorce--remarriage/) is gender neutral holding both men and women accountable to their marriage promise. EPC's effective steps to member churches on these issues are offered as suggestions to be considered and are not mandated.

Pastor Scott Farmer and Laura Taggart spoke to marriage, divorce and remarriage in fall of 2006 and the transcription of **Sermons on Sexual Intimacy** can be found on our Denomination Web page at <http://cpcdanville.org/pdf/sexsermons.pdf>.

34. What is the history of EPC in regards to minorities and women?

EPC's history forming as a denomination was triggered by the need to affirm the divinity of Christ and the authority of scripture. There never has been an issue about race at the EPC and therefore there is no history recorded regarding race and minorities. EPC's history in regards to women is answered in question 37.

35. How many minorities are represented in the EPC? The EPC does not track numbers that represent a minority population. The EPC welcomes all people of all racial backgrounds and therefore does not limit ethnic diversity by setting quotas. In fact, Second Presbyterian Church of Memphis is now a national example of the EPC in reaching out to local ethnic communities by planting churches in three communities. Although the doors to their church are wide open they were not seeing diversity among their membership. Three local churches were planted and are thriving today, by meeting the ethnic communities in their geographic locations. These churches represent the gospel of Jesus Christ in the familiarity of their language and culture.

36. Do PCUSA ordained Pastors, Deacons and Elders have to be "re-ordained" into the EPC?

No. Pastors do have to be received by the EPC. They would be examined regarding the EPC essentials of the faith and affirm and acknowledge the Westminster Confession and Catechisms. Elders will have to answer basic questions pertaining to the reformed faith.

Questions Regarding the EPC and Women

37. Why does the EPC refer to the ordination of women as "non-essential"?

Non-essential does NOT mean that women are NOT essential to the church. When the EPC started in 1981 they determined that on the basic essentials of the Christian faith, they would not disagree, but on anything that was not essential to the core beliefs and existence of the church, such as the issue of ordaining women as officers or practicing charismatic gifts (speaking in tongues), they would give each other liberty. The reference to "non-essential" therefore means the opinion around the ordination of women is not addressed in the "Essentials of Our Faith" found in the EPC Book of Order which focuses on the essential doctrines of faith for salvation, Being of God (the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit). To affirm and support what is included in the "Essentials of Our Faith" they have a motto; "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity."

In 1980-81, when the EPC was forming as a reformed denomination, there were discussions around the ordination of women as Teaching (pastors) and Ruling Elders. Different viewpoints existed about obedience to the authority of scripture in this. The two sides to this disagreement were both seeking to be pleasing to God and obedient to His word and therefore felt strongly about their interpretation of scripture. It was decided the differences around women (to ordain or not to ordain) was not going to be beneficial to the foundation of their (EPC) faith, and their call to the Great Commission. The EPC founders agreed to delegate this decision to the local church and, that being so; the ordination of women became titled as "non-essential". It is in this context the EPC states in its *Book of Government*, Chapter 7, titled "Rights Reserved to a Particular Church" "The particular church has the right to elect its own officers" (7-2). This right is guaranteed in perpetuity (**forever**).

38. What is the Presbytery of the West view of ordained women?

EPC Presbytery of the West believes strongly in the authority of scripture and the great Commission, as we do. They also believe strongly, as we do, in identifying, equipping and supporting men AND women to be inwardly strong and outwardly focused. The Presbytery of the West encourages, accepts and equips both men and women as pastors, ordained officers and active leaders of the church, as God gifts them to do so. Along with the EPC's view of ordained women, the Presbytery feels strongly that there can be genuine unity amid diversity on the subject. For more on this topic, see the written statement by the EPC... "Position Paper on the Ordination of Women" at <http://www.epc.org/about-the-epc/position-papers/ordination-of-women/> and www.epcwomeninministry.org

39. How many ordained women pastors (Teaching Elders) are there in the EPC? What percentage of ordained women pastors are represented by EPC churches?

At this time there are 10 ordained Teaching Elders (pastors) in the EPC, including those who have been received from other denominations in the last 6 months. This number represents approximately .03% among the 274 EPC churches. Signal Mountain Presbyterian Church, Signal Mountain, TN recently issued a call to a woman to be an associate pastor upon her graduation from Gordon-Conwell. The number of ordained Teaching Elders (pastors) is expected to grow significantly as more churches request dismissal from the PCUSA to the EPC. The EPC plans to propose the addition of Presbytery of the Pacific to the General Assembly, June 2011, anticipating growth in the number of churches joining the EPC in California, Oregon and Washington.

40. Can CPC ordained women Teaching and Ruling Elders be received by the EPC?

Yes. All current Teaching and Ruling Elders (men AND women) are examined by the EPC in order to transfer to the denomination. EPC resources are given to help prepare for examination. At this time women are required an additional step of including an essay statement about their call to ministry however dialog is taking place to request the same essay statement of all men as well.

41. Does EPC's position reflect a lesser role of women in ministry? Are women encouraged to be in ministry leadership in the EPC?

The EPC recognizes the giftedness and worth of women. It acknowledges and encourages the utilization of their gifts in partnership with the whole body of Christ for the building of God's Kingdom. Jacky Gatliff, member of Second Presbyterian Church of Memphis, has been hired by the EPC as the national Director of Women in Ministry, www.epcwomeninministry.org. This ministry inspires all women, ordained or not, who have callings and gifts given to them by the Holy Spirit and for use in the church. Jacky's role includes implementing a program called REAL - Reaching, Equipping, Advancing Leaders – Women in a full range of ministries within local congregations, presbyteries, denomination and missions.

42. Explain the program "REAL" by Women In Ministry?

REAL is a training guide for EPC Women in Ministry that they might be equipped to serve and lead to the glory of God. The authors of REAL include those who have attended seminary and those who have many years of service and experience in their fields of ministry. The plan behind this program is to train and equip women to be theologically driven and to identify giftedness that will encourage all women to want to serve as leaders.

43. How many ordained women Ruling Elders in the EPC?

There are approximately 2000 ordained Elders in the EPC and approximately 300 are women representing 15%. According to our Stated Clerk, about 30-35% of EPC churches have women serving on Session as Ruling Elders. At the EPC there is not a required quota for women Ruling or Teaching Elders-this is left in trust to the leading of the Spirit and the decision of the local churches.

44. How many ordained women Deacons are currently serving at the EPC?

We do not have these numbers at this time. Women Deacons are allowed to serve at most EPC churches, including, in some cases, those that currently do not receive ordained women Teaching and Ruling Elders. We will let you know if these numbers become available

45. How many Presbyteries in the EPC do not affirm the ordination of women?

Only 2 Presbyteries (Florida and South Central) of 8 EPC Presbyteries do not receive Women Teaching Elders (pastors). There are some churches in these locations that do allow women Ruling Elders and Deacons, based solely on the decision of the local church

46. Does the current EPC moderator affirm women as ordained Pastors, Elders, and Deacons in ministry leadership?

Yes. The current moderator of the EPC 2010 GA is Rob Linden and he affirms ordained women as Pastors, ruling Elders, Deacons and at all levels of leadership at the EPC.

47. Are there EPC Presbyteries divided about the ordination of women?

In June of 2009, at the EPC 29th General Assembly (GA), a proposal was presented by Presbytery of Mid America to divide their Presbytery because of differences among their member churches about the ordination of Teaching Elders. Their request was ruled unconstitutional by the Permanent Judicial Committee (PJC) referring back to the “Essentials of Our Faith” and the Book of Order that refers to the right of the local church to elect its own officers, guaranteed in perpetuity (see question 1 above). The EPC is committed to protecting the integrity and unity of the “Essentials of Our Faith”. At the 29th General Assembly an Interim Committee on Women Teaching Elders was therefore elected to “explore ways to include those pastors and churches with conflicting positions on Women Teaching Elders in the Presbyteries of the EPC.”