At the Congregational Meeting of September 30, the congregation was invited to write down their questions regarding the possible denominational changes. Below are those questions and our attempts to answer them succinctly.

What else is different about the denominations besides ordaining gay pastors?

There are several features that make the ECO very attractive. For one, the property is held by the church. Another benefit is that the tenets of faith are written right into their policy rather than being so scattered and vague that they hold no weight. There is a strong emphasis on our “covenant” relationships. Pastors from various churches in our region would be required to be in close contact with one another, supporting one another and holding each other accountable. The ECO is less hierarchical. There are fewer layers and there is a desire to focus much more on “best practices” rather than spend our energy litigating our constitution every two years.

Provide a clear discussion of what has changed that calls for this move in light of previous divisions in PCUSA (such as ordination of divorcees, ordination of women, etc.)?

For many of us, the ordination of avowed, practicing homosexuals represents a break with the Scriptural understanding that is just too far. In every other dispute there is a “minority view” in the Scripture that supports the ministry of women or the restoration of a pastor with a broken marriage. We do not see that view in this case.

What will be the financial impact of changing (or staying put)?

The Presbytery is currently wrestling with that. We will at least commit to giving five more years of “mission share” to the Presbytery. If we form a Union, this point becomes less relevant. Things remain as they are. As for staying put, it may mean that some will stop giving. But then, perhaps others could give more!

Are the financial implications for staying or leaving different for our pastors (retirement considerations) than for the congregation?
While the pastors are vested in the pension plan of the Presbyterian Church, their future payment could go towards the ECO’s retirement plan. However, it could be that Emmanuel simply continues to pay into their pension plan.

**What is the position on abortion for both the ECO and the EPC?**

The EPC has made abortion a key issue in their understanding of the faith. They have a position paper on it that you can read here: [http://www.epc.org/mediafiles/epc-abortion-position-paper.pdf](http://www.epc.org/mediafiles/epc-abortion-position-paper.pdf). They call for specific political action in this area. The ECO has a section in their theology where they interpret the 10 commandments. On the sixth commandment, “thou shalt not kill” they say this: “6. eradicate a spirit of anger, resentment, callousness, violence, or bitterness, and instead cultivate a spirit of gentleness, kindness, peace, and love; recognize and honor the image of God in every human being from conception to natural death.”

**Are there other churches leaving the PCUSA?**

In our presbytery about a dozen are preparing to leave for ECO. Other churches across the West and in other areas have left as well, often for the EPC.

**Why do some session members want to stay?**

Some believe that the stance taken by GA is correct. Others who voted “no” mean only “not at this time.”

**Why do we need to affiliate with any Presbytery? Why can’t we be totally independent?**

The charter of the church has always been that, if we were to leave, we could do so only if we were dismissed to “another Reformed Body.” If we did not wish to go with anyone else, we would have to enter into negotiations for the full cost of the property. Furthermore, it is theologically more wise to enter into a covenant with other churches.
Are we turning away from something or going to something?

Both. It is necessary at this time to focus on what we are turning away from. We are turning away from endless arguments that are leading the PCUSA further and further from its biblical foundations. We are turning towards a set of relationships that are more akin to Emmanuel and that are designed to help us improve as a church rather than constantly fight about the constitution.

What are the benefits of making a change?

We lose the dissonance between what is said by the denomination and who Emmanuel is. We are no longer part of a body that seems to undercut the very Gospel we proclaim. The second is that it allows us to go forward with some confidence that the church will be in a stronger theological position going forward.

What is being discussed at the Presbytery level?

We are finalizing the policy by which any church could separate from the Presbytery of Santa Barbara. The questions that remain are, how do we cover the debts and how can we continue to work together in certain projects?

How did we become so indebted to the Presbytery without a congregational vote?

Let’s remember that it was the Presbytery who first helped found our church. They took on debt FOR us at one time. In later years, there were some aggressive—and successful—church plants. The vote to be indebted for these came from the floor of presbytery and Emmanuel had representatives there. There is effort now being taken to move this debt off the presbytery’s books and to specific churches.

What are written materials for the various options and what are the positives and negatives of each option?

The Session is in the process of evaluating just this point. Some of our resources are available to you at these sites: www.epc.org and www.fellowship-pres.org. In addition, there are materials on our website.
Who owns our property?

The Presbytery of Santa Barbara currently owns our property.

What does “most restrictive” mean for the Union Presbytery with respect to marrying non-heterosexual couples?

It means that the polity that is less permissive is the one that is followed. In this case, ECO polity would not allow for this kind of marriage.

Could you please provide more information on the issues, not just limited to the top three and the impact of these to Emmanuel?

We believe that the centrality of Scripture, the re-establishment of ordination standards, and then embrace of a new and dynamic denomination will be a benefit for Emmanuel. There are many other issues we can discuss, but they would have less impact on Emmanuel.

Is there a denomination that claims Jesus is Lord while also leaving open possibilities for divergent views on the sinfulness of homosexuality?

The United Church of Christ, the Episcopalian Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America are three.

Some of ECO’s essentials sound legalistic. Can we get more information on those that are “codes of conduct?”

We searched the documents and did not find the particular phrase “code of conduct.” But to your point: the ECO has taken pains to not be legalistic. Their spirit is one of discussion rather than one of direction. We believe we will find very kindred spirits among this group.

Would you please provide biblical direction on how churches should address disagreement on issues?
There are many biblical references to this theme, because conflict has always been part of the church. One document that does a good job of this, and is brief, is called, "Seeking to be Faithful Together: Guidelines for Presbyterians During Times of Disagreement. It can be found here: [http://www.pcusa.org/resource/seeking-be-faithful-together/](http://www.pcusa.org/resource/seeking-be-faithful-together/).

**What is the impact of any change on our missionaries?**

None that we are aware of.

**How will leaving the PCUSA effect younger generations?**

It is hard to say, of course. But our belief is that this will provide them with a church that is more consistent in terms of representing the faith and more focused on what matters for their life and for most of us.

**Explain why fidelity in a gay marriage isn’t enough to qualify someone for church leadership?**

Our belief is that this is not a relationship sanctioned by God.

The ECO is so new and not well established. How can we know exactly what we are getting ourselves into?

Most of these churches have been like-minded with Emmanuel for many, many years. The pastors know one another from various renewal conferences and events. Those involved in writing the foundational documents are skilled and the organization is solid. It is a new organization, but it is also an exciting and positive movement.

**Would you please put more emphasis on prayer concerning this issue?**

Yes.
Could we have a scriptural discussion on this, and could we emphasize what we have in common rather than what is separating us?

We have had many scriptural discussions on this and we have emphasized what we have in common. However, as we truly discuss separation, we cannot by too shy about discussing these issues that can also divide.

Will you see unity and a course that is palatable to as many members as possible?

That is our deep goal. We realize that fine Christians disagree on these issues and we hope to remain in fellowship with all. Our task as elders is described in one of our vows as seeking the peace, unity and purity of the church. We will make every attempt to do so.

If we stay, will our pastors be mandated to marry gay couples?

Not immediately. But it could come to that in the future.

Are we generally in concert with the concerns of other local Presbyterian churches?

Yes. Recently there was a gathering of 17 churches from our presbytery who are planning to act together as we consider the options.

If we change, will we lose our property?

Not as long as we act in concert with others and in keeping with the soon-to-be-ratified Gracious Separation Policy.

If we don’t change, can we be sued for not employing a homosexual pastor?

It may not be that we would be sued for not employing a homosexual pastor, but we could run afoul of the denomination for not interviewing a gay or lesbian individual.
What are the benefits of the Union option over going straight to the ECO?

The Union option allows us to keep the same voting balance in the Presbytery and keeps us in vital contact with our brothers and sisters. However, we are pursuing the ECO option regardless of whether the Union comes into being.

Why are some churches that have moved to ECO now moving to EPC?

We know of only one case where that happened. It was First Presbyterian, Orlando. In that case, the formation of ECO was not quite established when they felt their presbytery was about to close the door on their leaving in a gracious way. After a soul-searching process, they decided to go with the EPC. We know of one church in our area that went EPC and now wishes to go ECO.

What will change in our congregation if we change?

It is likely that you will not notice much change at all. Our presbytery will have some different dynamics and our national meetings will receive less media attention.

Can you provide a thorough analysis of the benefits of staying in the PCUSA?

That is beyond the scope of this format. One benefit would be to decide, once and for all, that we are NOT leaving. There is an inherit stability in making no change. But it does seem that change is coming to us from without and from within. It will likely be the case that marriage is re-defined at the next General Assembly and that the distinctive of Jesus’ role in salvation will be increasingly diminished.

Can you provide input from liberal theologians as well as from conservative ones?

Our intent here is not an academic exploration of the issue but to make a decision. We stand with a more evangelical point of view.

Can you provide more information on the tenets of the PCUSA faith?
It is one of the confusing elements of the PCUSA that, while we hold to the essential tenets of the Reformed faith, they are not specifically identified. Rather, they are inferred. There are major theological discussions on every aspect of the faith. You can find some of this at www.pcusa.org.

What are the benefits of acting in concert with several other churches?

It allows us to support others and be supported in terms of helping churches through difficult times. It also will allow us to be in consultation when the inevitable questions come up as we navigate a new system.

Which are the local churches that are staying in the PCUSA?

At this time, Monte Vista, El Montecito, First Presbyterian Santa Barbara, Goleta First Presbyterian, and St. Andrew’s Presbyterian of Santa Barbara have indicated they will stay.

What is the deadline and plan for leaving?

We are right now exploring the right timeline. One concern is that, if we wait too long, the current, positive climate might change as those who agree with us will be fewer and fewer. We would expect to act in 2013.

What is a woman’s role in the EPC?

This was a contentious issue for their denomination so they did not consider it a foundational issue as to whether or not woman should be ordained. It has been decided on a presbytery by presbytery basis. The net is, women are now serving as pastors in the EPC. However, there has not yet been a case where a woman has gone from one church to another in a normal transfer situation. They are decidedly behind both the PCUSA and the ECO in this matter.

What is the status of finances of the ECO?
The organization is funded through a requirement of 1% of the church’s budget. That would be about 1/3 of what we pay now. They are committed to very low overhead and do not believe a large, centralized mechanism is the right model for the 21st century.

*Is the Bible the Word of God for today or just a historical artifact?*

We believe it is the Word of God for today and tomorrow.