

Sunset Presbyterian Church is now a member of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC).

In November of 2008 the Presbytery of the Cascades of the Presbyterian Church (USA) voted to release Sunset to EPC. This concluded a year long process of conversation and negotiation. The gracious process and attitude from Cascades Presbytery is very much appreciated. Additional details about the release and transfer are included in the links below.

We are currently getting acquainted with our new denomination and will post updates here as we begin to live into our new community of faith.

Our congregation wishes to express their gratitude to all who worked hard and prayed fervently to make this move a reality. We look forward to where God is leading us in the future. Your continued prayers will be appreciated

For additional information contact:  
Ken Mulder, Minister of Outreach  
[kenmulder@sunsetpres.org](mailto:kenmulder@sunsetpres.org)

Jim Blanchard, Member of Denominational Strategy Team  
[jamesiblanchard@cs.com](mailto:jamesiblanchard@cs.com)

Dennis Kviz, Member of Denominational Strategy Team  
[dennis@AvalarRealty.com](mailto:dennis@AvalarRealty.com)

### **Resources About Sunset's Transfer to the EPC**

*Sunset Presbyterian Church*

- [Denominational FAQ and Resources](#)
- [Sunset Pres Session Approved Position Statement](#) (Sept 20, 2007)
- [Update on Denominational Direction](#) (Feb 21, 2008)

Evangelical Presbyterian Church

- [About the EPC](#)
- [EPC Beliefs](#)

Joint Statements (Sunset Presbyterian Church and Presbytery of the Cascades of the PC/USA)

- [Congregational Letter](#)
- [Joint Agreement of Dismissal](#)

Presbytery of the Cascades of the PC/USA

- [Process for Congregations Considering Leaving the PC\(USA\)](#)
- To offer an opportunity to give a fair hearing of reasons against leaving, this document "[Why Stay?](#)" is authored by Presbyterians for Renewal which is a renewal organization associated with the PC(USA).

## Other Resources

- In fairness to Presbyterians for Renewal, they have recently released the following document in response to the General Assembly meeting in June 2008: [Reshaping the Presbyterian Church \(USA\)](#). Moved to permanent status in the EPC or become independent.
  
- In an attempt to provide background information and context to the decision we faced, the Denomination Strategy Team prepared the following documents.
  - [Interim Session's Denominational Affiliation Statement](#) - 6/5/10
  - [Recent denominational history of Sunset](#)
  - [Memo to Churches of the New Wineskins EPC Presbytery](#) – 11/5/10
  - [Should Sunset Stay Within the EPC or Become Independent?](#)
  - [Denomination Decision Information](#) - 7/22/11

# ***Denominational Frequently Asked Questions and Resources***

## **Sunset 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, the national meeting for the denomination, where policies are created or modified by vote. The next General Assembly will be held in June of 2006.

## **What is the PC (USA)?**

Presbyterian Church (USA) or PC (USA) is the Presbyterian denomination to which Sunset 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 denomination's national offices are in Louisville, Kentucky.

PC (USA) is governed by its constitution, made up of *The Book of Order* and *The Book of Confessions*, which is decidedly evangelical; it is founded on a Biblical worldview. For more information on PC (USA), visit the PC (USA) website, [www.pcusa.org](http://www.pcusa.org). If you do not use a computer you may also see the attachment to this FAQ Sheet entitled "The Organization of Presbyterian Church (USA)."

## **Why are we part of the PC (USA)?**

Sunset was founded by the Presbyterian Church (USA) and we remain part of that body to this day. The foundational beliefs and organization of PC (USA) are in line with our beliefs and values. Because we are Presbyterian, we are committed to always being in close relationship with other like-minded churches for support and accountability; we believe that this follows the example of the early churches and is one of our responsibilities as a part of the Body of Christ.

## **What influence does PC (USA) have over us?**

Our Presbytery, The Presbytery of the Cascades, is the regional governing body consisting of 124 churches in Oregon and Southern Washington. It is responsible for oversight of the churches, providing support and resources and providing pastoral care, including ordination and disciplining. For more information, see [www.cascadespresbytery.org](http://www.cascadespresbytery.org).

The General Assembly, the highest level of Presbyterian government, is composed of representatives from all 173 Presbyteries in the United States and meets every two years. Decisions, directions and strategies that affect the whole church are considered and acted on at the General Assembly. It has a large, full-time staff working year-round on church issues.

## **So, what's the problem?**

Right now, the governing book of PC (USA), the *Book of Order*, is strongly evangelical. Sunset's mission and essential beliefs are in agreement with the beliefs outlined in PC (USA)'s *Book of Order*. However, PC (USA) is sharply divided between "evangelical" and "liberal" views.

Some of the key differences are:

Christology (the lordship of Jesus Christ). Is Jesus THE way or one of many ways to the Father?  
Authoritative Interpretation of Scripture. Is the Bible the final authority for spiritual truth or is it just a book of wisdom that is subject to interpretation?

Ordination Standards. Is it right to ordain pastors who disregard scripture and/or practice immoral behavior?

The Mission of the Church. Is the main priority of the church to bring people to Christ or to pursue a political and social agenda?

Sunset is considered an "evangelical" Presbyterian church, because of our strong biblical and moral beliefs. For more information on what we believe, see *The Essential Beliefs of Sunset Presbyterian Church* which can be found on our website at [www.sunsetpres.org/go/essential\\_beliefs](http://www.sunsetpres.org/go/essential_beliefs).

The problem is that the leadership of PC (USA)'s General Assembly—the top leadership of our denomination—is dominated by the liberal wing. General Assembly is not enforcing the constitution of PC (USA) and the liberal wing is pushing a social and political agenda that directly contradicts the current *Book of Order* as well as Sunset's essential beliefs.

For those interested in substantive reading regarding the Theological divide we refer you to the following website: [www.presbyterysd.org/presbynews/santa-barbara-resolution-final.pdf](http://www.presbyterysd.org/presbynews/santa-barbara-resolution-final.pdf) This is a Declaration of Theology and Action written by the session of a church in Oxnard California, presented to and accepted by the Santa Barbara Presbytery in October, 2006. Tedious Reading but one of the best and clearest definition of the Theological Divide in PC (USA).

## **What about our pastors?**

Currently, Ron Kincaid and Ken Mulder are the only Presbyterian ordained pastors on staff at Sunset. Pastors Ron and Ken are members of the Presbytery but are employed by Sunset. Their terms of call to minister at Sunset need annual approval by the Presbytery.

## **What about our property?**

Our Presbytery, the Presbytery of the Cascades, holds the deed to our property, in accordance with *The Book of Order*.

## **What are we doing about the agenda of the liberal wing?**

Sunset has been involved with reforming PC (USA) for a very long time. In 2003, Sunset hosted The Gathering of the Presbyterian Coalition (visit [www.presbycoalition.org](http://www.presbycoalition.org) for more info.) where over 300 Presbyterian pastors and leaders gathered from all over the country to discuss the integrity of the Presbyterian Church in America. We are also a voting member of the New Wineskins Association of Churches.

## What is the New Wineskins Association of Churches?

The New Wineskins Association of Churches is a growing network of evangelical Presbyterian ministers and churches within PC (USA) who share essential Bible-based beliefs and values. New Wineskins exists to support and encourage Presbyterian churches who stand firm in their beliefs that the Bible is the true word of God and that Jesus is the only way to Him. Because the congregations involved in the New Wineskins Initiative believe that PC (USA) is in need of significant structural reform, New Wineskins has created a proposed constitution, evangelical in nature, that was attempted to be presented at PC (USA)'s General Assembly in June of 2006. For more information about the New Wineskins Initiative, visit their websites at [www.newwineskinsassociation.com](http://www.newwineskinsassociation.com).

For those who do not use the computer we have included a hardcopy in an appendix notebook of a rather lengthy document entitled “New Wineskins, *a Time For Every Purpose Under Heaven*.” (You can pick this up at a “Town Hall Meeting” or contact Cindy at [cindyheinz@sunsetpres.org](mailto:cindyheinz@sunsetpres.org) ). This is the report of the Commissioned Strategy Team of The New Wineskins Association of Churches presented to and accepted by the New Wineskins Convocation in Orlando, Florida on February 8-9, 2007. It is presented to those who want to know more about what New Wineskins is and why Sunset is committed to their vision. (*More specific FAQs re: New Wineskins later in this document*)

## What direction are we heading at Sunset?

In June of 2007 two decisions were made in different places that have led the Session of Sunset Presbyterian Church to decide to invite the Presbytery of the Cascades to begin talking with us regarding being dismissed to another denomination:

1. The first decision was made at General Assembly of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. This was in the form of a vote to create a non-geographical Presbytery for any and all New Wineskin Churches who wish to be dismissed from PC (USA). Since this decision there have been approximately 30 churches across the United States that have been dismissed or are in the process of being dismissed from the PC (USA).
2. The second decision was made at the regular presbytery meeting of the Presbytery of the Cascades in June, 2007. The Presbytery has developed “A Process For Congregations Considering Leaving the PC (USA)” and it was presented to and accepted by the Presbytery. This has opened the opportunity for a gracious process for leaving if we desire.

On September 20, 2007, Session approved an official “Position Statement of the Session of Sunset Presbyterian Church” and they voted to begin the process of conversation with the Presbytery of the Cascades.

In October, the first Presbytery team called the Conversation Team, met with Session for discussion about our desire to be dismissed. This team, in turn recommended that the second Team, the Resolution Team, be scheduled to begin meeting with a team that Session has commissioned as the Negotiation Team. Those meeting have begun in April, 2008.

Both the Position Paper and the Process Papers are available on [www.sunsetpres.org](http://www.sunsetpres.org) or are included in the appendix notebooks.

## What is the Evangelical Presbyterian Church?

Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) began in 1981 when they founding churches and leaders determined that on the basic essentials of the Christian Faith, they would not disagree, but on anything that was not essential they would give liberty. Above all, they committed themselves to loving each other and not engaging in quarrels and strife. The result is that when they are together they spend most of their time in worship and fellowship and almost none in arguing with each other.

EPC consists of a little over 200 churches and about 85000 members. They have a world missions program with priority on sending missionaries to unreached people groups. They eagerly desire to plant new churches across the United States, especially in urban communities and college towns. It is their desire that every one of their congregations will be an outpost of the Kingdom in post-Christian America with every member viewing himself or herself as a missionary on a mission.

They began when a group of pastors and elders held meetings in St Louis, MO in 1980-81 for planning and prayer. They came from mainline Presbyterian denominations like the United Presbyterian and the Presbyterian Church in the United States (the two denominations that merged in 1983 to form PC (USA)). These leaders had become increasingly distress by liberalism within their denominations. They wanted to form a church that took seriously the words of Scripture, the theology of the historic confessions of the faith, and the evangelical fervor of Presbyterian founders.

It is the belief that God created the Evangelical Presbyterian Church to be a significant part of his plan for the renewal of believers and for witness to those outside the faith. It is their conviction that, like the ancient Queen Esther, God has brought them together for such a time as this.

For further information about this church go to [www.epc.org](http://www.epc.org). or the appendix notebook.

## Why Would We Go To EPC?

In 2005, this denomination commissioned a Long Range Planning Team to evaluate progress on Vision 21, a plan put in place in 2001 (see appendix or go to [www.epc.org](http://www.epc.org). click on “about us” and go to long range plan). They wanted to begin envisioning the EPC’s mission beyond 2010. The Long Range Planning Team is focusing on developing missional ethos and practice in the denominational life.

It is this intentionality that connected this team with New Wineskins. Through a mutual group of people, this team was introduced to the writings and vision of New Wineskins. They began meeting to talk. A year later, The Leadership of the denomination offered to create the non-geographical presbytery for New Wineskin churches who wished to leave the PC (USA). This was passed by the 2007 GA (see above).

In addition, however, this action went hand in hand with the creation of a Transitional Team (called “New Wineskins/EPC Joint Commission”), made up of members of the Long Range Planning Team and members of the leadership of New Wineskins Association of Churches. This team is now working on blending he two visions together to become one in the next five years. *See paper in appendix notebook.*

Sunset’s overall vision is very close to what EPC and NWAC believe is to be the purpose and direction of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church. For these reasons Sunset’s leadership believes we would be better aligned with EPC than with PC (USA).

## **Why Not Go To New Wineskins Instead of EPC?**

The constitution of PC (USA) gives each Presbytery the power and the right to dismiss any church seeking to be leave but it has to be to another Reformed Group with which they have communion. PC (USA) does not recognize New Wineskins as an organized reformed group but they do recognize EPC.

**See Dave Henderson's "The New Wineskins Initiative" on page 9.**

## **Would Church membership transfer automatically?**

Yes, once Sunset has been released to EPC, every member who states they want to go with Sunset to EPC will automatically be transferred.

## **What is relative size of EPC & PC(USA)?**

PC(USA) is has just under 11,000 churches and has approximately 2,300,000 members  
EPC has approximately 200 churches with about 85,000 members.

## **Questions relative to Congregational vote**

**Will only members be allowed to vote?**

Yes

**What % of Sunset's attendance are members?**

On any given Weekend about 65 or 70% of the attenders of the weekend services are members.

**Will representatives from the Presbytery of the Cascades be allowed to speak to Sunset members?**

Yes. In fact, they have already expressed a desire to do so when we have our Congregational Meeting for a vote.

**Does the vote have to be taken in a single meeting?**

Yes.

## **When will the membership know more of the details regarding being dismissed to EPC? What will be the process?**

The Session appointed Negotiation Team from our church (all Elders except for one Pastor) is currently meeting with the Presbytery of the Cascades appointed Resolution Team. It is not known how long the entire negotiations will go on. It could be several months.

When the two teams come to an agreement, that agreement is then taken to Session for their approval or disapproval. If the Session approves then they will call a series of informational meetings where the entire membership will be able to hear and discuss the details of the agreement. Then a special called congregational meeting will be scheduled where the entire membership will be asked to be present to vote.

If Session disapproves the agreement from the Team, they will either have the teams continue negotiations or seek to wait until a later time to make a change. A time when the Lord will allow us to leave with our property in a manner acceptable to everyone.

The Congregational approval will need to have 51% of the congregation voting to leave. That is the requirement of the denomination. Sunset's leadership however, is seeking a much high vote percentage to affirm that which they believe God is leading us. A vote of no less than 90% is an affirmative vote.

## **What happens when the Congregation approves to go to EPC?**

The Resolution Team from the Presbytery of the Cascades become Sunset's advocates and brings the motion to Presbytery for a vote of the Presbytery.

## Resource List

### Information about Sunset:

The following pages can be reached from the “about us” page on Sunset's website ([www.sunsetpres.org/go/aboutus](http://www.sunsetpres.org/go/aboutus)):

Sunset's Mission and Vision	<a href="http://www.sunsetpres.org/go/vision">www.sunsetpres.org/go/vision</a>
Sunset's Essential Beliefs	<a href="http://www.sunsetpres.org/go/essential_beliefs">www.sunsetpres.org/go/essential_beliefs</a>
Sunset's Core Values	<a href="http://www.sunsetpres.org/go/values">www.sunsetpres.org/go/values</a>
Sunset's Philosophy of Ministry	<a href="http://www.sunsetpres.org/go/philosophy_of_ministry">www.sunsetpres.org/go/philosophy_of_ministry</a>

---

### Information about our Denomination:

Presbytery of the Cascades' Website	<a href="http://www.cascadespresbytery.org">www.cascadespresbytery.org</a>
PC(USA)'s Website	<a href="http://www.pcusa.org">www.pcusa.org</a>

---

### Additional Resources:

**Presbyterian Coalition**—an alliance of evangelical renewal groups. Presbyterian Coalition coordinates with individuals and groups who share evangelical convictions and who are working for revitalization of PC (USA). [www.presbycoalition.org](http://www.presbycoalition.org)

**The Layman**—a publication that monitors and reports on news and issues within PC (USA) from an evangelical perspective. The Layman is published by the Presbyterian Lay Committee. [www.layman.org](http://www.layman.org) *The Layman* is also available in print as a free subscription; request a subscription by emailing your name, mailing address and telephone number to [art@layman.org](mailto:art@layman.org).

**New Wineskins Initiative (NWI)**—a growing network of Presbyterian ministers and churches within PC (USA) who share essential Bible-based beliefs and values. NWI has created a proposed constitution to be presented at PC (USA)'s General Assembly in 2006. [www.newwineconvo.com](http://www.newwineconvo.com) and [www.presbywine.com](http://www.presbywine.com)

**The Confessing Church Movement**—a collection of independently gathered churches and individuals within PC (USA) who have agreed to assert the reaffirmation of three basic confessional statements. [www.confessingchurch.homestead.com](http://www.confessingchurch.homestead.com)

**Presbyterians for Renewal**—an organization committed to the renewal of PC (USA). [www.pfrenewal.org](http://www.pfrenewal.org)

**Other Renewal Groups** as listed on the Presbyterian. [www.presbycoalition.org/partners.htm](http://www.presbycoalition.org/partners.htm)

**The Book of Order**—one of two books that make up the constitution of PC (USA). [www.pcusa.org/oga/publications/boo-04-05.pdf](http://www.pcusa.org/oga/publications/boo-04-05.pdf)

---

## The Organization of Presbyterian Church (USA)

### Session

Each church has a Session which is composed of the pastors, often referred to as "teaching elders", and lay people who are elected from the membership of the congregation and are often called "ruling elders". Both teaching and ruling elders are ordained for life, although ruling elders serve for a period of three years on the Session.

The Session has supreme authority in all matters in the local church such as:

- Receiving, disciplining and dismissing members.
- Overseeing the worship services.
- Supervising all activities of the congregation including the deacons and trustees.

### Presbytery

The Presbytery consists of an equal number of clergy and laity from each church in a specific geographical area. The "Presbytery of the Cascades" is composed of 124 congregations, one of which is Sunset Presbyterian Church. Some of the responsibilities of the Presbytery are:

- Ordaining and disciplining teaching elders. All teaching elders have their membership in the Presbytery rather than the local church.
- To oversee and supervise churches within the Presbytery.
- To elect commissioners to Synod and General Assembly.

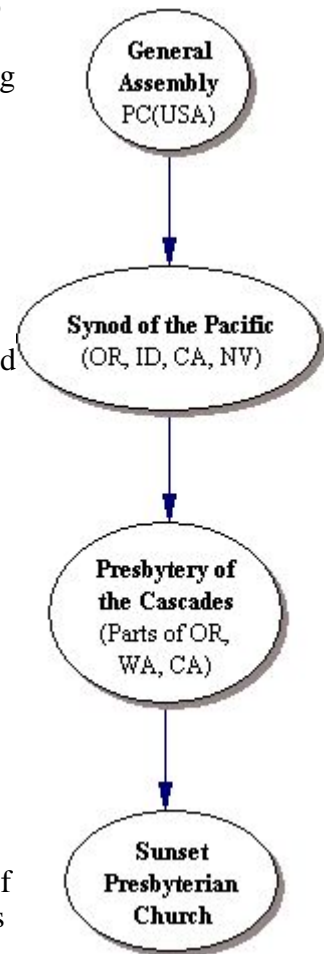
### Synod

The Synod consists of a geographical group of Presbyteries. The Presbytery of the Cascades is a part of the Synod of the Pacific, which includes Presbyteries in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Nevada, and California.

### General Assembly

The General Assembly is a representative body composed of an equal number of ruling elders and teaching elders who have been elected by the various Presbyteries. The General Assembly meets biannually and it is the final authority in all matters affecting the interests of the entire church.

Note: Presbyterian Church (USA) is often called PC (USA).



## The New Wineskins Initiative

*Frequently asked questions  
answered by David Henderson*

**Q:** *Why New Wineskins? What is really motivating your work?*

**A:** The vision of the New Wineskins Initiative is that our life together as Presbyterians would be characterized by theological and ethical integrity, missional faithfulness, and structural effectiveness. This vision has as its major components a newly drafted reformed statement of faith essentials and of ethical imperatives, as well as a streamlined missional/relational structure which, while true to our Presbyterian heritage, will allow us to be more effective and faithful in our kingdom mission in this world. You can find those statements and our proposed constitution at our website: [www.newwineconvo.com](http://www.newwineconvo.com). We believe the picture we are holding up before the denomination is one that will be attractive to the broad majority of Presbyterians.

**Q:** *Some say that the statements of faith essentials and ethical imperatives that your group has drafted are too narrow and restrictive.*

**A:** Our present *Book of Confessions* gathers together many exceptional expressions of reformed faith to guide us in our Biblical interpretation. We desire that the body of historically recognized reformed confessions and creeds would continue to serve in this capacity. However, the present *Book of Confessions* is so broad that, while it serves us as a guide in matters of instruction and interpretation, it does not adequately serve us as a basis for discipline. We need a shorter Biblically-grounded reformed statement of theological and ethical essentials upon which we (the great majority of us) can agree together, and on the basis of which we are willing to discipline one another and to be disciplined ourselves. That is why we have drafted a fresh expression of essential classic reformed theological beliefs and ethical practices.

Obviously not all will agree with the statement of faith essentials and ethical imperatives we put forward. There are some within the PCUSA whose theology and ethics departs so profoundly from what the church has historically affirmed in its classic orthodox expressions of faith for twenty-one centuries that they will not find our theology comfortable, or perhaps even recognizable. But it is they who have departed, not we, not the vast majority of the PCUSA. It is they who have stepped outside the bounds of orthodox theology and morality.

**Q:** *You say that you desire us to experience greater theological unity. But doesn't the work of New Wineskins push us further apart rather than bringing us closer together?*

**A:** In spite of the structural model for unity that has dominated our denominational thinking for the past one hundred and fifty years, we who are part of the New Wineskins Initiative continue to believe that our unity should be found first and foremost in our shared theology, ethics, and mission, not in a shared structure. This necessarily means that we need to be willing to identify some theological and ethical convictions as being out of bounds, and some practices as being unfaithful to our mission, and some aspects of our structure as being ineffective. This means being willing to call for reform that does not *a priori* require that everyone who is now part of the PCUSA happily fit within a new structure or articulation of orthodox faith and ethics.

Insisting that we keep the PCUSA together in precisely the form and make-up in which we now see it is *not*, as we understand it, the meaning of Biblical unity. To insist that we preserve and maintain an institution is not the same thing as upholding the peace, unity, and purity of the Church. Do we not uphold the notion of a Church reformed and always being reformed according to the word of God? What does our resistance to reform say about our beliefs about the denomination? Have we turned things around, such that we view the word of God as fallible and the PCUSA infallible?

**Q:** *What do you say to the criticism that the New Wineskins Initiative threatens the peace and unity of the Church that Jesus describes in his high priestly prayer?*

**A:** Critics of our work often will point to Jesus' prayer in John chapter 17. They say, "Anything that threatens the present institution of the PCUSA threatens the unity of the Church to which Jesus calls us." There are two aspects of our response to that.

First, the denomination is not the Church. It is part of the Church; it helps to organize a portion of the Church. But where the Church is God's creation, the denomination is merely a human institution, one that exists to serve the Church – and it needs to be preserved and strengthened to the extent that it is faithful to what God intends for the Church, and reformed where it is not.

Secondly, I think we need to take a closer look at the nature of the unity to which Jesus calls us, and for which He prays. It is unity based *not* on shared structure but on shared theology, ethics, and mission. Look at the text. Jesus talks about shared beliefs in John 17:8: "I gave them the words you gave me, and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me." He prays for shared ethics in 17:17: "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth." And calls the Church to a common mission in 17:19: "As you have sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world." According to Jesus, what defines our unity is not being in the same institution but sharing the same theology, ethic, and sense of call. Without those things in common, we simply *cannot* experience the unity to which Jesus calls us, regardless of what structure we may share.

**Q:** *What is your response to those who say New Wineskins is schismatic?*

**A:** Those who have called New Wineskins schismatic misunderstand our work. The New Wineskins Initiative is not a separatist movement. We have no desire to gather together a small band of miffed members and leave. In fact, just the opposite is true. We intend the NWI to be a uniting movement. In the face of forces that threaten the unity of the body of Christ, we are presenting a vision for the denomination that is faithful to its past and that can continue to unite us into the future.

But we are seeking to uphold the unity of the Church around those things which we believe the Scriptures tell us are to be the basis of our unity – around beliefs and practices, not name or structure. Is it schismatic to seek to restore theological, ethical, and missional unity to our life together as Presbyterians?

We don't have any desire to split off. Neither do we believe God would have us passively accept things as they are now. We want to encourage the radical reform of a denomination that has a beautiful heritage but which has lost its way.

It is true that we have talked at points about the possibility of various scenarios in which the PCUSA would not continue as it is presently. But those possibilities have been discussed only as responses, as steps that may be required if the denomination were to continue in its slide away from faithfulness and toward compromise.

Continued muddiness in the proclamation of the Gospel and disagreement about the life to which Christ calls us, continued bitter battling between factions within the denomination, continued struggle to join hands in meaningful mission to our world, continued loss of members and waning financial support: we can't go on like this – not if we wish to honor God.

The New Wineskins movement has been labeled as schismatic because we are willing to say that continuing indefinitely as we are now is not an option. But should it be an option? Is what we have – what we are experiencing together – what we want for ourselves? More importantly, is it what God wants for us? Perhaps the fact that we are willing to say it is not is an expression not of schism but of wisdom.

**Q.** *Another concern about New Wineskins is that it threatens to abandon our Presbyterian and reformed heritage. How would you respond?*

**A.** We believe the draft constitution that we are proposing is thoroughly Presbyterian in structure and solidly reformed in doctrine, though perhaps not in a way that is obvious to those whose only exposure to Presbyterian structure and reformed theology is the late twentieth-century version with which we are most familiar.

For instance, the form of government stands upon the spiritual leadership and authority of those who are recognized for their wisdom and spiritual maturity (elders); it joins congregations in constitutional association for mutual encouragement, accountability and mission; and it provides for a series of wider governing bodies whose responsibility it is to support and serve the smaller and more local expressions, all distinctively Presbyterian hallmarks.

Likewise, the theology espoused in our declarations is fully consistent with the theological emphases of the Reformers, including the sovereign reign of God over human history and the lives of individuals; the inability of persons, because of the taint of sin, to please God or to seek Him of their own accord; the Trinitarian nature of redemption, including the gracious election of some to salvation by a loving Father, the substitution sacrifice of the Son to purchase redemption, and the empowering work of the Spirit to effect new life; and the Church's missional call to embody the loving reign of God and engage the world with God's redemptive purposes.

As we believe you'll see in the documents we've proposed, the work of New Wineskins is completely faithful to our heritage as reformed Presbyterian believers, and seeks to uphold and reform it, not dismantle it.

**Q:** *Why should we take the New Wineskins proposal seriously?*

**A:** The denomination persists in addressing symptoms rather than the source of our problems. As long as we do so, we will be frustrated with our results. Only a thorough reform of the denomination from belief to behavior to structure to practice will allow us to experience the unity of spirit and purpose for which we long. We believe we offer a workable blueprint for reform that will help bring about needed change.

Clifton Kirkpatrick's request for suggestions concerning the present *Book of Order* shows that the need for significant change is recognized by those who work with it most closely. We offer our work as a serious response to that request, and believe that it warrants close consideration by our fellow Presbyterians.

*The Rev. Dr. David Henderson is Co-Moderator of the New Wineskins Initiative, Senior Pastor of the Covenant Presbyterian Church in West Lafayette, Indiana, and author of the book [Culture Shift: Communicating God's Truth to Our World](#) (Baker Books).*

*Revised 5/21/08*

FINAL

# Position Statement of the Session of Sunset Presbyterian Church

As approved by Session  
September 20, 2007

## FINAL

### I. The purpose of this Statement is summarized here:

The Session of Sunset Presbyterian Church approves the initiation of a process. The process will allow Sunset Presbyterian Church to separate from the Presbyterian Church USA and transition to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church / New Wineskins transitional presbytery. The principle cause of this decision is due to the practice of natural theology by the PC(USA), as explained in section III. The process for transition has been provided by the Presbytery of the Cascades.

### II. Our process for reaching the above decision to initiate separation was as follows:

Since the founding of Sunset Presbyterian Church, our elders and staff have participated in the PC(USA). From the beginning we discovered troubling theological differences, and stayed involved in the denomination to try to resolve those differences.

Sunset Elders and staff have also participated in committees of the Presbytery of the Cascades, seeking to impact the decisions made at each General Assembly, and to seek renewal of the denomination to orthodox theology.

To try to join forces to achieve renewal, Sunset participated in a variety of reform groups within the PC(USA), sponsored meetings of those groups on our property, and provided leadership and financial resources to the groups. These groups have included the Confessing Church Movement, New Wineskins, Presbyterians for Renewal, and the Presbyterian Coalition. We continue to be active in these groups.

As the internal conflict in the PC(USA) continued to grow over time, Sunset's leadership and Session went through a number of periods of information collection followed by Session meetings, study and prayerful consideration. The purpose of this activity was to evaluate our relationship to the denomination.

It was Sunset's hope that the appointment in 2001 of the Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity and Purity (known as "the PUP report") would bring resolution to the key theological issues that today are tearing the PC(USA) apart.

## FINAL

The final PUP report was issued and accepted in 2006, and did not bring resolution. Instead, it resulted in a great deal of discussion, prayer and study by groups throughout the denomination, and attempts to leave the PC(USA) by several churches. For Sunset the PUP report ultimately leads our Session to recommend to the congregation that we undertake the process of separating from the denomination.

Session has carefully considered this course of action to assure we are not promoting schism within the PC(USA) or the body of Christ at large. Schism is a sin. Sunset's pursuit of integrity is not schism, and therefore not sin, because we are seeking to fulfill the call of Christ instead of worldly interests or personal preferences. Furthermore, we are making a decision only for our congregation; we are not trying to lead other churches with us.

### III. Our basis for making the recommendation is this:

Sunset Presbyterian Church's mission, vision, core beliefs, and values are summed up in the Great Commission: **Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."** (Matthew 28:18-20, NIV)

The constitution of the PC(USA) acknowledges the Great Commission, referring to it as one of the "great ends of the church": "The great ends of the church are the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind; the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; the maintenance of divine worship; the preservation of the truth; the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world." (The PC(USA) Book of Order G-1.0200)

Unfortunately, the PC(USA)'s practice has not followed its constitution for many years. The resulting internal strife, between those who want to follow the constitution and those who do not, has taken a toll, and now Sunset's ability to effectively pursue the Great Commission is compromised.

## FINAL

The basis for PC (USA)'s internal strife is irreconcilable theological perspectives. The two perspectives are known as Natural Theology and Evangelical Theology:

In Natural Theology, humankind discovers God primarily through the natural world. Statements about what God is like are drawn from evidence gathered from observing people, animals, and the rest of the visible creation. This puts humankind in the position of making ultimate, authoritative decisions on the character of God and our relationship to Him. In particular, in Natural Theology it is acceptable to declare that Jesus is only one way among many to reach God, and that therefore Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism and other world religions stand on equal footing with Christianity. It logically follows that people who follow one of those other religions have no need to become followers of Jesus Christ.

In Evangelical Theology, humankind discovers God primarily through God's deliberate revelation of Himself to us. Statements about what God is like are drawn from the Scriptures. This puts God in the position of making ultimate, authoritative decisions about how humankind should perceive and relate to Him. In particular, Jesus's declaration "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father but through me" must be taken at face value as an exclusive claim, meaning that Christianity is the only way to God. It logically follows that all non-Christians everywhere are in need of the salvation provided by sacrifice of Jesus and the hope provided by the resurrection of Jesus.

Natural and Evangelical theologies are mutually exclusive: "One can not declare Jesus "the Way, the Truth, and the Life, the only way to the Father"<sup>1</sup> and simultaneously declare that he is but one way among many. One can not affirm the authority of the Scriptures over all matters of faith and practice<sup>2</sup> while simultaneously proclaiming that experience, emotions, and opinions have equal (or greater!) voice. One can not hold that the ethical standards of Scripture are to be required while simultaneously holding that truth is uncertain and each must choose their own course, beliefs, and behaviors. There is always room for diversity within the church when these beliefs deal with non-essentials or are not mutually exclusive." (Ventura Church Declaration, pg 3-4 lines 67-72.)

### I.

<sup>1</sup> John 14:6. 8.10, *Book of Confessions*, Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) part I.

<sup>2</sup> 5.003; 6.001-006, *Book of Confessions*, Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) part I.

## FINAL

Existence of differing theologies within the denomination is acknowledged by the PC(USA) itself. (See the PUP Report, page 12, lines 320-328.) This is the source of the tension within the PC(USA), as stated above. There is tension in attempting to “adhere to essential and necessary beliefs and practices that bind the faithful into the body of Christ while also respecting freedom in nonessential matters of belief, worship, piety, witness, and service”. (See page 28, line 699 of the PUP Report)

IV. While the PUP Report acknowledges the tension, it stops short of providing authoritative definition of essential beliefs – thereby failing to resolve the tension. Still worse, the PUP Report arguably provides for a local option in deciding what is essential truth and what is not; this means that each individual PC(USA) church can decide for itself to follow Evangelical Theology, Natural Theology, or a completely arbitrary mixture of the two, without concern for discipline by the denomination. It also heightens the tension: if each local church can decide essential truths, then each church can ordain any pastor or elder with any theological beliefs that are (locally) acceptable. The Book of Order of the PC(USA) requires that a church like Sunset accept the ordination of any pastor and/or any elder from any other church in the denomination. This would require Sunset to put such a person into a position of power within our church, in spite of our disagreement with their beliefs. Although these decisions are subject to review and correction by higher governing bodies, the record shows that these sort of decisions are rarely overturned. The result would be strong, crippling disagreements among our leadership, and confusion about our message among our membership and our community.

This issue of tension within the denomination over theology and its practical effects was brought home to Sunset leaders very forcefully when we received a letter dated August 28, 2007, from Southminster Presbyterian Church - a church that is part of the Presbytery of the Cascades along with Sunset. Southminster announced that for the sixth straight year they will include the Jesus Seminar as a part of their adult education. The Presbytery of the Cascades has given their permission to proceed with this activity. The Jesus Seminar explicitly denies that all Scripture is inspired, placing man's opinion above God's revelation by voting on the authenticity of the words of Jesus. What is more, many of the participants in the Seminar deny the resurrection of Jesus. The Jesus Seminar and its participants therefore explicitly deny several beliefs that are affirmed by the PC(USA)'s Book of Confessions, Book of Order, and

## FINAL

affirmations of orthodoxy in other denominational statements. Therefore, there is no unity or integrity between the PC(USA)'s confessions and the actions of our local Presbytery, and obviously no unity or integrity with Sunset's mission, vision, core beliefs and values.

The renewal groups within the PC(USA) mentioned above have tried for many years to restore the confessional unity and integrity of the denomination, but all attempts have been unsuccessful. Quoting the PUP Report's Mandate, "The 213th General Assembly (2001) approved the formation of a Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church. Its mandate is as follows: The Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church is directed to lead the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in spiritual discernment of our Christian identity in and for the 21st century, using a process which includes conferring with synods, presbyteries, and congregations seeking the peace, unity, and purity of the church. This discernment shall include but not be limited to issues of Christology, biblical authority and interpretation, ordination standards, and power. The task force is to develop a process and an instrument by which congregations and governing bodies throughout our church may reflect on and discern the matters that unite and divide us, praying that the Holy Spirit will promote the purity of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)."

The PUP Report acknowledges theological diversity, calls for unity and mutual respect for diversity but fails to address essential matters of faith preferring to push the issue to the local level for church by church determination. This results in the final deterioration of the denomination's theological unity. We are now bound only by a governance structure that promotes the celebration of diversity while failing to clearly define and enforce common essential beliefs. In effect, and ironically, the PC(USA) has promoted unity only for the issue of diversity of theology.

V. Ultimately the internal conflict in the PC (USA) has spilled over to the point it inhibits Sunset's ability to fulfill Great Commission for several groups:

Within the Reformed Theology Christian Community, opportunities to participate in seminars have been denied because of concern over PC(USA) theology.

At the Local Church Leadership Level, ministers at the highest levels of Sunset's leadership struggle with PC(USA)'s association with natural theology. As a result, some have chosen to leave. This results in a drain

## FINAL

of leadership resources, and an inability to attract the best talent to fulfill the Great Commission.

At the Membership Level, individuals have refused to join because of the theological concern over the PC(USA). Individuals have also left for the same reason. Individuals have refused to contribute money because the per capita contribution paid to the PC(USA) by Sunset could be used by the PC(USA) leadership to support non-Biblical theology. Finally, individuals have refused to give to our capital campaigns or give as much as they wanted due to our association with PC(USA) and their policies related to ownership of church property.

At the Non-member Level, the theology of Sunset Presbyterian Church is in conflict with the theology of the PC(USA). The inconsistency breeds suspicion for non-members and inhibits personal conversion due to perceived lack of integrity on our part.

Within our surrounding community, inconsistency confuses Sunset's message. In one case protesters actually appeared outside the church, assuming that Sunset agreed with a position supported by PC(USA) when in fact Sunset does not support that position.

The result is a confused message, preventing Sunset's leaders and members from even having a chance to proclaim the Gospel.

### VI. Why not "Stay and Fight" to change the PC(USA) back to follow Evangelical Theology?

Sunset has supported the position of "stay within denomination and promote denominational renewal" for at least two decades. This is proven by our participation in Presbytery committees and in the renewal groups, as detailed above. We now believe that staying and fighting is unlikely to prevail. Years and even decades of discord have led nowhere. We see an increasing emotional toll on our leaders, and an increasing distraction away from the Great Commission.

Time devoted to the tension in the PC(USA) has been and continues to be substantial; Pastor Ken Mulder has devoted half of his time to denominational issues over the last four years. Time spent in Denominational Task Force issues has distracted Sunset's Session; Session monthly meeting time over the last two years has been dominated by discussion of PC(USA) issues. Special Session meetings were

## FINAL

devoted to the PUP Report, both before and after its adoption by the PC(USA).

The Great Commission is not about particular denominations, so staying in the PC(USA) is not essential. Sunset belongs first to the Church of Jesus Christ. The denomination originally represented churches that shared essential beliefs and traditions. The disagreements within the denomination have now eroded relationships between Sunset and other like-minded churches within the PC(USA), to the point that now each individual church must declare its essential beliefs so that other churches can determine whether there is alignment on essential beliefs. This eliminates one of the primary benefits of membership in the PC(USA).

Sunset theology would remain unchanged, even in a new denomination. Sunset's commitment to evangelism would remain unchanged. Sunset's commitment to the Presbyterian form of church government and Reformed Theology (a particular form of Evangelical Theology) would continue. Changing denominations – from one Presbyterian body to another – would have the effect of removing the tension over denominational issues, the distraction from our mission, and the time demands on our pastors required to deal with PC(USA) developments.

### VII. What are the next steps for our congregation?

In pursuit of separation, Sunset will follow this series of steps, in roughly chronological order:

1. Sunset's Session contacts the Presbytery of the Cascades to initiate this process.
2. The Presbytery of the Cascades begins to follow its published "A Process for Congregations Considering Leaving the PCUSA".
  - a) The Presbytery offers a Conversation Team, who meet with Sunset leadership.
  - b) The Presbytery follows this with a Resolution Team, who meet with Sunset membership and work with Sunset leadership.
3. Sunset's Session recommends, presuming an affirmative vote of Sunset's membership, that we seek to join the Evangelical Presbyterian Church ("EPC").
  - a) EPC is a Presbyterian denomination that follows Evangelical Theology, both in belief and practice.
  - b) The process of the Presbytery of the Cascades requires that Sunset's congregation be received by another

## FINAL

Reformed (i.e., Presbyterian) denomination. EPC would qualify.

- c) Sunset could join EPC by following a straightforward process provided by New Wineskins Association of Churches.
- 4. Sunset membership votes on the recommendation to leave PC(USA) and join the EPC/New Wineskins transitional presbytery.
- 5. A transition of our people, property and pastors occurs.
  - a) A transition process will be established for people who do not want to transition with Sunset to EPC.
  - b) The two ordained Presbyterian pastors, Ron Kincaid and Ken Mulder, will seek to be received by the EPC.
  - c) Legal documents will be executed to transfer our assets to Sunset.

### VIII. Conclusion

We hope that this Statement provides the essential materials needed to understand the background of this recommendation, to make an informed decision about this critical issue, and to concur with Sunset's leadership that it is in our best interests to proceed with separation. We are aware that individuals may have many questions on particular points, and we expect to answer those questions both in publications and in face-to-face meetings. In the meantime, we humbly request your prayerful support as we move forward.

# UPDATE ON DENOMINATIONAL DIRECTIONS

Approved by Session on February 21, 2008

The Sunset Presbyterian Church Elders (Session) and denominational leadership team recently began a process to work with our regional governing body (Presbytery of the Cascades) to explore changing our denominational affiliation from Presbyterian Church (USA) to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. The purpose of such a change would be to more closely align our theological beliefs and our mission of outreach with a denomination that shares our vision of reaching the world for Christ.

Such a move is not to be taken lightly and will require a vote of Sunset's membership and of the Presbytery of the Cascades. We expect this process to be gracious and amicable and may take up to one year. We are asking everyone to pray for God's wisdom and guidance for our Session and leadership team as they engage in these discussions.

## **WHY ARE WE CONSIDERING LEAVING?**

Irreconcilable theological differences and a centralized bureaucratic structure that doesn't fit our mission of outreach have caused Sunset's Session to vote to begin discussions about denominational change. After more than 25 years of attempting to reform our national denomination from within, recent PC(USA) actions and positions have made it clear that we still have irreconcilable theological differences that are best handled by Sunset moving to a new Presbyterian denomination. For instance, Sunset believes Christ is "The Way" to God, while an increasing number of leadership in PC(USA) now believes Christ is just one of many ways. In addition, these same leaders in PC(USA) believe that parts of the Bible can be debated, while Sunset believes all of God's Word is infallible. In response to this movement in PC(USA), some leaders, members and staff have either left Sunset or declined membership because of our relationship with PC(USA). In addition, PC(USA)'s bureaucratic structure is working in conflict with Sunset's mission to reach people for Christ. Excessive red tape is inhibiting our ability to designate our missions giving to aligned causes. Finally, PC(USA) has become more concerned with the survival of its central structure than supporting its member churches.

## **WHERE WOULD WE GO?**

Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) is a denomination that was formed 25 years ago out of PC(USA). It is a "reformed" denomination designed to support a grassroots network of churches who share a vision for Kingdom collaboration, connectedness, accountability and reaching the world for Christ. Our financial obligation to the new denomination would stay relatively the same, but we would be linked arm-in-arm with a network of churches working together to bring people to God.

## **WHEN WOULD THIS HAPPEN?**

First, we believe God would have us retain our property and campus facilities. We believe our property is a stewardship responsibility given to us by God to accomplish our mission. Ensuring that this happens could elongate our process of leaving. Sunset's denominational leadership team began discussions with the Presbytery of the Cascades in 2007. A congregational vote of our membership will be needed and could happen sometime in 2008. Session will keep the congregation informed as the process moves forward.

## **HOW WOULD THIS AFFECT OUR CHURCH LIFE AT SUNSET?**

During this process we expect our worship and ministries to continue unhindered and strong. However, movement to EPC will allow us to make a number of improvements at Sunset and retain our own unique identity in the Portland community. The new structure will empower lay leaders and staff currently at Sunset to take on greater ministry opportunities and responsibilities in serving the body in ways the PC(USA) currently inhibits and it will stabilize senior leadership.

## **HOW CAN I HELP?**

Pray. The denominational leadership team, staff and Session all need the prayers, thoughts and feedback of the entire congregation. This is a significant change, but one that can truly benefit Sunset's members and our ability to reach the world for Christ for years to come.

If you have questions, comments or would like more information please contact:

Ken Mulder – Minister of Outreach at [kenmulder@sunsetpres.org](mailto:kenmulder@sunsetpres.org)

Ken has served as our senior associate pastor and is the only other ordained PC(USA) pastor on our staff (other than Pastor Ron). Ken has worked for renewal within our denomination and has led the denominational strategy team as we begin this process. Ken has also worked with New Wineskins.

Jim Blanchard – Elder (not currently serving on Session) and leader of the Negotiation Team and Denominational Strategy Team – [Jamesiblanchard@cs.com](mailto:Jamesiblanchard@cs.com)

Jim has worked extensively on Presbytery of the Cascades committees and worked tirelessly toward renewal in the denomination. He has served on the board of Sunset several times and served on the denominational strategy team. Jim is currently leading the negotiation team that will begin this process with Presbytery.

Dennis Kviz – Elder (not currently serving on Session), member of Denominational Strategy Team and the Denominational Communication Task Force – [Dennis@AvalarRealty.com](mailto:Dennis@AvalarRealty.com)

Dennis has served on the board of Sunset and for many years as a member of the Denominational Strategy Team and now on the Communication Task Force.

Rachel Hansen – Deacon of Communications

Rachel serves as part of the Operations Missional Team working with our Communications team. She is currently serving on the Denominational Communications Task Force both as liaison to the communications team and with an ear to the congregation.

In addition to speaking to one of the above individuals look for upcoming leaders forums on this topic or contact Cindy Heinz at [cindyheinz@sunsetpres.org](mailto:cindyheinz@sunsetpres.org) for when these will be scheduled.

September 19, 2008

Dear Friends in Christ,

We are writing today to urge your attendance at one of the two meetings designed to provide you with information about denominational issues related to the future of Sunset Presbyterian Church. Both meetings will last one hour and take place on Sunday, September 28, at 12:30 PM following the 11:00 AM service, and on Wednesday, October 1, at 7:00 PM. Both will be held in the sanctuary.

Earlier this year the Sunset Presbyterian Church Session sought further information as to what would be required for the Presbytery of the Cascades of the Presbyterian Church (USA) to dismiss Sunset to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (E.P.C.). In response to that request, and in accordance with "A Process for Congregations Considering Leaving the PC(USA)," the Presbytery appointed a Resolution Team that has been working on the details of dismissal with the Denomination Discussion Team appointed by Sunset's Session. We have now reached a Joint Agreement. Session unanimously approved the Joint Agreement which calls for Session to request the Presbytery of the Cascades to dismiss Sunset to the Presbytery of the West of the E.P.C.

The purpose of these meetings will be to provide information to Sunset members who have questions about the process, the Joint Agreement itself, future membership options, and any other concerns. In the weeks following these informational meetings, on three consecutive Sundays (October 12, 19 and 26, between 8:30 AM and 1PM), you, as a member of Sunset, will be given the opportunity to express your desire on the question of dismissal to E.P.C. Your statement on those Sundays will provide Presbytery with an expression of the congregation's support for Session's request. Our goal is to have 100% participation in this response.

In preparation we encourage you to study the enclosed Joint Agreement as well as the documents on the church website: [www.sunsetpres.org](http://www.sunsetpres.org) (select "denominational information" on the left side of the home page). These documents represent a range of perspectives on the issues surrounding the recommendation of Session to leave the PC(USA). You may also request copies of these documents by calling the church office, or find them at the book counter in the lobby before or after worship services.

We hope that these conversations will help inform you as you seek to discern God's will for yourself, your family and the Sunset congregation. Should you wish to contact us you will find our names and email addresses listed below. We welcome any and all communications on this most important matter.

*Childcare available on Wednesday, Oct 1<sup>st</sup> only. Send required registration request to [cindyheinz@sunsetpres.org](mailto:cindyheinz@sunsetpres.org).*

Sincerely in Christ,

Presbytery Resolution Team and Sunset Denomination Discussion Team

Rev. Michael McCall, Chair	<a href="mailto:michael@hillsboropres.com">michael@hillsboropres.com</a>	Elder Jim Blanchard	<a href="mailto:jamesiblanchard@cs.com">jamesiblanchard@cs.com</a>
Rev. Tom Campbell-Schmidt	<a href="mailto:tandpcs@msn.com">tandpcs@msn.com</a>	Elder Sally Nofziger	<a href="mailto:sally@nofzigers.net">sally@nofzigers.net</a>
Rev. Robin Garvin	<a href="mailto:rregarvin@comcast.net">rregarvin@comcast.net</a>	Elder David Stewart	<a href="mailto:david.c.stewart@intel.com">david.c.stewart@intel.com</a>
Elder Verne Duncan	<a href="mailto:vduncan@comcast.net">vduncan@comcast.net</a>	Elder Dennis Kviz	<a href="mailto:dennis@avalarealty.com">dennis@avalarealty.com</a>
Elder Phyllis Wright	<a href="mailto:pwright12@juno.com">pwright12@juno.com</a>	Elder Will Merkel	<a href="mailto:wmerkel@merkelassoc.com">wmerkel@merkelassoc.com</a>
Rev. Aleida Jernigan, Presby. Staff	<a href="mailto:ajernigan@cascadespresbytery.org">ajernigan@cascadespresbytery.org</a>	Elder Al Hahn	<a href="mailto:ahahn@hahnconsulting.com">ahahn@hahnconsulting.com</a>
		Elder Ray Veillet	<a href="mailto:ray.veillet@gmail.com">ray.veillet@gmail.com</a>
		Rev Ken Mulder	<a href="mailto:kenmulder@sunsetpres.org">kenmulder@sunsetpres.org</a>

JOINT AGREEMENT OF DISMISSAL  
FOR SUNSET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
SEPTEMBER 18, 2008

*The Session of Sunset Presbyterian Church requests the Presbytery of the Cascades of the Presbyterian Church (USA) (the "Presbytery") to dismiss Sunset Presbyterian Church ("Sunset") to the Presbytery of the West of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church ("E.P.C.") after following 'A Process For Congregations Considering Leaving the PC(USA)' and agreeing to the following resolution worked out by the Presbytery's Resolution Team and Sunset's Denominational Discussion Team:*

We believe that the Holy Spirit guided us in conversation and has led us to the following ways in which we might come together on a plan for separation. We are fully aware that these proposals will not meet the expectations of many members of the Presbytery and Sunset; that these proposals call mutually on Sunset and the Presbytery to make material sacrifices; and to risk setting precedent for other churches departing to E.P.C. from the Presbytery. In making this agreement we acknowledge that we have fundamental differences over the interpretation of the Constitution of the PC(USA) and grounds for determination of these differences by civil courts. However, we share the belief that Scripture calls us to seek in all humility to resolve our disagreements and avoid the harm that is done to the Gospel and the Church universal when Christians find themselves resorting to civil litigation and witness to their brokenness rather than the love of neighbor and of enemies that Christ commands us to practice.

Therefore, this proposed plan should in no way be interpreted as a concession by either body to the "rightness" or superiority of the other's convictions and understandings, nor should it be construed as binding the process or the outcome regarding any other dispute between the Presbytery or the PC(USA) and any other congregation; it is simply our best effort to move forward in the Christian spirit of putting others before ourselves, to support each other's future mission and ministry; and to find the reconciliation to which God in Christ calls us.

The negotiating teams from both parties carefully considered the joint impact of the agreement with the purpose of avoiding harm to the ministries of Presbytery, PC(USA) and Sunset. In reaching this agreement the following material matters were taken into consideration:

- Recent and significant budget reductions by Sunset,
- UPCUSA planting of Sunset Church in the 1950's,
- UPCUSA purchase of the Wilshire property,
- Transferred Presbyterians that started Sunset Church and added to Sunset over the years,
- Denominational loans that helped Sunset build at Wilshire,
- Leadership and pastors who have come to Sunset through the PC(USA) denomination,
- Presbytery co-signing loans as Sunset built at Cornell,

- Presbytery providing a gracious procedure for separation and transfer to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
- Work and ministry of the Presbytery that Sunset has participated in and which Sunset's departure impacts,
- Ongoing relationships and ministries that Sunset and the Presbytery expect to continue as Sunset transitions to the E.P.C., and
- Our common commitment to glorify God and to fulfill the Great Commission.

To this end, The Presbytery agrees to accept the following commitment from Sunset:

- 1) **Administration.** To lessen the impact of Sunset's departure and provide a period of transition for the Presbytery, Sunset agrees to pay \$123,000 in three successive annual payments of \$41,000 each. The funds set forth in this Section 1 may be used by the Presbytery to care for the needs of any members of Sunset that choose to remain with PC(USA) following the Dismissal Date. Payment will commence thirty (30) days from the Dismissal Date ("Payment Date") and then annually on the anniversary of the Payment Date thereafter. The Dismissal Date shall be defined as the day upon which all of the following events in total are completed:
  - a) The Presbytery has voted in favor of the dismissal of Sunset to the Presbytery of the West of the E.P.C. ("Presbytery Vote Date")
  - b) The expiration of no less than 90 days from the Presbytery Vote Date.
  - c) All necessary real and personal property transfer documents are executed by the Presbytery transferring all right, title and interest to Sunset.
  - d) All necessary transfer documents are completed and submitted transferring Sunset pastors to the Presbytery of the West of the E.P.C.
  - e) Sunset is formally received by the Presbytery of the West of the E.P.C.
- 2) **Missions.** Sunset has provided mission support to the Presbytery in recent years in the amount of \$45,000 annually. To further the mutual goals of: maintaining current levels of Presbytery mission funding, witness to our community our shared desire to provide a positive Christian witness even in disagreement, and emphasize our shared interests, Sunset agrees to contribute \$315,000 to the Presbytery in the form of seven (7) annual payments of \$45,000 each ("Mission Payment"). The Mission Payments shall be paid on the Payment Date set forth in Section 1. Each annual Mission Payment shall be divided among the following missions which reflect the shared values of the Presbytery and Sunset negotiating teams:
  - a) Presbytery Existing Congregation Support: Sunset agrees to provide \$15,000 of the Mission Payment to the following Presbytery Funds for the benefit of existing Presbytery churches. The funds set forth under this section 2(b) shall be divided among the Presbytery funds listed below on an annual basis in amounts to be determined by the Presbytery :
    - i) Barnabas Fund for the support of Presbytery Churches with emergency physical plant needs.
    - ii) Opening Doors Task Force on Disabilities Fund for the purpose of assisting churches with accessibility issues for people with disabilities.

- b) **Next Generation Mission:** Sunset agrees to provide \$15,000 of the Mission Payment to the following Presbytery Funds for the benefit of elementary, middle school, high school and family related missions of the Presbytery. The funds set forth under this section 2(c) shall be divided among the Presbytery funds listed below on an annual basis in amounts to be determined by the Presbytery:
  - i) Annual Presbytery Junior High Retreat Fund
  - ii) Cascade Presbytery Youth Assembly Fund
  - iii) Presbytery Youth Camping Programs Fund
- c) **Sherwood Church Building Fund:** Sunset agrees to provide \$15,000 of the Mission Payment to the Presbytery for the benefit of the Sherwood Presbyterian Church Building Fund (“Sherwood Building Fund”). In the event the Sherwood Building Fund ceases to exist, then the funds set forth under this section 2(c) shall be divided among sections 2(a) and 2(b) above as determined by the Presbytery.
- 3) **Loans.** Sunset will also perform whatever actions are necessary to remove the Presbytery from any liability related to the current building loan from Sterling Bank.
- 4) **Sunset Members Electing to Remain with PC(USA).** Sunset and the Presbytery will together develop a Membership Care Plan that provides a safe, confidential and orderly process for church members to declare their desire to stay in the PC(USA). Sunset members who elect to stay with the PC(USA) will be identified by written declaration and contacted by a designated team representing Sunset and the Presbytery so that appropriate pastoral care and membership actions may be provided.
- 5) **Minute Books.** Within ninety (90) days of the Dismissal Date, Sunset shall deliver to the Presbytery a full and complete copy of all Sunset rolls, registers and minutes of meetings of session, trustees and congregation since the inception of the church.
- 6) **PC(USA) Affiliation.** To avoid confusion following the Dismissal Date, Sunset agrees to take the following steps to educate the community and its future attendees that Sunset is no longer affiliated with the PC(USA):
  - a) Advertise within thirty (30) days of the Dismissal Date for two (2) consecutive weeks in the Oregonian Life section Sunset’s new affiliation with the E.P.C. denomination.
  - b) Include information on the Sunset web site identifying Sunset with the E.P.C. denomination.
  - c) Change the Sunset Presbyterian Church Yellow Book listing within sixty (60) days of the dismissal date to “Churches-Presbyterian-E.P.C.” or equivalent language as dictated by the Yellow Book.
  - d) Add a sign beneath the current Sunset Presbyterian Church signs located at its north and west entrances which shall state “Member E.P.C. Denomination.”
- 7) **Commitment.** Sunset feels called to the E.P.C. at this time in history and is committed to being part of a reformed denomination.

In exchange for Sunset's commitments as set forth above, the Presbytery agrees to the following:

1. Dismiss Sunset Presbyterian Church from the Presbytery of the Cascades PC(USA) to the Presbytery of the West of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
2. Dismiss Revs. Ron Kincaid and Ken Mulder to the Presbytery of the West of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, if requested,
3. Release any and all claim to real and personal property of Sunset including, but not limited to, transferring title to the property located at 14986 NW Cornell Road, Portland, Oregon to Sunset.

This agreement is the culmination of five months of negotiation, discussion, prayer and compromise. The Joint Agreement constitutes the terms of agreement for a binding document between Sunset and the Presbytery. It reflects the best efforts of both negotiation teams whom have chosen to compromise and err on the side of grace as a witness to others.

In Christ,

**Presbytery of the Cascades Resolution Team:**

Rev. Michael McCall, Chair

Rev. Aleida Jernigan, Co-Executive Presbyter

Rev. Tom Campbell-Schmitt

Rev. Robin Garvin

Verne Duncan, Elder

Phyllis Wright, Elder

**Sunset Denomination Discussion Team:**

Jim Blanchard, Chair, Elder

Rev. Ken Mulder, Assoc. Pastor

Al Hahn, Elder

Dennis Kviz, Elder

David Stewart, Elder

Sally Nofziger, Elder

Will Merkel, Elder

Ray Veillet, Elder

## **A PROCESS FOR CONGREGATIONS CONSIDERING LEAVING THE PCUSA**

### **Preamble**

The mission of the Presbytery of the Cascades is to serve God by nurturing, supporting, and celebrating our common ministries. Even in times of conflict, we seek to uphold one another, respecting each other's integrity as we perceive the Biblical basis and Christian credibility of varied perspectives. It is the Presbytery's desire to encourage peace and unity while minimizing confrontation between and among its congregations and members as we seek together to find and represent the will of Christ. In all that we do, it is our prayer that they will know we are Christians by our love.

These policies relate to congregations which may seek to withdraw from the Presbytery of the Cascades and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The Presbytery desires to create a gracious process that is simple in administration. Our first goal is reconciliation. A conversation team will meet with the session and congregation to discern the situation and provide a nurturing, healing presence. If efforts to reconcile differences seem unsuccessful, the conversation team may recommend that the Presbytery Council form a resolution team to work with the congregation, either to continue the relationship with the Presbytery or to prepare a mutually satisfactory separation. If there is to be a separation, the resolution team will join the congregation in addressing such practical matters as pastor relationships to Presbytery, pensions, assets and liabilities including debt liquidation, and corporate status. When necessary, the resolution team may recommend that the Presbytery appoint an administrative commission to act for the Presbytery in delegated matters that address the specific situation of the congregation. The Presbytery itself is the only body empowered to approve a congregation's dissolution or withdrawal.

With believers in every time and place, we rejoice that nothing in life or in death can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

### **Conversation Team**

When the leadership of the Presbytery becomes aware, either through formal congregational action or through informal contacts with church leaders or members, that a congregation is in serious disagreement with the denomination, visitation will be offered to the congregation of a Conversation Team by the appropriate Committee on Ministry.

The purpose of the Conversation Team will be as follows:

1. To engage either the leaders of the congregation or the congregation as a whole, as circumstances dictate, in a time of prayer and conversation aimed at understanding the conflict and identifying steps toward reconciliation.
2. If the team determines that progress can be made toward reconciliation through continued and constructive dialogue, the team will engage in such dialogue.

3. In its dialogue with the church, the team will share matters for consideration with respect to implications for a church considering leaving the PCUSA and implications for the impact on the status of the Presbyterian minister of such church.

If, after dialogue, unresolved issues and concerns remain, the Committee on Ministry will recommend that Presbytery Council create a Resolution Team to work with the church.

If the offered visit is refused by the leadership of the congregation or by the congregation itself, Presbytery Council will immediately recommend to Presbytery the formation of an Administrative Commission with authority to act for Presbytery in matters delegated to the Administrative Commission.

### **Resolution Team**

1. If the Conversation Team determines that its discourse with the church still leaves open issues and concerns, a Resolution Team established by Presbytery Council shall work with the church to achieve a mutually agreeable resolution.
2. Working in good faith toward a mutually agreeable resolution means that the Resolution Team as a representative of Presbytery and the congregation's clergy and officers:
  - a. Are open and honest in all their dealings with each other;
  - b. Provide all requested relevant information and documents to each other on a timely basis;
  - c. Commit to protect the rights of the officers and members, if any, of the church who desire that the congregation remain loyal to the PCUSA, or who desire to remain congregants of another PCUSA church; and
  - d. That the congregation's clergy and officers refrain from any unauthorized unilateral changes in the way their assets are held or managed.
3. A mutually agreeable resolution may result in clarification or mediation of the church's connectional relationship to the Presbytery within the limits of the Book of Order and other binding requirements existent throughout the PCUSA and the Presbytery.

Or the mutually agreeable resolution may result in a recommendation to Presbytery that the congregation be separated from the Presbytery, be divided, dissolved, or be transferred to another Reformed denomination within the framework of the applicable Presbyterian requirements with due regard for the rights of and obligations of all interested parties.

Such a resolution shall:

- Specify how the separation will affect assets, liabilities, including debt liquidations, pension, corporate, and other interests of the parties (including any group within the congregation which wishes to remain within the Presbytery) as well as the processes and procedures for the church to join another Presbytery or a Reformed denomination.
  - Be approved by secret ballot at a duly called congregational meeting where representatives of the Presbytery were present and given permission to speak and at least 50% of the members on the active roll were present and casting ballots.
4. If the Resolution Team determines that a congregation will not work in good faith according to these criteria or that a mutually agreeable resolution cannot be reached, it will recommend to Presbytery that an Administrative Commission be formed (Book of Order: G9.0408, G11.0103s, and others).

Draft 4/21/07

### **APPENDIX 1**

#### IF A PRESBYTERIAN CONGREGATION SHOULD CHOOSE TO LEAVE THE PCUSA ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

- In the historic language found in G-1.0300, it is clear that our form of government respects the right of individual conscience and “the rights of private judgment, in all matters that respect religion, as universal and unalienable.” It is recognized also that Presbyterians may differ in their opinions. In matters of differences of opinion, “a majority shall govern” (G-4.0301e). Dissents and protests and proposals for change are permissible, but defiance and schism are not permitted.
- If a congregation seeks to leave the PCUSA, it is to be determined by the presbytery if the decision truly and accurately reflects the will of the majority of the members of the congregation and if so, whether there is a “loyal minority” of Presbyterians who do not choose to withdraw.
- It is clear by the PCUSA Constitution (G-8.0201) that “all property held by or for a particular church ... is held in trust ... for the use and benefit of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)” and an earlier explication of that “trust clause” provision has been affirmed by The Oregon Supreme Court. “Property” is considered to be both real and “personal” property held by a particular church, including church records, financial assets, and intangible assets. The name of a PCUSA congregation may not be continued to be used by a congregation which has withdrawn from the denomination without the permission of a presbytery.
- A presbytery has authority and responsibility for “the mission and governance of the church throughout its geographical district” (G-11.0103) and has the power “to divide, dismiss, or dissolve churches in consultation with their members” and “to consider and act upon requests from congregations for permission to take the actions regarding real property as described in G-8.000.”

- A presbytery has authority to divide, dismiss, or dissolve a congregation (G-11.0103i). A congregation may be released from the PCUSA to another reformed denomination, but it may not be released to independent status.
- Practical Considerations:

Tax Status: A congregation which ceases to be a PCUSA church is no longer included in the PCUSA's "group revenue ruling" by which a Presbyterian congregation is granted 501(c)(3) non-profit tax-exempt status. Such status is required not only for exemption from tax payments to state and federal authorities and the filing of certain tax forms, but is required also for real estate tax exemption, for U. S. Postal Service bulk mailing permits, for grant-making foundations, and for the receipt of many forms of grants and bequests. Gifts to a church which does not have valid tax-exempt status may not be claimed as charitable contributions. Legal and other services will be needed to secure new 501(c)(3) status.

Corporate Status: A congregation which ceases to be a PCUSA church will need to revise its corporate status (which may require the filing of new articles of incorporation and bylaws).

Insurance: Since many PCUSA congregations have property and liability insurance which is available only to PCUSA congregations, new insurance provisions will need to be made, and it is an unwise congregation which is uninsured for even a minute.

## **APPENDIX 2**

### IF A PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER SHOULD CHOOSE TO LEAVE THE PCUSA ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

- A Presbyterian minister of the PCUSA is under the ecclesiastical authority of a presbytery. A Presbyterian minister's ecclesiastical status is to be determined and approved by a presbytery and may not be "independent" of a presbytery.
- A Presbyterian minister's employment by a particular church may be only by a three-way contractual agreement between a minister, a congregation, and a presbytery (in cases of called-and-installed pastoral relationships) or between a minister, a session, and a presbytery (in cases of temporary pastoral relationships). The concurrence of all three bodies is required for an official pastoral relationship to exist.
- While it is permissible for a Presbyterian minister to be granted permission to labor outside the bounds of the Presbytery or beyond the jurisdiction of the church, as in temporary service in another denomination (G-11.0411), it is made specific that "when a minister of this church continues or accepts membership of

any character in another denomination, except as provided in G-11.0411, the presbytery shall record the fact, delete the minister's name from the roll, and take such other action of an administrative character as may be required by the Constitution" (G-11.0416).

- If a Presbyterian minister, "after consultation and notice, persists in a work disapproved by the governing body having jurisdiction, the governing body may presume that the officer has renounced the jurisdiction of this church" (G-6.0502), and the governing body may remove the minister from the roll of the governing body. The 2004 General Assembly adopted specific procedures regarding the implementation of the provisions of G-6.0502, but it is a presbytery alone which has authority in matters regarding the membership of ministers.
- Practical Considerations:  
*[A minister considering departure from the PCUSA is advised to consult, with the advice of counsel encouraged, the provisions of the Board of Pensions plan (which are available at <http://pensions.org/library/publications/rules.htm>) and to consult also with legal and tax professionals regarding the special tax issues which relate to clergypersons.]*

Pension: A Presbyterian minister's pension benefits are "vested," and a member (or survivor of a member) of the Presbyterian Board of Pensions' plan has a non-forfeitable right to receive a retirement pension based on contributions and increases once pension credits are vested.

Medical Insurance/Death-and-Disability: The Board of Pensions' major medical plan and death-and-disability provisions require active participation in the plan, and participation is not available to ministers who are not on the roll of a presbytery. A member may be eligible to purchase continuation of medical benefits for a limited duration. Life (death) insurance and disability insurance policies are available commercially at varying rates.

Tax Issues: A Presbyterian minister is entitled to certain income-tax benefits and provisions due to his/her ecclesiastical status in the PCUSA. An "independent" minister may or may not be entitled to such benefits and provisions.

Insurance: A minister no longer serving a PCUSA congregation or no longer on the roll of the PCUSA should make arrangements for professional liability insurance coverage if continuing to engage in professional ministry.

On that first Easter morning, some of the disciples, forgetting the teachings of Jesus, left Jerusalem in despair *too soon*. (Luke 24:13ff.) But all was not lost. Their greatest hope was about to be fulfilled beyond their wildest dreams! We pray that no one will leave the PC(USA) too soon. If you are considering leaving the PC(USA) now, please consider these questions:

- Through prayer and discernment, do you sense God calling you to leave?
- Are you being restricted from preaching Jesus Christ and fulfilling the ministry the Lord has given you? Will you experience greater gospel freedom through different affiliation? Why?
- Can you envision that God wants to use you in the redemptive and transforming work of Jesus Christ in the PC(USA)?

It is our hope that these reflections will help you as you prayerfully consider the way forward in God's call and in God's love. Our website ([www.pfrenewal.org](http://www.pfrenewal.org)) will carry further elaborations of these and related issues throughout the coming weeks and months.

#### The PFR Issues Ministry Team

Elder Jim Cahalan (Edmond, OK)	Rev. Mike Loudon (Lakeland, FL)
Rev. Paul Detterman (Louisville, KY)	Elder Nancy Maffett (Colorado Springs, CO)
Rev. Kevin Ford (Cambridge, MA)	Rev. Donna Marsh (Bethesda, MD)
Rev. Henry Greene (Merced, CA)	Elder Nabeel Saoud (Canoga Park, CA)
Rev. Hurron Hamilton (Roxbury, MA)	Rev. Tracie Stewart (Statesville, NC)
Rev. James Harper (Houston, TX)	Rev. Bill Teng (Alexandria, VA)
Elder Camille Josey (Atlanta, GA)	Rev. Chris Yim (Germantown, MD)

#### Presbyterians for Renewal

8134 New LaGrange Rd., #227  
Louisville, KY 40222 Phone 502.425.4630  
Email [pfroffice@pfrenewal.org](mailto:pfroffice@pfrenewal.org)  
[www.pfrenewal.org](http://www.pfrenewal.org)



© 2007 presbyterians for renewal

# Why STAY? in the PC(USA)

from the Issues Ministry Team of  
**presbyterians for renewal**

*"All power in heaven and earth is given to Jesus Christ by Almighty God. Christ calls the Church into being, giving it all that is necessary for mission in the world...for the establishment and extension of his Kingdom."*

*"In affirming with the earliest Christians that Jesus is Lord, the Church confesses that he is its hope and that the Church, as Christ's body, is bound to his authority and thus free to live in the lively, joyous reality of the grace of God."*

The quotations on the cover are from the opening page of our Book of Order—unaffected by the will of any dissident or the action of any General Assembly. This is who we are ordained to be as members of the Body of Christ within the PC(USA).

Some are questioning staying in the PC(USA). We do not minimize the problems in the denomination, and therefore we understand why some consider leaving for “greener pastures.” Even so, PFR finds compelling reasons to continue gospel ministry within the PC(USA) based on Scripture, present reality, our hope in Jesus Christ, and our call to share gospel hope.

Twelve of these reasons are offered here. No attempt has been made to list them in order of importance. We invite you to weigh these before the Lord.

1. **God has placed an evangelical witness within our denomination.** If you are considering leaving, remember there are many like-minded and evangelical people with you still in the PC(USA). If you leave, you are abandoning them and weakening the evangelical witness that remains.
2. **This is a good time to be an evangelical in the PC(USA).** The Peace, Unity, and Purity Task Force report invites and provokes an evangelical witness through intentional presbytery participation, careful and thorough examination of candidates, and the exercise of the Bible’s call to speak the truth in love.
3. **We are not here by accident.** We need to faithfully labor where we’ve been called and sent. In many different ways, God has called each of us to be part of the PC(USA). Is God now calling you to leave? Do you have God’s permission to leave your present post and go to another? Only you can answer this through fellowship with Christ in prayer.
4. **Theological and moral problems are not new.** See the Apostle Paul’s letters and Revelation 2-3. Yet, I Corinthians, as an example, is addressed, “To the church of God that is in Corinth.” Though Paul urges the exercise of discipline, he never suggests that some should leave a flawed church.

5. **Church history instructs us that some of the greatest and most important controversies over theological and moral issues took time to be resolved.** We are called to maintain our convictions with patience and with hopeful endurance, trusting God to bring resolution in his time.

6. **Sessions still control all finances of the local congregation (including *per capita*) and are free under our constitution to exercise faithful stewardship.**

7. **The PC(USA) affirms and encourages women in leadership and in all forms of ministry, affirming this as nothing less than God’s intent for the growth and well-being of the church and our witness to the whole gospel.**

8. **Networks of support and nurture for smaller congregations are a reality in the PC(USA).** Further, there are many opportunities for smaller congregations to work together in mission and witness, and God is using these for renewal.

9. **The PC(USA) is itself a mission field, and the fields are ripe for harvest.** When our eyes are on Jesus Christ and our lives are focused on proclaiming him, there is excitement in being on the front line for the Kingdom of God. Why would we leave a mission field, especially one we know quite well?

10. **A fresh missional focus is growing in the PC(USA) as can be seen in the Presbyterian Global Fellowship, in the work of PC(USA) mission organizations, and in thriving congregations which reach out locally and globally.** God is at work in our midst and there is excitement in being part of that work!

11. **Fresh winds are blowing in our seminaries, including new models of training offered by evangelical scholars, pastors, and congregations.** These hold great promise for the future, both immediate and long-range.

12. **We remain free to preach and teach Jesus Christ, his atoning sacrifice, the reality of the Resurrection, and the truth and authority of the whole Word of God.**

# Why Stay in the PC(USA)?

## Twelve Reasons:

# 1

### *presbyterians for renewal*

Mobilizing leaders of congregations within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to be biblically faithful and missionally minded in their service to Jesus Christ.

## Are We Listening for God?

*by Moongil Cho, Pastor, Duraleigh Presbyterian Church, Raleigh, NC*

One of the most important figures in biblical history is Elijah. He was important enough to be confused with Jesus by the Jews in the First Century, and powerful enough to be seen at the Transfiguration along with Moses. But, "Elijah was a human being like us," (*James 5:17*) and he proved it. In spite of his great victory over the power of Baal on Mount Carmel, Elijah was deeply troubled by the threat of Jezebel. It was serious enough for him to willingly die; "Take my life, I am no better than my ancestors." (*1 Kings 19:4*)

It is natural, from time to time, for those who are in Christian ministry to have the same feelings Elijah expressed. One moment, we are so energized that nothing seems to be impossible. But in the next moment, we can be deeply hurt and affected by challenges that grow to seem insurmountable.

What drives such a swing to a feeling of loneliness? A sense of powerlessness.

Elijah may have expected Jezebel to acknowledge the power of God after hearing about what happened at Mt. Carmel. On the contrary. She became more hostile than ever. Suddenly, Elijah felt alone and powerless. All he experienced at Mt. Carmel became meaningless. His hope was gone as well. Since Elijah was a faithful man, he would rather his life be taken by God than to face Jezebel. Elijah, the great prophet of God, pleaded for an honorable death.

And God answered, but in a very different way. In the middle of his darkness and hopelessness, Elijah heard the voice of God, carrying a new mission, sending him back the very way he came, but to anoint the kings of Aram and Israel as well as to anoint Elisha as his successor. (*1 Kings 19:15-16*) God's voice in the midst of a troubled time brought more than a mission—it brought assurance. There were 7000 faithful people in Israel! His fear of loneliness now lifted, Elijah recovered and was able to continue his ministry.

We are at an important juncture in the history of the PC(USA). Our evangelical witness is strong. Yet many strong pastors and sessions are feeling very lonely, like Elijah. Some of the people who now feel alone have, in other times, led the denomination in reaffirming faithfulness. Now they are wondering if they should stay with the same denomination they have helped. They feel alone. They feel they have become a shrinking minority. They consider leaving for “greener pastures.”

But, let us, like Elijah, hear what God is trying to say. There are many more Christian brothers and sisters within the same denomination who are fervently praying to God than we might think. Elijah chose to be obedient by listening to God’s comforting and assuring voice and accepting God’s new mission and ministry. If those who are considering leaving actually leave the denomination, many like-minded brothers and sisters will still respect their faithfulness and courage. But, what about the particular mission God has intended for our denomination? Will the God-given mission of faithfulness be able to be fulfilled?

At times in my ministry, I have known what it feels like to think you are among a shrinking minority. But God will never leave his faithful people. God does extraordinary life-saving acts using an ordinary person like you, me, and Elijah. Have we heard the assuring voice of God?

# Why Stay in the PC(USA)?

## Twelve Reasons:

# 2

*presbyterians for renewal*

Mobilizing leaders of congregations within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to be biblically faithful and missionally minded in their service to Jesus Christ.

## Is There a Witness in the Church?

*by Paul Detterman, Interim Executive Director, Presbyterians for Renewal*

“Evangelical” has lost its punch. Ask a dozen different people what the word means, and you will get thirteen different answers—many of which have far more to do with politics or a particular conservative worldview. Even among church people, “Evangelicals” are sometimes thought to be the nutty Christians who womp up emotions and call it worship, are easily swayed socio-political tangents, and form the core of the dreaded Conservative Right in contemporary American life.

Wrong on every count!

From before the time of the New Testament, evangelists were the people who carried good news. Christians evangelists brought the Greatest News of Jesus Christ. Throughout Christian history, it has been the evangelists (or evangelicals) who have called the Church back to its message and the joy of proclaiming, without a blush or flinch, that Jesus Christ is Lord and through him God wants an eternally abundant and amazing relationship with us. Only in the past few decades when the radical conservatives shanghaied the term “evangelical” for their own ends, and the liberal press believed them and wrote about it, have we lost the punch of our calling to evangelize the world with God's Word and in God's love.

This is important for us to realize at this moment in our history, because among members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) there has never been a better time to be a true evangelical—a bearer of the Great News of the gospel. This may sound strange to people who are feeling mocked, marginalized, maligned, or defeated in our current climate of confusion and hyperbolae, but it is true.

Jesus Christ has commissioned us to share the Good News, first to those closest to us, and then, in increasingly widening circles, throughout the world. For reasons too numerous to mention here, we

have come to assume that the people closest to us already know the gospel and, in their better moments, are living it out.

In the current PC(USA) ethos, we've been taught to be spooked and skittish at the thought of sharing our faith, afraid we might offend someone or, worse yet, might be asked questions we don't think we can answer. If we focus on "mission" at all it is through funded encouragement of extroverts in foreign service. Then, we are surprised when some of the people closest to us speak and act in un-Orthodox and even non-Christian ways. We have assumed the Good News has reached the people we were called to reach, by Providence or osmosis, and we have assumed far too much. Our mission field is at our door. An elder once said to me, "The great thing about being a Presbyterian is that you don't have to go looking for lost people—they can be sitting right next to you at Presbytery!"

Now there are stirrings among some of our Presbyterian siblings concerned with Orthodoxy and biblical faithfulness to abandon ship and seek the company of other like-minded people. That would be a comfortable and enticing option if it were not for two things; Christ's commission to share the Good News starting with people closest to us, and the reality that almost every other Western Protestant denomination is facing the same challenges we are—no matter how "faithful" they may appear.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is not a lost cause. It is not a fraternity of faithless people or a hotbed of heresy. It is merely a reflection of our own spiritual neediness and our own Great Commission complacency. Bottom line, there's nothing wrong with the PC(USA), or right with any denominational alternative, that can't be traced to the condition of our own hearts.

The PC(USA) has been portrayed by some as a "liberal" denomination. But if this were true, why has one liberalizing amendment after another been voted down by super majorities of the presbyteries when the actual presbyters, the elders and pastors of the presbyteries of the church, had the chance to vote?

The PC(USA) has been portrayed by some as faithless. But the truth is that the Good News of Jesus Christ is being shared in thousands of congregations, large and small, in preaching and in teaching, and even more importantly, in the witness of lives transformed by the redeeming work of Jesus Christ—all of this unhindered by the family name. To paraphrase a wise old saying, the gospel works if we will only be serious about trying it!

We are currently working in a denominational structure that has allowed agendas other than the Good News of Jesus Christ to claim the eyes and ears of our people. We have let this happen. But the Acts of the Apostles, and the dynamic witness of the contemporary Church throughout the developing world should remind us that the power of the Holy Spirit, unleashed in lives obedient to Christ, can redeem cities, and nations, and even denominations without breaking a sweat.

No alternative denominational identity will change our heart for God and refocus our witness on his Son. No name change alone will propel our people out of their complacent pews and into Kingdom work among the truly needy in God's world.

It is our personal responsibility to refocus our eyes, and the eyes of the people closest to us from scrutinizing the sheep to adoring the Shepherd. It is our personal calling to boldly and joyfully proclaim Jesus Christ—crucified, risen, victorious, returning, and reigning eternally. That is the message of our gospel hope—our evangelical witness—the Good News!

There has never been a better time to do this among Presbyterian people than right now. A serious dearth of leadership in all levels of our denomination can be cause for dismay if we look to the denomination to define and defend us. But the same dearth of leadership can be a God-given opportunity for believers to step forward and articulate faith with joy!

The recommendations resulting from the PUP report and the 2006 General Assembly have opened the door for close examination of every candidate for ordination at every local level of the PC(USA)! Hooray! We've just been invited to ask the essential questions and help earnest people discover the life-changing answers.

The only thing that can hold back the spiritual renewal and reassembling of the PC(USA) is a whining or apathetic spirit on the part of people who are commissioned to go and make disciples: baptizing, instructing, and reminding each other of every promise God ever made and of the hope we have in his Son alone. Bitterness, resignation, apathy, and retreat are fruit of the Enemy. Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, is there a witness in the Church??

# Why Stay in the PC(USA)?

## Twelve Reasons:

3

*presbyterians for renewal*

Mobilizing leaders of congregations within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to be biblically faithful and missionally minded in their service to Jesus Christ.

## We Are Not Here By Accident

*by Henry Greene, Pastor, Central Presbyterian Church, Merced, CA*

I've enjoyed hearing young people use the expression, "That's so random!" I like that response to something said or done which seems off-the-wall, out-of-the-blue, disconnected to anything else. 'Random': purely by chance.

The fact that we, and the congregations we belong to, are part of the PC(USA) may seem "so random." It may seem as if we could just as easily have been anything else—that we, or our parents, or our grandparents, might have been anything else, that the friend who long ago invited us to church might have been other than a PC(USA) member. And if that's so, if it's a random thing that we're here, then we could just as well go someplace else.

But what if it isn't random that we're here? In fact, we Presbyterians, of all Christians, should be quick to affirm the possibility that God has a purpose for us being not only believers in the world but right where we are. As Presbyterians, we value the emphasis of our tradition on the *sovereignty of God* and the *call of God*, don't we? Isn't it possible that God has sovereignly called us into the PC(USA), even though the means seem random to us?

If that is the case, *or if it might be the case*, then we must continually ask the Lord himself where he would have us be. No cause other than the call of Jesus Christ is sufficient for us to go elsewhere. For if, in fact, God has called us to serve where we are, then it is not enough that *we're tired* of long battles. It is not enough that *we're uncomfortable*. It is not even enough that *the denomination is unfaithful*. Faithfulness in this case is about Jesus Christ and where He has called us to serve. Therefore, it's only enough to leave if the Lord gives us permission and leads us elsewhere.

"But," you may say, "I *am* tired and uncomfortable, and the denomination has been unfaithful. Why would God want me to stay?" Of course, only God can fully answer that for you. Let me suggest three possibilities:

Article Three in a series, "*Why Stay in the PC(USA)?*"  
resources created by the Issues Ministry Team of Presbyterians for Renewal © 2007  
For more information on this and other resources for leaders of congregations,  
find us on the Web at [www.pfr renewal.org](http://www.pfr renewal.org)

**I. Love.** God loves the people in the PC(USA), as, indeed, God loves all people everywhere. What is the proper duty of love, even if some are unfaithful? Martin Luther's counsel sounds very contemporary:

Indeed, if there are wicked persons in a church, surely one should hasten to it; in keeping with the example of Paul, one should shout, exhort, entreat, beg, and frighten, and should try everything to make them good. ...What kind of love is it that has decided neither to endure the wicked nor help them? It is madness clothing itself most improperly with the name love.

**Again Luther wrote:**

For if the bishops or priests or any persons at all are wicked, and if you were aglow with real love, you would not flee. No, even if you were at the ends of the ocean, you would come running to them and weep, warn, reprove.... To be sure we censure, we denounce, we plead, we warn; but we do not on this account split the unity of the spirit, nor do we become puffed up against it, since we know that love rises high above all things, not only above injuries suffered in bodily things but also above all the abominations of sins. A love that is able to bear nothing but the benefits done by another is fictitious.

Yes, later Luther and other Protestants left the Roman Catholic Church. However, as Richard Lovelace has pointed out, that is because they were forced out of the arena in which biblical truth could be declared, sometimes by the threat of death, sometimes by the restraint of mission. And neither of those conditions prevails today.

**II. Growth.** God might want you and me to stay for the sake of growth. I'm thinking here of our own growth—the growth of us who may be tired and uncomfortable and troubled by the denomination's unfaithfulness. God may intend for us to stay so that we might become more knowledgeable about the Scriptures, clearer thinkers and speakers, more patient, more loving toward our enemies, and even, perhaps, to share “in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church” (Colossians 1:24).

**III Renewal.** It is by no means clear that God is finished with the PC(USA). God might well want you and me right here to help prepare for, and perhaps participate in, something new and wonderful. Even dry bones can rattle (Ezekiel 37:7) and live in a new Spirit-generated and Spirit-inspired vitality.

And don't forget that in spite of all that is wrong, in PC(USA) congregations around the country people are becoming connected with Jesus Christ! PC(USA) ministries are carrying the love of Christ to people locally and globally.

May we faithfully labor where God has planted us unless God calls us elsewhere. It is not given to us always to know just what God is doing; nevertheless, God is working his purposes out.

# Why Stay in the PC(USA)?

## Twelve Reasons:

# 4

### *presbyterians for renewal*

Mobilizing leaders of congregations within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to be biblically faithful and missionally minded in their service to Jesus Christ.

## So, What Else Is New?

*by John "Mike" Loudon, Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Lakeland, FL*

The Church is made up of human beings, and all human beings are infected with a spiritual malignancy. The Old Testament teaches that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it" (Jeremiah 17:9). The Apostle Paul wrote in the New Testament: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). The late Ben Lacy Rose once wrote, "We are tainted by sin from birth; our souls come to us stained—infected with a deadly virus...it infects every organ of man's soul: his thinking, his feeling, and his doing."<sup>1</sup>

We believe that God's love for sinful humanity moved God to send his only begotten Son to become incarnate among us, and die on a cross, as the atoning sacrifice for human sin. John, in the opening chapter of his Gospel, writes: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). Paul wrote: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). The hymn writer, Charles Wesley, summed this up when he wrote, "Amazing love! How can it be that thou, my God, should die for me?"

Christ called the Church into being. It is his idea. God said: "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of death will not overcome it" (Matthew 16:18). We Protestants interpret what Jesus said to mean that the Church would not be built on Peter himself, but on the faith in Christ he expressed. He had said just prior to this that he believed Jesus to be the long awaited Messiah, "...the Christ, the Son of the Living God" (Matthew 16:16). So, we believe that Jesus Christ is the foundation of the Church and it is our faith in him that is vitally important.

On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out on the followers of Jesus. On that exciting day, the Church of Jesus Christ was born. The Book of Acts teaches that the early believers "...devoted themselves to

---

<sup>1</sup> Ben Lacy Rose, *T.U.L.I.P.* (Franklin, TN: Providence House Publishers, 1992)

the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer...they sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all people" (Acts 2:42-47).

But from the very beginning, all was not perfect in the church, because it was and is made up of human beings. There were problems. There were tensions. There were disagreements. There were moral failures. There was greed. People are sinners. These are people for whom Christ died. These are people who have trusted in Jesus as Lord and Savior. These are people who have been redeemed by Christ's blood and transformed by His Holy Spirit. But the Church is made up of people who are still human, and still tainted by sin and selfishness.

In Acts, chapter 5, we read of the tragedy of Ananias and Sapphira in the earliest days of the Church. Later, Paul wrote in I Corinthians 5 of grave moral problems in that congregation. John, in his vision of The Revelation (chapters 2 and 3), was given a message to a number of congregations that struggled with sin encrusted barnacles. Church discipline was called for, but the Church itself was not abandoned. God did not call people to "give up on the Church."

The problems we face today in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) are serious, and call us to be vigilant in our witness for Christ and faithful to God's Word. But the issues we face are no worse than those faced by Christians in the early Church, or Christians throughout the centuries. As the writer to Ecclesiastes wrote: "There is nothing new under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

Every Christian must be faithful to his or her conscience and calling. Some may look at the PC (USA) and believe the time has come to move to other pastures which seem more pure, morally and theologically, and which offer a fresh beginning to weary pilgrims. Other faithful pastors and elders, however, look at our denomination and acknowledge that although we have serious moral, theological, and internal problems, the Church of Jesus Christ has always struggled with such issues and what may appear to be greener pastures elsewhere may not be as lush and rewarding as we think. Every denomination is made up of redeemed sinners. Christians seek to live by God's Word and walk in God's love, but we are still fallen people, and therefore, there is no perfect congregation, and no perfect denomination this side of glory.

I confess that I have pondered whether I should remain in the PC (USA) at various times through the years. Every time I have wrestled with that thought and have prayed through the situation, I have been led to stay and minister here. Passages such as Jesus' parable of the wheat and tares growing together (Matthew 13), and Abraham pleading to God on behalf of Sodom if ten righteous persons could be found (Genesis 18), have spoken to me. I believe there are many opportunities for evangelicals for service, ministry, and mission in this denomination. I pray that you also will be led to continue to worship and serve Christ here.

# Why Stay in the PC(USA)?

## Twelve Reasons:

*presbyterians for renewal*

Mobilizing leaders of congregations within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to be biblically faithful and missionally minded in their service to Jesus Christ.

## Learning from History

*by John "Mike" Loudon, Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Lakeland, FL*

The great theological issues of the Church did not resolve themselves quickly, or without much discussion, dissension, and pain. Our understanding of God as a Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, took centuries to define. The Apostolic Fathers, including Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, and Polycarp, addressed the issue. Apologists like Justin Martyr, Tatian, and Theophilus of Antioch, sought to use both Greek philosophy and Biblical language to describe God. Irenaeus waded into the controversy, as did Tertullian. Origen added his thoughts, and then along came Arius and Athanasius facing each other in theological battle. The Emperor Constantine called together the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD to resolve the matter, but it was not until the Council of Constantinople in 381 that a final decision was reached, and Christians defined our belief in a Triune God.

The Trinitarian controversy was just the tip of the iceberg. Next came the Christological controversy and the Church's struggle to understand who Jesus Christ truly is. We Evangelicals think we have a pretty good handle on this, but such was not the case in the early centuries of the Church. There were the Ebionists who denied that Jesus was divine. There were the Docetists who moved in the opposite direction and questioned the humanity of Jesus. The Gnostics who developed an elaborate, descriptive philosophy of cosmic speculation. The Monarchians believed in a dualism of spirit and matter. Tertullian and Origen did battle with them. Origen wrote on the subject, and so did Arius and Athanasius. But Nicaea did not settle the Christological issue; next came the Apollinarins who were Monophysites and believed in only one nature. There was Diodore of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuetia, Nestorius and Cyril of Alexandria. The Council of Ephesus dealt with conflicts between Cyril and Nestorius. The Synods of Constantinople in 448 and in 449 waded into the controversy. Finally the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD set about to resolve the dispute over "Who Is Jesus Christ?" The Chalcedonian formula gave equal recognition

to both the unity and duality in the persons. The divine Word is a unity existing in two natures, each of which is complete and retains its own distinctive properties and operation.

Next came the Ecclesiological controversy, which was followed by the Anthropological controversy, and the Sacramental controversy. One of the best studies of all of these church controversies is Dr. Donald McKim's book, *Theological Turning Points* (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1988). The bottom line is that it took centuries for these issues to be resolved, and even then, some disagreed and went their separate ways.

The history of the Presbyterian Church is no different. In this country alone we have debated various issues and divided a number of times. Often our divisions have led to reunions years later. There was the Old Side and New Side split of 1741 over evangelism methodology, and then the Old School and New School division in 1837 over revivalism, and the division of the denomination North and South in 1861 at the beginning of the Civil War. The famed Modernist and Fundamentalist debates of the early twentieth century and concerns with the Board of Missions led some to leave and form the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in the early 1930's. Women's Ordination and fears of reunion with the Northern Church led the founders of the Presbyterian Church in America to leave in 1972, and theological and political issues led to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church being formed in 1978.

Church history instructs us that some of the greatest and most important controversies over theological and moral issues took time to be resolved. In the meantime, we who claim the name of Christ are called to maintain our convictions with patience and with hopeful endurance, trusting God to bring resolution in His time. There are many Evangelical pastors, and lay leaders in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) who are working for spiritual renewal, and there are many faithful congregations where the Word of God is faithfully proclaimed and lived each week. There are many PC(USA) congregations teaching scriptural truth, seeking justice, and reaching out to people in mission, and service with the love of Jesus Christ. They are all around us.

My prayer, and the prayer of those on the board of Presbyterians For Renewal, is that God would impress upon your heart to stay and minister within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and lovingly feed God's sheep in this pasture, working where God is already at work.

# Why Stay in the PC(USA)?

## Twelve Reasons:

6

### *presbyterians for renewal*

Mobilizing leaders of congregations within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to be biblically faithful and missionally minded in their service to Jesus Christ.

## Money, Money, Money...

*by Jim Cahalan, Elder, First Presbyterian Church, Edmond, OK*

Who controls local congregation finances?

Many congregations express significant concern that money they contribute to the denomination is not being used in a manner and for purposes their congregation supports. Or worse, they fear that the money they contribute is being used to further objectives directly *contrary* to the wishes of the congregation. Although a congregation should be aware and concerned about where their contributions go, this need not be a deciding factor if that congregation is considering whether or not to stay in ministry within the PC(USA).

The subject of congregational contributions to the denomination can become confusing, because the words “*per capita*” get quickly inserted into the conversation. And *per capita* can mean different things in different locations. In some presbyteries, congregations are assigned *per capita* payments that include apportionments for presbytery, synod, and the General Assembly. In other presbyteries, only the General Assembly *per capita* is specifically assigned to congregations. And, in still other presbyteries, there is no assigned *per capita* apportionment at all.

Regardless of their presbytery, however, all sessions need to be aware of G-10.0102 (i) in the Book of Order, which reads that the session has the responsibility and power:

to establish the annual budget, determine the distribution of the church’s benevolences, and order offerings for Christian purposes, providing full information to the congregation of its decisions in such matters...;

That exact wording has been in the Book of Order at least since 1991-1992. This responsibility of sessions to determine what disposition should be made of church benevolences has been supported by several Permanent Judicial Commission (PJC) cases over the years.

Article Six in a series, “*Why Stay in the PC(USA)?*”  
resources created by the Issues Ministry Team of Presbyterians for Renewal © 2007  
For more information on this and other resources for leaders of congregations,  
find us on the Web at [www.pfrenewal.org](http://www.pfrenewal.org)

On July 15, 2003, the General Assembly PJC issued a *unanimous* opinion that:

Presbyterian sessions have the right to withhold payment of per-capita apportionments to support presbyteries, synods, and the General Assembly of the PC(USA).

That opinion reaffirmed a 1991 ruling that:

a church may neither be compelled to pay, nor punished for failure to pay, any amounts pursuant to such (per capita) plan.

There have also been several attempts in recent years to have the General Assembly amend the Book of Order via overtures and/or commissioners resolutions that proposed changes to the voluntary nature of payment of *per capita*. However, these proposed changes have all been defeated at General Assembly.

It would be naive not to recognize that different presbyteries treat receipt of benevolences from particular congregations differently. Most presbyteries recognize the responsibility granted by G-10.0102 (i). In some rare cases punitive actions have been taken, although such actions have been overturned when tested by a PJC.

Support of the General Assembly, synod and presbytery mission budgets are, of course, also voluntary, and for those benevolences a session has the additional option of designating its contributions to a specific function or program. Again, some higher governing bodies attempt to influence sessions to contribute even to the mission budget, but such actions are not supported by polity or by PJC decisions.

Every session has the responsibility to faithfully steward the funds entrusted to them by their congregations. They are expected to recognize the high moral obligation based on the grace and call of God to participate fully in the covenant community, and to further the Great Ends of the Church (G-1.0200). They may resolve to willingly and cheerfully contribute -- to the extent their conscience will allow -- the full *per capita* apportionment determined by their presbytery. If the session members' consciences do not allow such full support, however, sessions have the right -- and indeed the responsibility -- to redirect or designate their benevolences in a manner that they deem appropriate.

Because a session retains this degree of ethical responsibility and personal oversight over where the congregation's particular contributions are directed, concern about denominational use of benevolences need not be a factor as a congregation determines whether to stay in ministry within the PC(USA). Financial concerns ought to apply only in extraordinary situations in which Presbyterian polity is not being properly applied.

# Why Stay in the PC(USA)?

## Twelve Reasons:

# 7

### *presbyterians for renewal*

Mobilizing leaders of congregations within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to be biblically faithful and missionally minded in their service to Jesus Christ.

## The Crucial Role of Women in Leadership

*by Terry Schlossberg, Elder, The National Presbyterian Church, Washington, D.C.*

*Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting;*

*but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.*

*Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate.*

Proverbs 31:30,31

Proverbs 31 has taught generations of women to bring honor to God through their industry, wisdom, and good character. Scripture's record is filled with the particular gifts that women bring, in complementary partnership with men, for the benefit of Christ's Church and whole societies. Models of able and faithful women abound in Scripture.

The account of Esther gives rare biblical insight into the development of a young girl into a charming and beautiful woman and then her continued development of character into a woman who feared God and risked her life to be obedient. Even without a single mention of God in this book, it's clear, especially to Reformed believers, that God positioned Esther to be his instrument of rescue of his people at a time when no man, not even a Moses, would have been suitable. And she was faithful to the task.

Esther overcame every barrier and obstacle that stood between her and her call. She was a significant figure in Israel's history in overcoming evil and establishing righteousness, and a beautiful example of the strength of womanhood.

Proverbs describes the woman who is to be praised. Anyone who reads the account of Esther will see her as such a woman. We rejoice at the outcome of a story that shows how much courage and leadership was displayed by a young woman of such humble origins.

Article Seven in a series, "*Why Stay in the PC(USA)?*"  
resources created by the Issues Ministry Team of Presbyterians for Renewal © 2007  
For more information on this and other resources for leaders of congregations,  
find us on the Web at [www.pfrenewal.org](http://www.pfrenewal.org)

In this troubled and troubling period for the Church in our time, the examples of the true leadership of women who, like Queen Esther, are devoted followers of the Savior are in utter contrast to women who, like Queen Vasti, seek only their own vain and rebellious purposes. We should find it instructive that Esther, who knew she took life-threatening risks, was in no real jeopardy, but rather was honored, while the woman who felt safe in her pride and defiance was deposed.

Our denomination, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), honors and affirms the particular gifts and callings that God bestows on women. Our denomination throws up no barriers to the exercise of those gifts and callings in the Church's ministry. To the contrary, we in the PC(USA) give every encouragement to women's leadership, even by constitutional declaration. Women are prominent in leadership from the prayer room, the nursery, the hospital room, and the kitchen to the role of pastor, of elder, of teacher, of Director of the General Assembly Council and Moderator of the General Assembly.

But there is a contrast in the leadership of women today that is strikingly similar to that in the book of Esther. Women are not only welcome in the PC(USA); faithful women are a necessary part of bringing the reforms needed in the Church, of work that only faithful women can do. To be a part of resisting evil and bringing righteousness means that we women, too, must take the risks that our calling demands of us in this church at this time. The challenge of Mordecai to the Queen in the fourth chapter of Esther is now a challenge to us: Who knows but that we have come to leadership for such a time as this?

## **Interim Session's Denominational Affiliation Statement**

**Presented by Mike Holzgang at the June 5, 2011 Congregational Meeting**

We'd like to thank more than 750 of you who took the time to respond to our recent questionnaire regarding the denominational future of Sunset. We very much appreciate your willingness to give us your thoughts on whether Sunset should become a full member of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, or move in the direction of becoming an independent/non-denominational church.

Today we would like to reiterate that Sunset is only a *provisional* member of the EPC, not a *permanent* member, and that we must decide before the end of the year whether to apply to the EPC for regular membership. For those of you who may not know, the temporary presbytery within the EPC to which Sunset now belongs, the New Wineskins presbytery, will cease to exist in 2012, and all those churches (like Sunset) who are members of the New Wineskins presbytery must decide before then whether to become permanent and regular members of the EPC, or to join another denomination, or to become independent congregations. If we do nothing, we will automatically become an independent church, by default. We would much rather make this important decision both prayerfully and carefully, with your help.

The questionnaire was designed to give our new Session important additional information that it might find helpful in considering Sunset's denominational future. The questionnaire was never seen, or used, as a scientifically rigorous survey, but instead was crafted to help our leaders get a general feel for where the members of our congregation might stand on the issue—a straw poll, if you will. And in that limited capacity, it appears to have functioned well.

Given the restricted nature of the questionnaire, we think it would be both inappropriate and perhaps misleading to use the results obtained through it to attempt any detailed analysis, draw specific conclusions, or make significant recommendations. At most, we believe it clearly reveals two things: (1) our people do not want to consider joining any denomination other than the EPC; and (2) a very high majority of those who took the questionnaire consider Sunset to be "their" church, regardless of denominational affiliation. We think it is unwise to use the results of the questionnaire to do more than make these two broad observations.

Even so, you can take a look for yourself at how your brothers and sisters in Christ answered the six questions we posed; we have posted the results of the questionnaire on Sunset's website.

Many of you also wrote notes and posed your own questions on your questionnaire response sheets, so we'd like to take a little time now to try to clarify where we stand in this process, and how we got here.

1. The EPC is requiring us, and all other members of the transitional New Wineskins Presbytery, to make this decision. The denomination also has set the timing of this question, and not Sunset or any other member of the New Wineskins Presbytery. The New Wineskins Presbytery of the EPC will dissolve automatically and cease to exist immediately prior to the EPC General Assembly in June 2012, so all churches currently in the New Wineskins Presbytery must decide whether to become permanent members of the EPC or to pursue some other option. Per EPC time frame, application for permanent membership must be received by February, 2012; however, due to critical issues involving health

insurance plans and benefits packages for our staff, it seems wisest to us to make this decision before the end of this calendar year.

2. Sunset's leadership team has no interest in returning to the PC(USA), or to join any other denomination. Our decision seems clear: Either we make application to join the EPC—we would become members of the not-yet-created Presbytery of the Pacific—or we would decide to become a non-denominational/independent church. Either way, Sunset retains ownership of all its property. When Sunset left the PC(USA) two years ago, our former denomination did not give us the option of retaining ownership of our property if we wanted to become a non-denominational/independent church. That option is now a possibility for us, should we decide to pursue it.

3. Let's consider the timeline facing us. Note a few of the key dates.

A. In order to meet the application deadline to join EPC's yet-to-be-created Presbytery of the Pacific, we must make a decision by January 2012. If, however, we were to decide to become a non-denominational/independent church, we would have to change our staff's medical insurance plan prior to January 1, 2012, to avoid the staff facing a midyear change that would force them to pay two deductibles in the same calendar year. We currently have our medical insurance plan through the EPC, and that plan runs on a calendar year basis. So in order to give us enough time to make any necessary insurance changes, we need to make this decision before the end of October of this year.

B. If we should decide to make formal application to the EPC to become a regular member of the denomination, our decision must be in place by Spring 2012, when the various geographic presbyteries of the EPC hold their annual meetings. The denomination emphasizes that "The move

into the geographic presbyteries is not something that can be done overnight. . . . This process must be completed by that Presbytery's Spring 2012 meeting" (taken from an official Memorandum from the EPC to all churches in the New Wineskins presbytery, dated November 5, 2010).

Finally, the process of making this important decision is still being worked out, with the help of the Sunset Commission and Presbytery leaders. Please pray for your new Session as its members deal with this issue.

We hope that this information, as well as the material available on Sunset's website, enables you to feel well informed on this issue. If, however, you would like still more information, please be advised that Jim Blanchard and the Denominational Strategy Team, which has been helping us navigate this issue, will be available in the Fireside Room right after we adjourn tonight. Its members will be glad to speak with you and try to answer your questions. Again, thank you.

## Recent Denominational History of Sunset Presbyterian Church

In order to provide some context for the choices now facing Sunset regarding its denominational status, we provide the following brief historical review highlighting the church's switch from the Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA) to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC).

The PCUSA, like most mainline Protestant denominations in the United States, over the past half century has drifted increasingly to the theological "left," calling into question or outright abandoning most of the core tenets of the historic Christian faith. The denomination's practical rejection of such foundational teachings as the reliability and authority of Scripture, the substitutionary death and bodily resurrection of Jesus, and its penchant for political activism opposed to scriptural norms (e.g., the denomination's recent constitutional change allowing openly gay individuals in same-sex relationships to be ordained as ministers, elders and deacons, *The Oregonian*, 11 May 2011, page A1) eventually prompted Sunset's leadership team to begin the process of separating from the denomination.

In November 2008, the PCUSA released Sunset into the Presbytery of the West of the EPC, thus ending Sunset's affiliation with the PCUSA. Almost a year and a half earlier, the EPC had created a "transitional" and non-geographical presbytery called the New Wineskins Presbytery (NWEPC), in part to facilitate the move of former PCUSA congregations into the EPC; but the PCUSA refused to recognize this transitional presbytery and therefore Sunset had to enter the EPC through the Presbytery of the West. In May 2009, Sunset was transferred to the NWEPC, the presbytery Sunset had intended to join at the beginning of the transferral process.

On November 5, 2010, a memo from NWEPC informed affiliated churches that the New Wineskins Presbytery would dissolve automatically immediately prior to the EPC General Assembly in June 2012. Congregations that desired to become "full members of the EPC"—and as a member of the NWEPC, Sunset is not a full member of the EPC—would need to "petition and be accepted into full membership in your geographic presbytery . . . in sufficient time to be completed by the spring 2012 meeting of the geographic Presbytery." Any congregation that failed to do so by that date would "become an independent congregation not affiliated in any way with the EPC" and would need to find its own pension and medical benefits, because the EPC health and pension plans currently in place in NWEPC churches (such as Sunset), "will not (repeat NOT) be available to cover you after June 2012, unless in fact you become full members of the EPC." The memo reminded NWEPC churches that the move into an EPC geographic presbytery "is not something that can be done overnight" and stated that the "process must be completed by that Presbytery's Spring 2012 meeting" (the full memo is available on Sunset's website).

The situation gets a little more complicated for Sunset, because if it decides to become a full member of the EPC, it would not move into the Presbytery of the West, but rather would move into the yet-to-be-created Presbytery of the Pacific. Although this presbytery does not yet exist, the EPC has been working to get it up-and-running by September 2011. Representatives from Sunset have met personally with the individual who likely will become the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of the Pacific to discuss

various issues related to the new presbytery. As of today, however, it is unknown what the new presbytery's official stance will be on such key issues as the ordination of women to the roles of pastor, elder, and deacon.

Taking all these dates and timelines into consideration, it would appear prudent for Sunset to make its decision about whether to: (a) become a full member of the EPC; (b) join another denomination, or; (c) become a non-denominational/independent church, *before* December 31, 2011. In fact, if Sunset were to become a non-denominational/independent church, it would seem wisest to make that decision by the Fall of 2011, in order to make the necessary arrangements regarding such key issues as obtaining appropriate medical and pension plans for staff members. (Most independent medical and pension plans allow new subscribers to enter their programs only at specified "enrollment periods," which in most cases occur at the beginning of a calendar year and in the Fall.)

[For further information on this issue, see the additional resources posted on Sunset's website, or feel free to contact Ken Mulder, Jim Blanchard, or members of Sunset's transitional Session.]

## MEMORANDUM

TO: All Churches and Pastors in New Wineskins EPC Presbytery

FROM: New Wineskins EPC Presbytery Coordinating Team  
NWEPC Joint Commission

DATE: November 5, 2010

RE: Becoming One / Dissolution of New Wineskins Presbytery

---

A. Purpose. The purpose of this memo is 1) to remind everyone that the New Wineskins Presbytery will dissolve automatically immediately prior to the EPC General Assembly in June of 2012; 2) outline the significance of that dissolution for NW/EPC churches and pastors; and 3) report other decisions concerning operations between now and June, 2012.

B. Becoming One. There are two paths to Becoming One - that is becoming full members of the EPC.

1. Option one: Your church and pastor(s) may petition and be accepted into full membership in your geographic presbytery. When June 2012 arrives, you will already be there. This process needs to be initiated by your church/pastor with the Stated Clerk of the geographic Presbytery in sufficient time to be completed by the spring 2012 meeting of the geographic Presbytery.
2. Option two: Church and pastor(s) become full members as in 1. Remain in the New Wineskins Presbytery and establish dual membership with your geographical presbytery. In this situation, when the New Wineskins Presbytery is dissolved, you will already have full membership in your geographic presbytery. Dual membership means that church and pastor(s) are responsible to their geographic Presbytery for ecclesiastical issues and participate in the NWEPC TP missionally.

C. Independence. If your church is not a member of a geographic presbytery (by the selection of option 1 or option 2 above), upon dissolution of the New Wineskins Presbytery in June of 2012, you will become an independent congregation not affiliated in any way with the EPC. While we believe most all of the New Wineskins churches will, in fact, become full members of the EPC, some may wish to become independent. If, for whatever reason, you do not want to become a part of the EPC and are not interested in being independent and wish to explore other associations, our Stated Clerk, Jeff Jeremiah (Phone # 734-742-2020) is available to provide you with information on how to go about doing that.

D. Termination of Pension and Medical Benefits. **THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT.** For those of you and members of your staff who are on the EPC pension plan and the EPC medical plan, those plans will not (repeat NOT) be available to cover you after June 2012, unless in fact you become full members of the EPC. (You do have certain short term rights, e.g., COBRA.) Obviously, particularly for medical coverage, it is critical that you be aware of the timing of this loss of coverage and what procedures are necessary to insure continued coverage. Please contact Ms. Linda DiVeto, Benefits Administrator, at the GA office, 734-742-2020, who has information in that regard, should you desire to become independent.

E. Timing. The move into the geographic presbyteries is not something that can be done overnight. Please contact the Stated Clerk of your geographic presbytery as soon as possible. This process must be completed by that Presbytery's Spring 2012 meeting. (Presbytery contact information is contained in the EPC Directory or at [www.epc.org](http://www.epc.org))

F. Candidates for the Ministry. If your congregation has a Candidate for the Ministry, please contact Rev. Dean Weaver, Chairman of the NWEPC Transitional Presbytery Ministry Committee. (Contact information is at the end of this Memo.)

G. Churches with women pastors & candidates who wish to exercise the provisions being presented in Descending Overtures from the 30<sup>th</sup> GA, concerning women Teaching Elders (DO 10A & 10B), providing these overtures are approved, should start to exercise those provisions as soon as they are ratified by the 2011<sup>th</sup> GA so the process can be completed by the 2012<sup>th</sup> GA.

#### H. Other Decisions Regarding the Operation of the Presbytery

- June 21, 2011 (the next Stated Meeting) will be the last day new churches and pastors will be received into the NWEPC Transitional Presbytery. After that date, churches and pastors will be referred to the EPC geographic Presbyteries.
- The June 21, 2011 Stated Meeting of the Presbytery will be the last day Presbytery will examine and receive pastors to fill vacant pastoral positions in NWEPC churches. Churches processing pastoral candidates who cannot meet that date will be referred to the Ministerial Committee of their geographical Presbytery to process these calls. This will necessitate that those churches be first received into the geographic Presbytery.
- The June 21, 2011 Stated Meeting of Presbytery will be the last Stated Meeting.
- All Presbytery structures and committees will remain in place between June 2011 and June 2012 to handle those situations that may come up that would be exceptions to the above. The Joint Commission will determine exceptions.

**Contact Information: If you have any questions about these details, you may contact any of the following:**

Randy Jenkins, Moderator of NWEPC Transitional Presbytery  
256-534-8446  
[revrtj@bellsouth.net](mailto:revrtj@bellsouth.net)

Dean Weaver, Co-Chairman of NWEPC Joint Commission & Chairman of Presbytery Ministerial Committee  
412-364-9492  
[dean@memorialparkchurch.org](mailto:dean@memorialparkchurch.org)

Bill Meyer, Co-Chairman of NWEPC Joint Commission  
727-729-7368  
[wmeyer9@tampabay.rr.com](mailto:wmeyer9@tampabay.rr.com)

# Should Sunset Stay Within the EPC or Become Independent?

This short essay attempts to lay out the chief advantages of Sunset either becoming a non-denominational/independent church or remaining within the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.

## Advantages of Becoming a Non-denominational/Independent Church

### **Sunset's culture has not been denominational**

*Sunset Church, its elders and members have never been very involved with the denomination to which we have belonged, whether the PCUSA or the EPC. Among our people there appears to be little to no understanding of—or interest in—the structure, purpose and theology of our denomination.*

### **Financial support for EPC can be better used elsewhere**

*Every church in the denomination is asked to pay a voluntary, but highly encouraged, “Every Member Asking” fee. If we would meet this fully, our yearly payment would amount to approximately \$64,000.*

### **Cultural trends are moving toward a post-denomination era**

*Denominationalism has been the major “glue” holding the churches of America together ever since the colonists reached our shores. In Europe and other parts of the world, state churches determined the church membership of individuals living within their ecclesiastical jurisdictions.*

*In our country, denominations were organized to help serve and support local churches with such things as vetting, training, and ordination of clergy; providing curriculum; adjudicating disputes; rooting out heresies; and correcting wayward clergy, elders, and churches. The massive administration of these organizations has loaded the church with bureaucracies that today seem more interested in continuing their existence rather than serving the individuals and churches they were created to serve.*

*For these and many similar reasons, increasingly large numbers of observers have come to see denominations as unnecessarily cumbersome, slow to act and react, and requiring a great deal of energy from their constituent congregations—energy that otherwise could be directed toward efforts at reaching their own communities with the gospel. In general, the culture of 21<sup>st</sup> century America has a growing suspicion and cynicism toward organizations, especially if they are perceived as political entities. Individualism has made people shy of joining or becoming members of anything that would require them to lose or reduce their personal autonomy.*

*Many church scholars have therefore contended that denominations as we have known them will disappear in the next 50 years. Although no one knows what will replace them, perhaps churches in a given community (or within distinct regions) will form*

*coalitions to work together to fulfill the mandates of the Kingdom of God.*

### **Sunset gains an outreach advantage by losing its Presbyterian/liberal identity**

*In previous decades, Sunset Church had a built-in evangelistic advantage in that many members of the Boomer generation were beginning to see that they had drifted from the ideals of their early years and were looking to return to the principles of their childhood and parents. For many, that meant the church. Yet they remained wary of "fundamentalist churches," or churches that seemed too radical in their proclamation of being "born again," etc. The tag "Presbyterian" worked to our advantage, since many in this generation felt more comfortable in a church that seemed "safer," and so many came to Sunset and to faith in Christ.*

*Subsequent generations, however, are far less likely to seek out big, mainline churches; rather, if they show any interest in church at all, they tend to prefer more informal, smaller, and "less threatening" congregations. In our day, then, the attachment to a mainline denomination has become an evangelistic disadvantage.*

### **More freedom to find "connectedness" with likeminded churches**

*We can achieve "connectedness," the watchword of Presbyterianism, far better locally than by trying to establish connections with churches hundreds of miles away. EPC is spread so thin in the Western states that it is nearly impossible to relate to and be actively engaged in missional pursuits with other EPC congregations (we have attempted to make such connections, with no success). It seems therefore more realistic to "connect and engage" with likeminded churches in our community and work arm-in-arm through mutual efforts to reach our community for Christ and in this way to serve others in the name of Jesus.*

### **A wider field for senior-level pastor candidates**

*If Sunset stays in the EPC, it will be limited to EPC ordained men or women, or to those who are "ordainable" and are open to be ordained in the EPC. As an independent church, Sunset would have access to a much larger pool of applicants, with a much richer theological background, than if it remained within the EPC.*

### **Free from "top down" denominational structure**

*A "top down" or hierarchical structure works against our conviction that the local church is the center of God's work in his Kingdom, and that each church needs to be free to act according to its perceived calling. If we stay within the EPC, everything from our ecclesiastical structure, to ordination, to officiating at the sacraments, is controlled by the denomination. For many years now, the DNA of Sunset has been much more in line with local control of such factors.*

## **The ability to determine our own constitution**

*Without question, a church needs a solid constitution with effective by-laws. Currently, these things are determined by the denomination. As an independent church, Sunset would have the opportunity to develop a "lean, mean, and non-cumbersome" constitution and set of by-laws that would enable it to more effectively pursue its God-given mission.*

## **More ability and freedom to make changes in response to ministry needs**

*A mammoth organization such as a denomination tends to make needed changes very slowly; the pace of change often gets so drawn out that by the time changes are agreed upon and implemented, the reason for the change has disappeared or morphed into something else entirely. This phenomenon of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, where the speed of cultural change often outpaces the ability of cumbersome organizational structures to effectively respond to it, requires the local body to make decisions quickly. Independence will allow us to more quickly make and implement such decisions.*

## **The suggested new organization for the church, now in front of Session, can be more easily implemented in an independent church**

*Presbyterian polity requires multiple-staff churches to have a Senior Pastor. This individual is: 1) The Chief of Staff to whom everyone either reports directly or through someone else; and 2) the moderator of Session. In the suggested plan now before Sunset's Session, the church would have both the "Teaching Pastor" and "Executive Pastor" reporting to Session, and not to each other or to one over the other. This arrangement works well in an independent church, but "muddies" the traditional Presbyterian paradigm.*

## **As an egalitarian church, Sunset would fare much better as an independent**

*Long ago, Sunset decided that women could be ordained as elders and pastors, making us what has been called an "egalitarian" church. In the EPC, however, women's ordination is not considered an essential belief. Each presbytery and each church is free to decide whom to ordain (regarding gender). Therefore, the only option for a church that seeks to ordain a woman as pastor—if it happens to belong to a presbytery that refuses to ordain women—is to request to be released from its regular presbytery into a geographically adjacent presbytery that does ordain women. Such a church must make application to that presbytery, and neither action is guaranteed. And so, for instance, a woman pastor who desires to accept a call to a church in a presbytery that does not ordain women puts herself and the church in a very difficult position. As an independent church, Sunset would control its own destiny in this regard.*

## **Advantages of Staying Within the EPC**

### **An existing constitution/book of order**

*It would take a great deal of time and effort to forge a new constitution and craft effective by-laws. When disciplinary or procedural issues arise, lack of a constitution leaves a church floundering. By staying in the EPC, we avoid any such possibility.*

### **We continue to attract people who feel comfortable in a Presbyterian church**

*Ever since its reorganization in 1981, Sunset's leadership considered being Presbyterian an advantage for anyone looking to find a spiritual reason for their existence. It was thought visitors would feel "safe" coming to a mainline church, rather than visiting a church perceived as too radical or fundamental.*

### **Another major change for our congregation could be divisive**

*Sunset has just passed through a period of gigantic change and much healing still needs to take place. Yet another significant change may not be in our best interest at this time.*

### **Retains a proven pastor ordination structure**

*The presbytery is the structure responsible for ordination in the EPC. If Sunset were to become independent, it would have to develop a new structure to handle this function, or else align with groups that specialize in vetting people for ordination.*

### **Continued system of accountability for the organization and its leadership**

*One advantage of a denomination is its built-in accountability structure. The greatest example of this in Sunset's recent history is the role the denomination played as we passed through the pastoral conflict of the last few months. Independence can lead to a greater lack of accountability, unless well-defined roles and responsibilities are thought out and implemented before conflict erupts. Checks and balances need to be included in the church's constitution and by-laws.*

*In addition, some believe that being independent may increase our financial and legal risks (risks mitigated by being part of a denomination). Having to reinvent who we are and how we function, while very exciting, inevitably means lots of change. And while change can be very good, it also can mean lots of opportunity for hurt feelings, bad communication, and division, which some fear could increase the church's vulnerability to lawsuits. Even after a transition to independence, the church might require significant legal and professional counsel to protect itself.*

### **Would retain our current health insurance and 403b retirement plans**

*By remaining in the EPC, current health insurance and retirement plans for staff would*

*remain in place. If Sunset were to go independent, it would have to secure other health insurance and retirement plans on the open market, and would have to do so by the time it left the denomination. On the day Sunset left the EPC, it would have to have in place its own health insurance and retirement plans.*

**Would retain our current 501c3 position (tax exempt status)**

*While going independent would not require Sunset to form a new corporation, it would require the church to refile for its 501c3 status with the government, since this status currently is conferred upon the church through its affiliation with the EPC. By remaining within the EPC, this consideration is a non-factor.*

**Would not have to spend funds to make a name change**

*If Sunset were to go independent, it would incur a number of costs involved in a name change—e.g., signage, stationery, business cards, registrations, etc.*

**Staying in the EPC is the easier thing to do**

*To become a full member of the EPC, all Sunset has to do is apply and let a team from EPC come and vet our elders; we then continue church as usual. To leave the denomination would require a church vote, the writing and implementing of a new structure and constitution, and all the many items listed above.*

# Denomination Decision Information

Provided by Sunset Session

## Background Information:

- In November 2008, Cascades Presbytery, the regional presbytery of the Presbyterian Church (USA), voted to dismiss Sunset from its denomination, an action requested by Sunset. As part of the release, Cascades Presbytery transferred ownership of all Sunset property to Sunset.
- Cascades Presbytery granted the dismissal on condition that Sunset join the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) denomination.
- At our request, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) denomination accepted Sunset into a temporary presbytery called the New Wineskins Transitional Presbytery.
- On November 5, 2010, the presbytery leadership reminded all churches in the New Wineskins Transitional Presbytery that they (including Sunset) needed to make a decision as to whether they wanted to become regular members of the EPC. The EPC is in the process of establishing a new Presbytery of the Pacific, and Sunset would become a member of this new presbytery in the Spring of 2012.
- If Sunset decided not to make application to the new Presbytery of the Pacific, it would cease to be a member of the EPC and would become an independent church as of June 2012.

## Session Decision on Membership in the EPC:

- On July 20, 2011, Session voted to approve making application to become a member of the new Presbytery of the Pacific, EPC. The vote was unanimous. Since Session has decided to continue with the decision already made two years ago by the congregation to join the EPC, this decision to make application to move from the transitional presbytery to the regular presbytery is a procedural next step that does not need another vote of the congregation.
- This decision by Session was made after considerable prayer and reviewing information from the following sources: Sunset's Denominational Strategy Team, the Congregational Survey, discussions with Sunset staff members, and conversations with many Sunset members.
- The primary reasons for the decision are:
  - Another major change for Sunset, at this time, could be very divisive.
  - EPC provides organizational accountability and structure, including a pastor ordination process and Constitution, which includes the Book of Order. If we were to become independent, we would need to develop these resources on our own.
  - EPC provides strong theological accountability.
  - EPC provides protection from legal and financial risks.
  - EPC makes available staff health insurance and retirement plans, which Sunset funds.
  - Joining the new Presbytery of the Pacific offers potential opportunities for Sunset to gain an expanded collaborative and leadership role beyond our local community.

- If, at some future date, Sunset decides that membership in the EPC does not help us to achieve our mission; we can withdraw from the denomination and we would maintain ownership of all Sunset property. Session will evaluate Sunset's relationship with the EPC in January 2013.

***Summary:***

- It is Session's hope and prayer that this decision to join the new Presbytery of the Pacific, EPC accords with God's will for Sunset.
- We have very much appreciated your prayers and cooperation as we have deliberated over this important decision. Please pray that God will continue to bless Sunset as we look forward-- with great anticipation!--to what He has planned for us.