

1 **A Presbytery Policy for Congregations Considering Leaving the PC (USA)-2nd Reading**

2 According to the guiding principles of the Presbytery of Carlisle our mission is “to support our
3 congregations in the name of Jesus Christ.” Further, “the Presbytery of Carlisle is a service
4 community which:

- 5 - supports congregations in addressing their needs and opportunities by increasing resources,
6 information and training in mission and ministry.
- 7 - seeks to create dialogue in which congregations and presbytery actively talk to and listen to
8 each other and respond to each other.
- 9 - promotes a relationship among congregations and the presbytery that is collegial and
10 collaborative in ministry.”

11 We acknowledge, as did the author of Ecclesiastes, “There is a time for everything, and a
12 season for every activity under heaven.” The ensuing list includes “a time to plant and a time to
13 uproot ... a time to weep and a time to laugh ... a time to tear and a time to mend ... a time to
14 be silent and a time to speak.”

15 Some see the Church described in Acts, Chapter 2 as the ideal to which we must aspire: “They
16 devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread
17 and to prayer ... all the believers were together and had everything in common ... and the Lord
18 added to their number daily those who were being saved.” However, the euphoria of this
19 snapshot picture gave way to lying and pretenses (Acts 5, Ananias and Sapphira deceive their
20 community); serious ruptures between two culturally different groups (Acts 6, the Hellenists
21 murmur against the Jews); theological contention (Acts 15:5-11, the community debates
22 whether circumcision was required of Gentiles); and disagreement (Acts 15:36-39, Paul and
23 Barnabas part company.) The Acts 2 snapshot may be the ideal, but most church living is much
24 less than ideal and reflects the range of emotions and behavior in the entire book of Acts.

25 There are no off-seasons in the church. All seasons are important and require leadership. No
26 season, however, is more important than that one where emotions run high and connectional
27 relationships are strained. It is just such a season in which the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) finds
28 itself. The reasons are many and varied and the perceived solutions are equally numbered and
29 diverse.

30 In recognition of this season, when our unity in Christ is being tested and our ability to work
31 together in mission is being tried, we covenant with one another to “encourage one another
32 and build each other up” (1 Thessalonians 5:11), and to respect and demonstrate love to one
33 another. Together we covenant to live together in the bonds of peace while we seek to discern
34 and follow the will of God.

35 The Presbytery of Carlisle is committed to pursuing a ministry of reconciliation with pastors,
36 sessions, and congregations who are seeking or considering dismissal from the denomination.
37 Whether the outcome takes the form of dismissal or mutually accepted recommitment to the
38 relationship between the congregation and the presbytery, it is the desire of the Presbytery of
39 Carlisle to create a context and a process marked by prayer, grace and mutual forbearance as
40 we open our hearts and minds to the power of the Holy Spirit working within the life, ministry,
41 and calling of the particular congregation and the presbytery as a whole.

42 To seek God's will requires a significant investment of time and energy, study and prayer. The
43 Presbytery of Carlisle is committed to this process and committed to following the principles
44 suggested by the 218th General Assembly (2008): Consistency, Pastoral Responsibility,
45 Accountability, Gracious Witness, Openness and Transparency.

46 The Presbytery requests that any Session or local congregation considering and/or seeking
47 dismissal from the PCUSA will covenant with the Presbytery to enter into a defined process of
48 mutual discernment, conversation, negotiation and resolution. This process is more fully
49 described in the remainder of this document.

50 **CONGREGATIONAL DISCERNMENT**

51 A congregational based discernment process is led by the session. (See Appendix 1 –
52 Suggestions for a Process of Discernment.) Session may invite Presbytery representatives to be
53 involved this time. To request this involvement contact the Executive Presbyter or Stated Clerk.

54 During the process, the following questions are paramount:

55 A.) Is God leading this particular congregation to seek dismissal from the Presbyterian
56 Church (USA) or toward reaffirmation of connection within the PCUSA?

57 B.) If God is leading this church to seek dismissal from the PCUSA, how can that be
58 accomplished in a way that honors Jesus Christ and strengthens both the congregation
59 and the Presbytery?

60 C.) If God is leading this congregation toward affirming its connection with the PCUSA,
61 how can that be accomplished in a way that honors Jesus Christ and strengthens both
62 the congregation and the Presbytery?

63 **PRESBYTERY INVOLVEMENT**

64 When the leadership of the Presbytery becomes aware, either through formal congregational
65 action or through informal conversation that a congregation is in serious disagreement with the
66 denomination, visitation of a Conversation Team will be offered to the congregation through
67 the Executive Presbyter or Stated Clerk.

68 The purpose of the Conversation Team will be:

- 69 A.) to review with the Session the discernment process already engaged, or to
70 participate in a new one;
- 71 B.) to engage the officers and/or the congregation as a whole in a time of prayer and
72 conversation, aimed at understanding the issues, identifying steps that may be taken,
73 including engagement with questions A, B, and C (above under Congregational
74 Discernment), if they have not yet been addressed.
- 75 C.) to share matters for consideration with respect to the implications for a
76 congregation and its pastor(s) considering leaving the PCUSA.

77 **NEGOTIATION AND RESOLUTION**

78 Working in good faith toward a mutually agreeable resolution means that all parties involved:

- 79 A.) are open and honest in all their dealings with each other;
- 80 B.) will provide all requested relevant information and documents to each other on a
81 timely basis;
- 82 C.) will respect the conviction of the members, especially those holding differing
83 viewpoints; and
- 84 D.) will refrain from any unauthorized unilateral changes in the way their assets are held
85 or managed.

86 The Conversation Team will work with officers and the congregation to define a resolution. A
87 mutually agreeable resolution may result in reaffirming connection to the PCUSA. This
88 resolution should be widely circulated to the congregation. Or a mutually agreeable resolution
89 may result in a recommendation to the Presbytery that the congregation be dismissed to
90 another Reformed denomination but it may not be released to independent status.

91 Congregations should graciously consider that Carlisle Presbytery's ability to sustain ministry is
92 related to its financial health. The dismissed congregation shall pay three years of per capita
93 even if it has withheld such per capita payments in the past. This payment shall be based on the
94 most recent per capita assessment.

95 Church building and grounds generally mean more to the members of a congregation than
96 simply an asset on the books. They represent a special place where members have experienced
97 life-changing conversions of faith in Jesus Christ, experienced inspiring worship and witnessed
98 and participated in baptism, marriages, funerals and memorial services. It is recognized that
99 vacating a property in which the congregation has heavily invested, both spiritually and
100 financially, would be a difficult sacrifice to make.

101 Church buildings also hold a special place in the presbytery as a whole. For well over two
102 centuries this presbytery has planted new churches and aided fledging congregations by

103 encouraging members from existing churches to become part of these new adventures; it has
104 given and loaned money to congregations young and old; it has worked diligently in fulfilling its
105 role in the calling of pastors; and across the years has prayed with and for each and every
106 church within its bounds as part of its common calling.

107 Bearing in mind the spiritual and financial investment of both members and the presbytery in
108 each of our local churches, any resolution to dismiss a congregation shall take into account the
109 particularities of the congregation's historical ties with the presbytery as it related to its
110 property. A resolution for dismissal may include permission for a congregation to leave with its
111 property.

112 All original rolls, registers, minutes and historical records remain the property of the PC (U.S.A.)
113 (Book of Order- G-3.0107).

114 If the resolution recommends dismissal it shall:

115 A.) specify how the separation will affect:

116 i. assets, (including physical plant, property, graveyards and church
117 records)

118 ii. liabilities (including presbytery indebtedness, other indebtedness,
119 outstanding commitments and pledges such as financial implications
120 related to the presbytery i.e. shared and designated mission, and per
121 capita)

122 iii. legal implications (including taxes, corporate status, insurance,

123 iv. the processes and procedures for the church to join another
124 reformed denomination. (See Appendix 2 for details)

125 B.) be approved by written ballot at a duly called congregational meeting where representatives
126 of the Presbytery were present and given permission to speak, and a majority of the members on the
127 active roll were present and casting ballots. The outcome of the voting will be determined by a 2/3
128 majority of those casting ballots.

129 If the Conversation Team determines that a congregation will not work in good faith according
130 to these guidelines, or that a mutually agreeable resolution cannot be reached, it will report its
131 findings to the Coordinating Council. The Council will make a full report to the Presbytery on
132 the work of the Conversation Team, including when deemed necessary a recommendation that an
133 Administrative commission be formed (Book of Order G-3.0109b)

134 The Conversation Team will report the action of the congregation to the Coordinating Council.
135 The Council will forward the action of the congregation to the Presbytery at a duly called

136 meeting, along with the report of the Conversation Team and the Council's recommendation as
137 to whether to approve the release of the congregation.

138 If the vote of the Presbytery favors dismissal, (a simple majority shall be required) the
139 Presbytery shall hold a service of celebration of the Church's and Presbytery's unity in Christ,
140 and the Church shall be dismissed to the Reformed Body agreed upon and stated in the Resolution.

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165 APPENDIX 1

166 A process for discernment and congregational discussion

- 167 A. The session after prayer and much discussion drafts and sends a letter to the
168 membership outlining the issues.
- 169 B. A workshop for all church leaders should be arranged for discussion and prayer
170 regarding options, ramifications and consequences of each option and steps that
171 would be needed.
- 172 C. Several forums should be held so that all members would have an opportunity to
173 hear, ask questions and engage in prayer together.
- 174 D. A follow up letter including a survey may be desirable.
- 175 E. Sessions for prayer and pastoral support should be provided.
- 176 F. After a period of discernment the Session will decide on the next steps needed and
177 inform the congregation of them.

178 APPENDIX 2 –

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180 Practical Considerations for the Congregation

- 181 A. Tax Status: A congregation which ceases to be a PCUSA congregation is no longer
182 included in the PCUSA's "group revenue ruling" by which a Presbyterian congregation is
183 granted 501(c) (3) non-profit tax-exempt status.

184 Such status is required not only for exemption from tax payments to state and federal
185 authorities and the filing of certain tax forms, but is required also for real estate tax
186 exemption, for U. S. Postal Service bulk mailing permits, for grant-making foundations,
187 and for the receipt of many forms of grants and bequests. Gifts to a church which does
188 not have valid tax-exempt status may not be claimed as charitable contributions. Legal
189 and other services will be needed to secure new 501(c) (3) status.

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

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

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197 APPENDIX 3

198 Practical Considerations for the Minister

- 199 A. G-2.0502 As the Lord has set aside through calling certain members to be teaching
200 elders, so the church confirms that call through the action of the presbytery. The
201 presbytery shall determine whether a particular work may be helpful to the church in
202 mission and is a call to validated ministry requiring ordination as a teaching elder. In the
203 performance of the ministry, the teaching elder shall be accountable to the presbytery.
204 Teaching elders have membership in the presbytery by action of the presbytery itself,
205 and no pastoral relationship may be established, changed or dissolved without the
206 approval of the presbytery.
- 207 B. G-2.0509. When a teaching elder accepts or continues membership of any character in
208 another denomination, except as provided in this Constitution, the presbytery shall
209 record the fact and delete the teaching elder's name from the roll.
- 210 C. A minister considering departure from the PCUSA is advised to consult, with the advice
211 of counsel encouraged, the provisions of the Board of Pensions plan (which are
212 available at <http://pensions.org/library/publications/rules.htm>) and to consult also with
213 legal and tax professionals regarding the special tax issues which relate to
214 clergypersons.]
- 215 D. Pension: A Presbyterian minister's pension benefits are "vested," and a member (or
216 survivor of a member) of the Presbyterian Board of Pensions' plan has a nonforfeitable
217 right to receive a retirement pension based on contributions and increases once pension
218 credits are vested.
- 219 E. Medical Insurance/Death-and-Disability: The Board of Pensions' major medical plan and
220 death-and-disability provisions require active participation in the plan, and participation
221 is not available to ministers who are not on the roll of a presbytery. A member may be
222 eligible to purchase continuation of medical benefits for a limited duration. Life (death)
223 insurance and disability insurance policies are available commercially at varying rates.
- 224 F. Tax Issues: A Presbyterian minister is entitled to certain income-tax benefits and
225 provisions due to his/her ecclesiastical status in the PCUSA. An "independent" minister
226 may or may not be entitled to such benefits and provisions.
- 227 G. Insurance: A minister no longer serving a PCUSA congregation or no longer on the roll of
228 the PCUSA should make arrangements for professional liability insurance coverage if
229 continuing to engage in professional ministry.