

THE PRESBYTERY OF WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA

**“Guidelines for Congregations Considering
A Request to Presbytery to be Dismissed”**

PREAMBLE

The Presbytery of Western North Carolina of the Presbyterian Church (USA) proclaims its enduring belief in the unity of the one Church of Jesus Christ, of which it is a grateful part. The members of the PCUSA are united by obedience to the Lord Jesus, who alone is head of the Church, by fidelity to the teachings of Scripture, and by adherence to the denomination’s Constitution, which enshrines such vital affirmations as:

- *“Unity is God’s gift to the Church in Jesus Christ. “To be one with Christ is to be joined with all those whom Christ calls into relationship with him.” (BO: F-1.0302.a)*
- *“The particular congregations of the Presbyterian Church (USA), wherever they are, taken collectively, constitute one church.” (BO: F-3.0201)*
- *“All property held by or for a congregation, a presbytery, a synod, the General Assembly ... is held in trust nevertheless for the use and benefit of the Presbyterian Church (USA).” (BO:G-4.0203)*

When this unity that is our Lord’s gift appears to be in jeopardy within one of its Congregations, the Presbytery must determine, in the light of the wider mission of Christ’s Church, what is best and most faithful for all its members and resources.

The goal of this Presbytery will always be reconciliation and continued relationship with all its Congregations.

The following process outlines the steps this Presbytery will reluctantly use to respond to situations where a Congregation, or its leaders, contemplate no longer maintaining their ordination vow to *“be governed by our church’s polity, and ... abide by its discipline.” (BO: W-4.4003.e)*

Approved at Presbytery Meeting July 30, 2013

In so doing, this Presbytery will act with consistency, pastoral responsibility, accountability, gracious witness, openness and transparency.

- I. The Congregation shall consider the Biblical imperatives in these passages:
Peace Romans 14:19; Galatians 5:22; Colossians 3:15
Unity John 17:21; I Corinthians 12:12-13; Ephesians 4:1-3
Purity I Corinthians 5:9-13; Hebrews 12:14; James 4:8
- II. Individual members, including officers (Deacons, Ruling Elders and Teaching Elders) may, at any time, unite with other Reformed denominations following provisions in the *Book of Order* (BO: G-3.0201.c)
- III. Congregations may be dismissed by Presbytery to a member of the World Communion of Reformed Churches or to another Reformed denomination whose organization Presbytery determines is conformed to the doctrines and order of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).
- IV. Congregations considering a request to be so dismissed, shall follow these steps:
 - A. The Session shall meet with representatives from the Committee on Ministry (COM) (BO: G-3.0307) on one or more occasions, focusing on reconciliation of any perceived serious problems.
 1. At the first meeting, the Session shall give the COM representatives a written statement of their reasons for considering leaving the PCUSA.
 2. The Session shall also then deliver to the COM representatives a current membership directory (including addresses and telephone numbers) of the Congregation.
 3. The Session shall, at this meeting, recognize the right of the Presbytery to communicate directly, at any time by various means, with members of the Congregation.
 4. The Session shall agree to hold no meetings with members of the Congregation that consider matters pertinent to leaving the PCUSA (other than those specified later in these Guidelines) without the permission and participation of Presbytery.
 - B. If the Session determines to proceed, it shall request the Presbytery to call a hearing of the Congregation, and to establish the rules for that hearing. Due notice shall be given orally from the pulpit at regular church services on two successive Sundays, the first of which shall be at least ten days prior to the hearing. Prior notice shall also be given in the parish newsletter or bulletin.
 1. At least 33% of the active members of the Congregation shall be present.
 2. Representatives appointed by Presbytery (COM and Presbytery staff acting on its behalf) shall be present throughout and shall have the right to speak.
 3. The question* to be discussed is “Shall the _____ Presbyterian Church request dismissal to another Reformed body?”
 4. Ample time shall be provided for both speakers wanting dismissal and those wanting to stay with the PCUSA.
 5. No type of vote for any purpose shall be taken at this hearing.

Approved at Presbytery Meeting July 30, 2013

- C. If the Session, after consulting leading members of the Congregation, is still determined to proceed, then:
1. Presbytery (the chairs of the Administrative Board and the COM, in consultation with the General Presbyter, acting on its behalf) shall, if it has not already done so, appoint an administrative commission (AC), which shall include some with financial expertise.
 2. The AC shall obtain an appraisal of the property by a licensed appraiser (selected by Presbytery in consultation with the Congregation), the cost of which shall be shared equally by the Presbytery and the Congregation.
 3. The AC shall meet with representatives of the Congregation and negotiate a legal agreement binding on all parties and addressing all forms of the property, contingent only on Presbytery's final approval. This agreement shall include appropriate financial terms in the light of the needs of the Congregation, those wishing to continue in the PCUSA, and the overall mission of Presbytery.
 4. At a duly called meeting, the Congregation shall approve this legal agreement in accord with *BO: G-1.0503.d*. Members of the AC shall have the right to speak at this meeting.
- D. After the legal agreement has been approved by the Congregation, the Session may – no sooner than three months and not later than six months after the first hearing described above (Presbytery having the right to modify these time limits for good reason in the light of negotiations for the legal agreement in IV.C.3) – request the Presbytery to call a second hearing of the Congregation, and to establish the rules for that hearing.
1. Due notice shall be mailed to all members of the Congregation at least thirty (30) days prior to the hearing, and shall be given orally from the pulpit at regular church services on two successive Sundays, the first of which shall be at least ten days prior to the hearing.
 2. The Clerk of Session and the Stated Clerk of Presbytery shall agree on the roster of active members, and the procedure for their registration at this hearing. Due diligence shall be exercised to ensure that only those eligible to vote do so.
 3. At least 50% of the active members shall be present.
 4. Members of the AC appointed by Presbytery shall be present throughout and shall have the right to speak.
 5. The question* to be discussed is “Shall the _____ Presbyterian Church request Presbytery to dismiss it to this Reformed body: _____?”
 6. Ample time shall be provided for both speakers wanting dismissal and those wanting to stay with the PCUSA.
 7. After discussion and prayer, a secret written ballot shall be taken on this question, the only choices being “Yes (Request dismissal)” or “No (Do Not request dismissal).”
 8. If 75% of those active members present and voting vote to request dismissal, the request shall go to Presbytery.
 9. If any five members, present and voting, contest the regularity (the call for, the conduct of or the vote taken) of the second Congregational hearing, they shall send the details of their allegation, postmarked within

Approved at Presbytery Meeting July 30, 2013

ten business days of that meeting, to the Stated Clerk of Presbytery, who shall convene the Permanent Judicial Commission to render a decision.

- E. At a meeting of Presbytery to consider the Congregation's actions, the Presbytery, while reserving its rights in *BO: G-4.02* shall:
1. Receive an explanation of the legal agreement, which can be debated but not amended, from both members of the AC and representatives of the Congregation.
 2. Hear from representatives of the Congregation in favor of its dismissal.
 3. Hear from representatives of those wishing to remain in the PCUSA.
 4. Hear from members of the AC, which shall recommend a decision to Presbytery.
 5. Be informed of any financial contributions from this Congregation to the Presbytery, Synod or General Assembly, and to this Congregation by the Presbytery, Synod or General Assembly within at least the last ten years.
 6. Be informed what provisions will be made for those members who wish to remain in the PCUSA and for any Teaching Elders, Christian Educators or Commissioned Lay Pastors associated with the Congregation.
 7. Be informed how the Congregation's dismissal would affect the mission and ministry of the Church in this Presbytery.
 8. After discussion and prayer, the Presbytery shall vote by written ballot on this question, *”Shall the Presbytery of WNC dismiss the _____ Presbyterian Congregation to this Reformed body: _____ with the terms in the legal agreement?” The only choices shall be “Yes” or “No.”
 9. If two-thirds of those commissioners, present and voting, vote in favor of the dismissal, that shall be the action of the Presbytery.
 10. If the Congregation (or any part of it) is dismissed, it may not use the prior name of the Congregation.
 11. If the Congregation is not still a member of the specified or another Reformed body at any time within ten years, the property of the dismissed Congregation shall revert back to the Presbytery.
- V. The intent in any dispute within the life of a Congregation is to achieve reconciliation in the Lord. It is therefore the clear intention of this Presbytery to continue to pursue that goal, and to assure any departing members of a Congregation of its continuing prayers for them and its willingness to welcome them back, at any time, to that part of God's family known as the Presbyterian Church (USA).

*As circumstances warrant, the Presbytery, in consultation with the Session, may modify the exact wording of these questions.

TEMPORARY ADDENDUM:

If any Congregation is currently working with Presbytery through these Guidelines, it may continue to do so under the Guidelines as they were on April 30, 2013 or follow the Guidelines as revised above.