

## Questions from Open Forum Meetings

### With Answers

What benefits do you see in being part of a connectional church?

From New Testament times on, churches have planted, supported, encouraged, prayed for and helped one another. Being members of a church is itself a statement that we are a part of something bigger than ourselves as individuals. Being part of a connectional church reminds us that God has created, loves and saves people with varieties of opinions who share reliance on God's saving grace through Jesus Christ for their salvation and commit themselves to be witnesses to God's grace through Christ in their lives in the world together with others. As a connectional body, common standards, accountability, support are possible and expected. Further, being a part of a connectional church means that we engage with others beyond our congregation in mission together in the world and that in times of need in our congregation we have assistance from the larger church of which we are a part. In this presbytery, First Presbyterian which was itself planted/established by Presbytery, has historically been a leader in church planting and in more recent days has spearheaded our work with the church in Madagascar. Practically speaking, partnership connections include mission, colleges, seminaries, youth retreats, leadership development, officer training, a resource center, support for pastors, Montreat, and The Acts 16:5 Renewal Initiative etc. In times of transition in pastoral leadership, the presbytery has been a helpful resource to facilitate the transition. The presbytery has nominated members and pastors at First, Presbyterian to share their leadership gifts with the larger denomination including membership on General Assembly Committees and Commissions and three General Assembly Moderators, Marshall Dendy, John Anderson and William Kadell.

If the presbytery believes as First, Orlando does what are we doing to encourage churches to fight the denomination?

The presbytery is working to not fight but reform the denomination by offering an amendment to the Book of Order by putting back language about fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman and chastity in singleness. The overture to do that will go to the General Assembly meeting in July 2012. If the commissioners to that General Assembly agree to recommend the change, it will require a vote of the majority of commissioners (elder commissioners from congregations and ministers) in a majority of the 173 presbyteries of our denomination by July 2013.

In the meantime, in June 2010 the presbytery adopted an interpretation of the current Book of Order, G-2.0104a. that the acceptable character of ministers who will be received into this presbytery will include fidelity and chastity as defined above.

Is there a process for presbytery dismissal from the PCUSA?

No.

Our church is ready to move forward with God's work. When will this vote for our dismissal be scheduled?

The session in consultation with the Resolution Team will determine whether to request permission of the Committee on Ministry for the team to conduct a congregational meeting so that the congregation can vote on whether to ask the presbytery to dismiss it. Prior to that time, the session will need to determine the Reformed body to which it will recommend that the congregation be dismissed and will need to work with the team to provide for those members who wish to stay in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) should the congregation request dismissal.

A valid meeting to request dismissal will have 50% of the members of the church in attendance. 2/3 of those present and eligible to vote must vote in favor of dismissal in order for the presbytery to be able to consider a request. Presbyterian polity does not allow for proxy votes affirming that the Spirit works in the gathered body and votes are taken after opportunity for discussion and discernment.

Where can I view the new rule in its entirety?

Amendment 10-A together with the rationale for it, the policy of Central Florida Presbytery on receiving ministers, the presbytery's overture to the 2012 General Assembly and the Policy for Gracious Witness are available on the presbytery's home page in the Stated Clerk's Corner.

How large is the PCUSA?

10,560 churches

How many churches have left by transfer to other denominations in the last five years?

According to the reports to the General Assembly from presbyteries 84 churches have been dismissed to other denominations in the past five years, 375 churches have been dissolved and 102 were merged in the same period. In the same time period the PCUSA has added 144 by new church development charters and transfer from other denominations.

What is the denomination's stand on the way to salvation?

Church membership is open to people who confess their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Across the centuries, the church has affirmed Jesus as Savior and Lord in a variety of confessional statements. The Shorter Catechism, one of the church's confessions, perhaps puts it most succinctly: Q 21 Who is the Redeemer of God's elect? The only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and continueth to be, God and man, in two distinct natures, and one Person forever. In 2002, the General Assembly meeting sent to the church a study paper entitled Hope in the Lord Jesus Christ which gives a full discussion of the church's understanding of how Jesus is understood in the church. That document is available at [www.pcusa.org](http://www.pcusa.org) when you enter the title in the search engine.

Can a homosexual minister be received in this presbytery?

No, the interpretation of G-2.0104a, which our presbytery adopted in June of last year does not allow for this.

When did the language come into the Constitution of our church that was removed with the passage of 10-A?

1997 when the amendment that created G-6.0106b was approved by a majority of the presbyteries.

Can you tell us if there are other changes in the denomination?

Changes to the Book of Order only happen when a majority of commissioners to meetings of a majority of our 173 presbyteries agree to the change after a presbytery or a General Assembly commissioner to a meeting of the General Assembly recommends it. Any changes proposed in 2012 will be posted at [www.pcusa.org/ga219](http://www.pcusa.org/ga219) The constitutional language added in 1997 then removed in 2011 had been supported by historical standards and Authoritative Interpretations which stated clear prohibitions, these were removed at the 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly. Previously the General Assembly allowed an addition to the scruple clause by allowing not only the possibility to scruple belief but also practice.

What is going to happen with the buildings at First Presbyterian Church of Orlando after gracious dismissal? Will the new Reformed church move to another site, allow the minority against dismissal to meet in church facilities or what are other options?

Our presbytery Gracious Witness Policy provides for dismissal of a congregation

to another reformed body with its property. The buildings can go with the dismissed congregation. It also provides that provision must be made for those members who wish to stay in the Presbyterian Church (USA). The possibility of a division of assets to provide for a home for a remaining congregation or some sharing of property will be part of the negotiation prior to dismissal.

What happens to a pastor's retirement?

All PCUSA ministers are fully vested in the retirement program at ordination. All funds contributed for that minister's retirement are available when the pastor reaches retirement age. There is no provision for ministers of another denomination to pay into the retirement plan of the Board of Pensions of the Presbyterian Church (USA). A minister who transfers to another denomination and that minister's congregation pay into another retirement plan and a different health care plan, but the retirement benefits for the term of service in the PCUSA remain available at retirement along with the good experience apportionment credits that Presbyterian ministers, active and honorably retired, receive.

Can an individual sue to block this action by FPCO? What court of the church is the suit filed in?

An individual cannot sue to block the action, but any individual who does not wish the congregation to be dismissed can vote against dismissal at the congregational meeting. Voting will be by secret ballot. If there are members of First Presbyterian Church of Orlando who wish to remain in the denomination and in possession of the property, those members can appeal to the presbytery to be declared the true church with a right to the property and the presbytery must hear their appeal and decide the matter as is provided in the Book of Order, G-4.0207.

In the light of the Presbytery vote on June 7, 2011 is this dismissal process still necessary? The session and the Resolution Team are working together now to seek to determine an answer to that question. Input from town hall meetings and conversations with session members and Resolution Team members are an important part of that process.

Can every member of the Resolution Team affirm for themselves and for all others that Jesus Christ is the sole means of salvation?

Yes!

Do you think there is a chance to reverse the ordination change? It will take 1 ½ years to get the result. Is it worth the wait?

There are indications that the ordination standards can be changed by the overture that

Central Florida Presbytery sent to General Assembly. Presbyterians are committed to reforming the church according to the Word of God.

If our church makes the suggested move, do we risk losing members? Do you have some estimate of how many? The church has already lost members over this issue with strong feelings toward both sides of the discussion. It is difficult to know how many members will be lost (or gained) as a result of this process.

How will Central Florida Presbytery provide for the spiritual, emotional needs of those at FPCO who wish to stay in the PCUSA?

According to the “Gracious Dismissal” policy Central Florida Presbytery is an advocate for those who wish to stay in the PCUSA. We will make sure that the process is fair and provide for the worship and pastoral care of those members who remain in the denomination. This will be done in consultation with those who remain in the denomination.