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Dear friends and members of MVPC,

May 21, 2012

I am writing to you on behalf of the full session of our church to explain in writing some of the reasons for the recommendation of our church to be dismissed from the PCUSA.

First and foremost, a majority of leadership in the current PCUSA does not believe that the Bible is the inerrant word of God and the ultimate truth and authority for Christians. Instead, they believe that each individual is able to decide for himself how to interpret the Bible. This progressive modern view gives human reason and thinking the ultimate authority and asks the Bible to submit to it. This change in thinking has been developing and increasing over the last 100 years. The traditional orthodox view sees the Bible itself as the ultimate authority and believes that we humans must submit to it.

We Presbyterians at MVPC (and other like-minded congregations) have been trying to maintain our faithfulness to Scripture as the ultimate truth, but we find that we can no longer ignore the distractions brought on by this fundamental disagreement in our denomination. We can no longer agree to disagree and continue our ministry with integrity. Asking to be dismissed simply recognizes current reality. We believe being in a more like minded group will spur us on to love and good works because we will be able to focus on ministry and not on theological debate.

The more human centered, more progressive or liberal viewpoint on authority has led to certain positions within the life of the church which we in the orthodox, biblically focused wing of the church find very troubling. The PCUSA has become increasingly accepting of a wide range of beliefs about Jesus. There is no longer agreement within the church (PCUSA) and its leadership about who Jesus is and what He did. The Book of Confessions has not changed, so we appear on paper to have an orthodox faith, but the truth is that the PCUSA is functionally pluralistic.

To say that it is functionally pluralistic means that there is a wide range of unbiblical beliefs about Jesus held and affirmed within the PCUSA. Here are some examples:

1. As long ago as 1981 Rev. Kaseman was ordained while denying the full divinity of Jesus and his ordination was sustained by the highest Presbyterian Court. He was asked, "Was Jesus God?" He answered, "No, God is God." Later he said, "Saying Jesus is one with God is a better way of saying it...but I, too, am one with God."
2. In 1993, a conference entitled "Reimagining God" was funded by the PCUSA where Presbyterian worship leaders denied the existence of the transcendent God and worshipped the god within ourselves and encouraged the exchange of Jesus Christ for the goddess Sophia.
3. In 2000, The Rev. Dick Ficca a member of Chicago Presbytery was paid by the denomination to speak at a "Peacemaking Conference". He said that world peace is threatened by religions that make exclusive claims and he asked, "If God is at work in our lives, whether we're Christian or not what's the big deal about Jesus."
4. In 2001 the GA made a motion that declared, "the singular saving lordship of Jesus Christ." It was defeated because the assembly was persuaded that it would be offensive to other religions.

5. In 2002 at a conference sponsored by the Covenant Network of Presbyterians, Anna Case-Winters, associate professor of theology at PCUSA's McCormick Seminary declared that the atoning death of Jesus Christ is an outdated doctrine. At that same conference, Paul Capetz former professor of theology at our Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, agreed saying, "We don't need any more crucifixions," implying that the crucifixion was just a cultural phenomenon.
6. In the 2006 General Assembly a group of delegates affirmed their belief that Christ was only one among many paths to salvation. A debate ensued and by the narrowest of margins the Assembly affirmed that Jesus was uniquely savior.
7. Research Services of the PCUSA in 2010 showed that less than half of the members, elders and pastors believe that Jesus is the only way to salvation.
8. In recent years, several PCUSA pastors have publicly declared their inability to believe that Jesus rose from the dead. Among them are John Shuck of Elizabethtown, TN, Rob Martin of Palo Alto, Helen Dekker, in the Presbytery of West Jersey, and James Rigby of Austin.
9. In 2011, the removal of fidelity in marriage and chastity in singleness from the requirements for ordination.
10. In April 2012 the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission approved the ordination of practicing homosexual Lisa Larges to the office of pastor, saying there is nothing in scripture or our confessions to prohibit her ordination.
11. Proposed for this General Assembly in early July are overtures from 5 Presbyteries asking that marriage be declared to be between two people and not a man and a woman, as scripture clearly says.

Also, in opposition to the clear positions of scripture, the PCUSA has consistently supported choice in regard to abortion. The position of the church was established in 1970 and has never changed. The 1970 GA ratified the following statement, "Women should have full personal choice concerning the completion or termination of their pregnancies."

In 1996 the GA rejected an overture affirming that "partial birth abortion of a live fetus except to save the life of a mother, falls short of God's plan for humankind." In every GA over the last 2 decades, a motion has been made to have the PCUSA affirm the sanctity of life and oppose the extermination of God's little ones living within the womb. Not one of those motions has been voted in the affirmative.

The bottom line problem from an orthodox point of view, is what it means to say the Bible has authority. Will the Bible be interpreted through the lens of human reason or will we human beings stand under the authority of the Bible and let it interpret the world to us. In 2010, the Rev. Landon Whitsitt, vice-moderator of the PCUSA declared, "Sola Scriptura [scripture alone] is dead in most places and rapidly dying in others." I don't dispute the accuracy of his statement regarding the PCUSA, however he meant it as something to celebrate and we see it as something to lament.

On June 10th you will be asked to concur or not concur with the session's decision to ask Seattle Presbytery to dismiss our church to the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians. Your vote in this matter will guide the session. If we have a strong vote of concurrence, we can look forward to being dismissed most probably by the end of the year.

So please plan on being at worship on June 10th to participate in the future of your church. Only members may vote. If you cannot be present on the 10th you may pick up a ballot at the Connection Center and either turn it in there, or mail it in before the 10th.

Many of you have asked, "If we leave will we lose our building?" and the answer at the moment seems to be no. Seattle Presbytery has been very gracious in its interactions with us and we are extremely encouraged at this point that things can be fairly negotiated.

With you in the service of Christ,
Pastor David/Session of MVPC