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Pastor: Dr. David Diehl

Dear MVPs,

The session is writing to you to try and answer the many questions that came up in the Town Hall meeting and that we are hearing from you in formal and informal communication. We are going to answer these in Q and A form.

1. What is denomination affiliation and how does it impact a church?

As defined by the dictionary, a denomination is a religious organization whose congregations are united in their adherence to its beliefs and practices. Denominations that are basically united theologically can offer support, collaboration and resources aimed at a common cause. Of course denominations that are not at all united theologically may be hurting the ministries of their individual churches on both sides of a theological divide. MVPC's denomination is the Presbyterian Church USA that was formed by the uniting of the southern and northern branches of Presbyterianism in 1983. The PCUSA is divided into 16 regional areas called Synods which are further divided into 173 Presbyteries. We are in the Synod of Alaska NW and the Presbytery of Seattle.

2. Why don't we pick up and leave if we are dissatisfied with the larger church?

First of all we believe that scripture has a very strong emphasis on the unity of believers expressed particularly in John 17 and I John and throughout scripture. Presbyterians have always put a strong emphasis on the word covenant. We make covenants with God and with one another. Our constitution says in F3.0201 that "the particular congregations of the PCUSA ...taken collectively, constitute one church called the church." So we have a deep theological reluctance to act independently.

Secondly, all the buildings of the Presbyterian churches are owned by the larger church, G-4.0203, "All property held by or for a congregation...is held in trust for the use and benefit of the PCUSA." So any separation from the PCUSA will affect our local church quite significantly. The Presbytery established in 2008 a guideline for Church Dismissal and Property Disputes. You can access this on the Seattle Presbytery's web-site under the minutes of January 2008.

<http://www.seattlepresbytery.org/documents/presbytery-meetings/archived-minutes/2008-minutes/>

3. How does Maple Valley Presbyterian support the denomination financially and do any of our dollars go to support the National Church?

The mission of the denomination beyond the local congregation is supported through what is called per capita apportionment. This supports the local Presbytery [Seattle], the local Synod [Alaska NW] and the national body, the General Assembly [GA]. Currently the only money that we are sending to GA is \$6.50 per member per year. If you do not wish that your money go to the GA you should contact Kevin Malone our clerk of session at kcmalonept@yahoo.com and let him know. He will delete that amount from our giving. The session felt that you should each speak for yourself in this matter. The session finds the local commitments of Presbytery and Synod to be biblically appropriate and therefore we hope that no one will withhold that portion of their giving which amounts to approximately \$26 per member.

4. At the town hall meeting Pastor David mentioned other areas of theological difference with the PCUSA. Can you give examples?

The fundamental challenge is the wide difference in the way we read and understand the Scriptures. Our view of the Bible is that it is the infallible and authoritative final word on matters of life and faith and that when it speaks clearly, it is to be obeyed. The recent passage of 10-A is just one example of people coming to very different conclusions after reading the same texts. Another key difference is Christology [the study of Jesus]. We affirm that Jesus is the eternal second person of the Trinity who came to earth, God in the flesh, lived a sinless life, died as a sacrifice for the sins of the world and was raised bodily back to life on the third day. An increasing segment in our denomination either disbelieves one of these statements or all of them. We also affirm the historical view that Christ alone is God's means of salvation for the world and that no one can be saved apart from Him. Increasingly this view is challenged in our denomination as well.

We also believe that God created human life in his image and that we have no right to take the life that he has formed in the womb. The PCUSA clearly affirms choice in matters of abortion and we deeply disagree with that position.

5. If we were to be dismissed to another denomination, what would be the estimated cost for Maple Valley Presbyterian to retain ownership of its property?

We cannot know this at this time. In other Presbyteries the number has ranged from nothing to millions of dollars. Our Presbytery, as mentioned earlier, has a document whose spirit seems to be to try and follow Godly dispute resolution practices, which include a serious intention to stay out of the civil courts. Please refer to the Presbytery minutes of January 2008.

<http://www.seattlepresbytery.org/documents/presbytery-meetings/archived-minutes/2008-minutes/>

6. Do we have to be dismissed to another denomination? Could we become an independent church?

The Constitution only allows for dismissal to another reformed body. That is another denomination that shares our Reformed theological heritage. Therefore we could not be dismissed to independent status. Alternative reformed bodies with local representation would be the Evangelical Presbyterian Church and the Christian Reformed Church. If we choose to ask to be dismissed the normal time from first asking to dismissal is one to two years.

7. Will Pastor David lose his pension and if so will the church make up that loss?

Pastor David is fully vested so he will receive what he is due to date, but would be unable to participate further and since he is in his last few years of eligibility he would lose considerable ground. The session, if we decide we must seek separation from the PCUSA, will seek to insure fairness for our Pastor.

8. Why are we so focused on homosexuality?

Like any social issue, there seems to be one or two that dominate in any period of history. For years the pro-life and pro-choice divide seemed to be the primary issue of controversy between the orthodox and progressive branches of the Church. Although still a very important issue biblically, it seems to have taken a back seat to the issue of practicing homosexual relationships. We at MVPC did not make this a pressing issue. The progressive element in the church did. And because it raises

serious biblical interpretation issues, it has become the tip of the ice-berg in the conflict over biblical interpretation between orthodox and progressive understanding of the scripture.

Homosexual practice is no worse than other sin, but the issue here is whether it is sin or not. We believe the scriptures teach consistently in the Old Testament and New Testament that it is sin. While there are many opinions, the vast majority on the progressive side claim that it is God's gift to be celebrated and affirmed. To read more, Covenant Network of Presbyterians - <http://covnetpres.org>. These are two contrary and incompatible positions. See the "Bible and the Practice of Homosexuality," by James Edwards of Whitworth College on our web-site under [about us/resources - presbytery issue](#).

9. Does this mean that a practicing homosexual person would be unwelcome at MVPC?

We certainly hope not. Everyone is welcome in our church and everyone who claims Jesus as Lord can become a member in our church. However, to be a leader in our church-elder, deacon or pastor, a higher standard must be met and one of those standards is in our sexual conduct. A leader must be chaste in singleness or express fidelity in marriage between a man and a woman.

The truth, however, is that a practicing homosexual person will at times feel uncomfortable when the word of God is preached. But then, we expect that all who attend MVPC will be uncomfortable from time to time as the truth of God's Word challenges different aspects of our lives.

10. What is the exact change in the constitution?

The Book of Order was changed in its requirements for deacon, elder and pastors. The old language read, "Those who are called to office in the church are to lead a life in obedience to Scripture and in conformity to the historic confessional standards of the church. Among these standards is the requirement to live either in fidelity with the covenant of marriage between a man and woman or chastity in singleness...."

The new language reads, "Standards for ordained service reflect the church's desire to submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life. The governing body responsible for ordaining or installing shall examine each candidate's calling, gifts, preparation and suitability for the responsibilities of office. The examination shall include but not be limited to, a determination of the candidate's ability and commitment to fulfill all requirements as expressed in the constitutional questions for ordination and installation. Governing bodies shall be guided by Scripture and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates."

11. That seems reasonable - why all the fuss?

The main reason for all the controversy is that this now opens the door to local options in churches and Presbyteries to allow a practicing homosexual person or a non-married sexually active heterosexual person to be ordained if that Presbytery allows, and everyone knows that there are many Presbyteries that will allow just that. The problem centers on the fact that ordination is for leadership across the whole church not just locally.

Also the authority of scripture has been weakened by changing from the word 'obedience' to 'guided.' We can be guided by many things, but we don't have to submit to those things.

12. How does this affect us locally?

At present the changes allow us to maintain any standards for elder or deacon that we believe are clear in the Word of God. They also leave our choice of pastor completely up to the congregation, so at our local level nothing changes. At the Presbytery level, in our case nothing changes if those of us on the orthodox side stay involved in making sure that the Bible really is guiding each candidate as they come before the Presbytery for ordination. This is more difficult now but still very possible. There are

churches in Seattle that may want to hire a practicing homosexual person based on their theological disposition. However, they can be stopped if we stay involved.

13. Shouldn't we stay and contend for the truth rather than leave the denomination?

Currently the possibility of restoring the older language, or of turning back the clock on this in any way nationally is very bleak. Over the years the orthodox and progressive sides of the church have fought many theological battles and slowly the orthodox side of the church has become increasingly discouraged and began to leave the church. Since 2007, we have lost 251,027 members and there have been 78 churches dismissed to other denominations with many more on the way this year. The Wenatchee and Cle Elum churches are leaving. Sequim left last year and Chapel Hill in Gig Harbor and Sumner are looking like they are on the way out, as well as possibly five other Olympia Presbytery churches. In Seattle, most evangelical churches feel that they are supposed to stay for the time being. The departure of our fellow evangelical churches makes it very hard to change anything nationally. Locally in Seattle we still have the opportunity to influence our Presbytery theologically since we are in the majority, but it will take vigilant effort because our majority is slim. Bellevue First and University Presbyterian, our two large evangelical churches have decided to be very heavily involved in Presbytery in order to have an influence on and serve the church as a whole.

14. What has session decided?

Currently session is in a period of discernment. We are talking with other churches locally and nationally. Pastor David is going to a large gathering in Minneapolis in late August, of churches that voted against the new amendment. Our elders are planning to attend some meetings in the fall with elders of other churches in Seattle that voted against the amendment. And of course we continue to seek the Lord for his direction.

15. How do I communicate with session?

You can write to Kevin Malone our clerk of session at kcmalonept@yahoo.com. If you wish to call Pastor David you may call him at his church office at 425-432-5876 ext. 11, or please feel free to speak with any session member.

This document and additional information is on our web-site www.mvpc.net, under [about us/resources – presbytery issue](#). You will find there an *MVPC Statement of Essential Beliefs* and a biblical analysis of the pertinent passages by James Edwards entitled “*The Bible and the Practice of Homosexuality*.” If you would like printed copies, please contact our front office at 425.432.4399. You can also get a CD of MVPC’s Town Hall meeting at the Connection Center if desired.

We want to thank you all for your prayers and support of the session taking the time to seek God for biblical direction for our church in this manner.