

Westlake Hills Presbyterian Church
Austin, TX

A **Called Session meeting** was held on Wednesday, **June 8, 2011**, at 7:00 p.m. in the church conference room.

Members present:

Rev. Dr. Peter Barnes	Mike Douglas	Jim Little	Julie Smith
Rev. Dr. Carol Friesen	Betty Hood	Liza Martin	Sheryl Streder-Becker
Rev. Peter Haas	Barbara Humphrey	Mary Mills	Mike Ussery
Alex Alleman	Jim Johnson	Rick Milvenan	Mike Ward
Drew Beckley	Laurence Ligon	Dennis Pauling	Wally Warrenburg
			Weldon Whiteside

Clerk: Sarah Wehner

Guests: WHPC Business Manager, Bill Laughlin, Denominational Relations Committee Members Amy Hanschen and Paul Gamel, Preferred Path Ministry Representative, Karl Slaikau, and Communications Team Member, Susan Whiteside.

Members excused: Phil Haag, Ray Mashburn, and Fred Wilder

Dr. Barnes called the meeting to order and opened the meeting with a devotional reading from Matthew 5 about love and reconciliation. He ended with prayer.

The purpose of the meeting was to bring the Session up to date on Denominational Relations Committee matters.

1. What has happened since a letter was sent from the WHPC Denominational Relations Committee (DRC). Dr. Barnes reviewed events from the last month, beginning with the charge from Session to explore the possibility of joining with other churches to create an overlay over the current geographic area of Mission Presbytery based on theological alliances. The Denominational Relations Committee voted to host a meeting at WHPC to discuss this proposal with other churches leaders and sent letters of invitation to selected pastors and elders throughout the presbytery. It was decided that this first meeting would be a closed meeting to avoid possible fear of retribution or misunderstanding. Fifty people responded affirmatively to the invitation, and additional participants indicated that they would use Skype to be included in the discussions. Dr. Barnes welcomed any interested WHPC elders to attend.

When the idea of a presbytery overlay was first being considered, Dr. Barnes contacted Hilary Shuford, Executive Presbyter of Mission Presbytery, to discuss and seek counsel on the proposal. It was decided that another meeting should be planned, but repeated attempts by Dr. Barnes to schedule a second meeting brought no response from Hilary or from Miles White, Stated Clerk of Mission Presbytery. However, when the letter of invitation reached the presbytery office, Miles White responded with his own letter citing disapproval of the meeting in general and of the efforts of Dr. Barnes specifically. There has been a significant response to the Clerk's letter by both presbytery committees and other church leaders who question the

appropriateness of the letter and the accuracy of its content. Dr. Barnes said that he is hopeful that there will be an agenda item added to the June Presbytery meeting for further discussion.

Elder Jim Johnson was asked to review an email sent to session elders that outlined the options considered by the DRC. The options were:

1. Celebrate the decision and press for new open ordination standards in our Sessions and Presbytery.
2. Remain in Mission Presbytery and press for the presbytery to adopt ordination standards which retain "fidelity in marriage and chastity in singleness."
3. Cloister ourselves (i.e. take no formal action to leave the denomination, but simply operate unto ourselves and ignore at least controversial parts of denominational relations).
4. Seek to organize a new theologically-aligned Presbytery, remaining within the denomination but operating in a formal structure with other congregations who share our theology. Possible options would include:
 - a. A presbytery consisting of a geographical area larger than Mission Presbytery, possibly state-wide.
 - b. A concurrent, overlay presbytery, using the same geographical boundaries as Mission Presbytery.
 - c. A presbytery consisting of a geographical part of Mission Presbytery.
5. Request dismissal from the Presbytery and seek a new Reformed denomination which is more theologically aligned with the congregation's beliefs, such as the Presbyterian Church in America, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Reformed Church in America, or a new Reformed denominational group which might be formed by other Presbyterian congregations across the nation, looking for a theological home.
 - a. Some of these denominations are not in correspondence with the PCUSA and dismissal to them is not likely. The most likely options are CPC, EPC, RCA and possible new Reformed body.
6. Leave the denomination and become a congregational church with no formal affiliation, but possibly informal relationships with other theologically-aligned congregations.

Elder Johnson asked if there were other options that were not listed above and if so, that they be passed to the DRC as soon as possible.

Elder Drew Beckley voiced concern that the DRC had exceeded the authority granted by the Session and that the Session was following rather than leading the work of the committee. Dr. Barnes responded that the proposal was the result of the committee's exploration and Elder Rick Milvenan asked if a vote to proceed should be taken. Dr. Barnes asked if everyone would like to make a motion and also request to waive the two-reading rule. Discussion followed concerning the current lack of congregational input, whether the Session was sufficiently informed to make a decision, and whether a vote should be taken after the meeting at WHPC on Saturday, June 11. Dr. Barnes asked if the Session was able to support the meeting and the DRC. He noted that the last paragraph of the proposal that indicated that the DRC would pursue all means to accomplish our goals had been eliminated. Elder Drew Beckley made the following motion:

Motion: That Session endorse the plan of the Denominational Relations

Committee (DRC) to host and facilitate the discussion of possible options to move forward. Session has not voted to approve any proposal, but it supports the meeting at WHPC on June 11, 2011 and the work of the DRC. It encourages checking agendas at the door and grace by all in attendance. The initial proposal language has been changed to eliminate the wording that indicates that the DRC will pursue all means to accomplish its goals. The agenda for the meeting will include:

- **10A - Paul Gamel, DRC Chair**
- **Implications of 10A and MFOG for local churches – Rev. Larry Coulter**
- **Views of Homosexuality – Rev. Dr. Peter Barnes**
- **5 theological reactions to homosexual ordination – Rev. Larry Coulter**
- **Possible Responses / Options and Elements of Proposal – Phil Barnes, WHPC DRC Member**
- **Development of Overture - Jim Johnson, WHPC Elder, DRC Member**
- **Where do we go from here? Rev. Larry Coulter**

The motion carried.

2. Plans for the meeting this Saturday. Dr. Barnes and DRC member, Amy Hanschen, gave a brief outline of the meeting's agenda. Elder Jim Johnson added that the hope was that the Saturday attendees would take the proposal back to their own Sessions and that together a joint resolution would be drafted that could be endorsed by many churches, whether they wanted to be part of a new presbytery or not. Elder Johnson emphasized that the proposal is not a WHPC proposal, but the work of the DRC. He said that the DRC is unanimous in believing that this proposal is the best alternative and opportunity to come together, but the committee is eager to hear from others and open to hearing other ideas.

3. Information about ideas for a Communication Plan/Strategy. Dr. Barnes introduced Susan Whiteside, who is partnering with WHPC Communications Director, Nancy Gray, to create a communication plan for the congregation to provide input to the Session on denominational issues. Dr. Barnes began by saying that where trust is high, communication is deemed to be good and where trust is low, communication is perceived as being bad. Susan added that when there is an absence of communication, people tend to come up with their own ideas and that there is sometimes a sense of secrecy. She said there is a need to do a good job of explaining what is happening in the denomination and to emphasize the role of Session versus that of the congregation. To that end, a Denominational Issues link from the WHPC website will be created to provide accurate information and to allow for member feedback. Dr. Barnes added that an announcement would be made at the Congregational meeting on June 12th of two listening meetings that would allow for comments and questions. Susan noted that there would also be a FAQ page, which would allow for information to be added as it becomes available, ensuring transparency in sharing as many facts as possible.

4. Observations from the Preferred Path Ministry. Dr. Barnes introduced Karl Slaikeu, WHPC member and developer of the Preferred Path Ministry (PPM). Karl said that the purpose of the ministry is to address life's conflicts using biblical principles. He said that the

most important principles for WHPC to follow at this time are prayer, acting in love, communicating, and facilitating mediation. To that end, the members of the PPM will facilitate two meetings this summer, June 19th and July 17th for listening and for sharing information. In addition, smaller meetings will be available for those who wish to talk to elders or PPM trained leaders. Karl said that it is important for members who are troubled to have a way to receive all of the information and help they need.

In closing, Dr. Barnes said that the issue of leadership will become more familiar and it can sometimes become a burden. He said he would rather be in a season of celebration, but it is not what is on Session's watch at this time. Advising elders, he urged them to pray, operate out of faith, lead in love, grace, and truth, be sensitive and passionate, and be courageous and decisive. He ended by saying he was grateful to be a partner in ministry.

With no further business to discuss, Rev. Dr. Carol Friesen closed with prayer.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Wehner
Clerk of Session