

FW: Session Meeting tonight - message from Ray | X | Inbox | X



Cynthia Mohle to me

11:32 AM (17 minutes ago) Reply

From: Cynthia Mohle
Sent: Tuesday, August 02, 2011 11:30 AM
To: 'Alex Allemann (allemann@winstead.com)'; 'Betty Hood (betty@bettyhood.com)'; 'juliepowersmith@gmail.com'; 'Laurence Ligon (lligon@austin.rr.com)'; 'Mike Ussery (mussery@aol.com)'; 'Barbara Humphrey (bhumphrey@austin.rr.com)'; 'Dennis Pauling (dennis.pauling@sbccglobal.net)'; 'Drew Beckley (drbecklev@me.com)'; 'Jim Little (James.Little4@austin.rr.com)'; 'lizamartin2@gmail.com'; 'mdouglas@austin.rr.com'; 'Rick Milvenan (rmilvenan@mcginnislaw.com)'; 'weldonwhiteside@gmail.com'; 'Fred Wilder'; 'Jim Johnson (jjohnson@johnson-rial-parker.com)'; 'Mary Mills (Jeffrey_mills81@hotmail.com)'; 'Mike Ward (Ward.Statesman@gmail.com)'; 'Phil Haag (phaag@mcginnislaw.com)'; 'Ray Mashburn (raymashburn@att.net)'; 'Sheryl Stredler-Becker (Sheryl.austintx@swbell.net)'; 'Wally Warrenburg (wwarrenburg@austin.rr.com)'; 'Peter Barnes'; 'Carol Friesen'; 'Peter Haas'; 'Jim Bankhead'; 'Bill Laughlin (bill.l@whpc.org)'; 'budr@whpc.org'; 'nancvg@whpc.org'
Subject: Session Meeting tonight - message from Ray

Dear Session,
 Ray Mashburn asked me to send you Phil Haag's below email to allow you some time for reflection and prayer.
 Blessings,
 Cynthia

From: Haag, Philip S. <phaag@mcginnislaw.com>
Subject: Session Meeting Tomorrow (Tues, Aug 2)
To: "Betty Hood" <betty@bettyhood.com>, juliepowersmith@gmail.com, weldonwhiteside@gmail.com, "Ray Mashburn" <raymashburn@att.net>
Cc: kslaikeu@chorda.com, "Kerry Pollard" <kpollard@austin.rr.com>
Date: Monday, August 1, 2011, 2:28 PM

Betty/Julie/Weldon/Ray:

Unfortunately, I have a business meeting tomorrow night that I cannot miss, which means I will miss the Session meeting. As four elders who (I think) have been at most of the listening sessions, I wonder if one or two you might be willing to report to the Session on the July 17 listening session and the two listening sessions yesterday. The report should capture your overall impressions of the comments without having to specifically identify who said what.

My overall assessment is that the listening sessions have been very effective and well received. The comments in general have not been polarizing but, in my opinion, have focused on receiving more information about the consequences of 10-A, about the impact of 10-A on how the Church does business and about the current ten alternative responses. There have been some threats to leave the Church as well as information about some people who have already left. There have been some comments regarding and (I believe) a strong underlying sentiment to keep the Church membership intact. There have been suggestions for further study, the need to make a decision at some point in time, an overall sense of relief and gratification that the Session is no longer rushing toward an August decision and an overall gratitude that the Session is also not rushing to distance itself from 10-A. My informal, uneducated estimate is that the majority of commenters taking a position on 10-A actually support it. In that regard, I suspect that we are hearing mainly from people who felt motivated to come out and state their opposition to the perceived plan of the Denominational Relations Committee to establish an overlay presbytery and that people who might support the plan may have been less motivated to comment and therefore absent.

The other overriding impressions are that:

1. Everyone appreciates the decision to slow the process down. I have heard no one say otherwise.
2. The need to address the issue without losing membership is paramount in many people's minds.
3. Many want to learn more about the ten options and the theological underpinnings for the underlying issue.
4. Many people are frustrated with the time spent on the issue and would prefer to be spending time on mission.
5. Concern has been expressed about some of the practical implications of a possible "split" including impacts on pension and property ownership.
6. Many raised questions about the relationship with Presbytery and exactly how much influence it might have on the Church's nominating process for pastors.
7. Many have also asked who the ultimate decision making body is and the appropriate role that our pastorate should be playing in this process.
8. Lastly, most everyone wants to stay in the process and be kept up to date.
9. Many expressed the desire to allow gay ordination.
10. Many suggest that other factors should also be considered in the nominating process in addition to sexual orientation; e.g., chastity in singleness, greed, fidelity in marriage, honesty, etc.
11. If a public opinion poll were taken, my overall sense is that the commenters (at the least) would be very happy if this whole issue disappeared.

I have copied Karl and Kerry on this email so that they may add their impressions if they so choose.

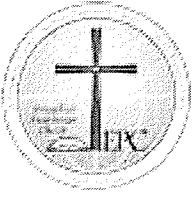
Thanks, Phil

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Possible Responses to the Passage of Amendment 10-A

1. Remain in Mission Presbytery, incorporating open ordination guidelines into the congregation's nominating process and examinations for its officers and new pastors.
2. Remain in Mission Presbytery, taking a "wait and see" approach as the Session remains in a season of prayer and discussion to discern God's will and timing for possible responses.
3. Remain in Mission Presbytery and take no formal action to leave the presbytery or the denomination, instead choosing to maintain the previous ordination standards within our congregation.
4. Remain in Mission Presbytery and press for the presbytery to return to previous ordination standards that include "fidelity in marriage and chastity in singleness."
5. Request that Mission Presbytery recognize each local church's "statement of expectations for church leaders" to be used by the individual church for nominating candidates for elder and deacon, and by the presbytery's Committee on Ministry in examination of candidates for Minister of the Word and Sacrament for that congregation.
6. Request that Mission Presbytery adopt a proposal coming out of the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly's Office which would create "Affiliate Memberships" for persons with a crisis of conscience in presbyteries and provide for the creation of separate governing commissions, such as the Committee on Ministry and Committee for Preparation for Ministry, within each presbytery.
7. Join with other churches in seeking to organize a new presbytery working with the Presbytery, the Synod, and the General Assembly's Administrative Commission on Middle Governing Bodies, and remain within the denomination but develop a new formal structure separate from Mission Presbytery. This new presbytery would hold to traditional ordination standards.
8. Request dismissal from Mission Presbytery to join another reformed body that is more conservative theologically (such as the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, the Reformed Church in America, or a new group that may be formed by Presbyterian congregations across the nation).
9. Request dismissal from Mission Presbytery and become an independent church with no formal denominational affiliation, but open to possible informal association with other theologically-aligned congregations.

EPC



Evangelical Presbyterian Church

“The motto of our church summarizes our stance: “In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity.”

The EPC began in the fall of 1980 and spring of 1981 when a group of pastors and elders held meetings in St. Louis, Missouri for planning and prayer. They came from mainline Presbyterian denominations like the United Presbyterian (northern churches) and the Presbyterian Church in the United States (southern churches).

When the EPC started in 1981 we determined that on the basic essentials of the Christian faith we would not disagree, but on anything that was not essential, such as the issue of ordaining women as officers or practicing charismatic gifts, we would give each other liberty. Above all, we committed ourselves to loving each other and not engaging in quarrels and strife. The result is that when we get together in our regional and national meetings, we spend most of our time in worship and fellowship and almost none in arguing with each other.”

What is their theology of Biblical Authority?

“All Scripture is self-attesting and being Truth, requires our unreserved submission in all areas of life. The infallible Word of God, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, is a complete and unified witness to God's redemptive acts culminating in the incarnation of the Living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible, uniquely and fully inspired by the Holy Spirit, is the supreme and final authority on all matters on which it speaks.”

Do they Ordain Women?

“The understanding of the role of women in the life of the church differs widely. Equally sincere Christians differ on this issue. In the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, the decision to elect women as Ruling Elders or Deacons is left to the discretion of the local congregation. The local congregation, subject to presbytery approval, determines whether they will have women as pastors. We believe that, whatever a congregation's view of office, women should be encouraged to serve as God has called and gifted them.”

What is their structure /form of government?

“To be Presbyterian is to be governed according to the pattern of elders seen in the Old and New Testaments. We are ruled neither by bishops in a hierarchical model nor by members in a congregational model. Biblically qualified elders are recognized through congregational election and, along with ministers, rule the church corporately. It also means being connected in mutual accountability and responsibility.

Every church has a right to send representatives to presbytery and general assembly meetings. Further, our form of government attempts to achieve a two-to-one ratio between lay delegates (elders) and ministers at those levels. This provision helps keep the EPC from being a clergy-

dominated denomination, out of touch with the needs and interests of the average person in the pew.”

What is their theology re. sexuality issues?

“A Position Paper identifies the positions of the EPC to the world. It requires the approval of two General Assemblies, including a minimum of one year circulation among the presbyteries.

From the Position Paper:

In light of the biblical witness, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church concludes:

1. The Bible clearly states that homosexual behavior is a sin.
2. God forgives repentant sinners. As Christians who are ourselves sinners redeemed by the grace of God, we must reach out to those persons who are struggling with homosexuality, offering them the word of hope that is the Gospel to the end that they may experience true wholeness through the freeing, renewing grace of God in Jesus Christ. “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” (John 8:36)
3. Unrepentant homosexual behavior is incompatible with the confession of Jesus as Lord, which is required of members of the EPC.
4. Unrepentant homosexual behavior is incompatible with the ordination vows for the offices of Deacon, Ruling Elder and Teaching Elder.”

An evangelical church

“To be "Evangelical" means to believe in the importance of sharing the good news that through Jesus Christ the kingdom of God has been inaugurated, freeing people from the guilt and power of sin through personal faith and repentance. We express this priority on evangelism by stating it in our governing documents as the first work of the church. This priority is evidenced in our emphasis on church planting and world missions.”

A reformed church

“To be "Reformed" means several things. Historically, it means that we trace our roots to the Reformation, when John Calvin and others led the movement to reform the Church according to Scripture. Theologically, it means belief in the absolute sovereignty of God and that the highest good is God's glory. This historical and theological heritage is often expressed in the "solae" of the Reformation-God's grace alone as the only way to be reconciled to God, faith alone as the only means of receiving God's grace, Christ alone as the ground of God's saving grace, Scripture alone as the only infallible authority for belief and God's glory alone as the ultimate purpose for the lives of men and women.”

A confessional church.

The EPC uses their own ‘Essentials of Our Faith’ and the Westminster Confession of Faith and both the Westminster Catechisms as their confessional documents.

“The purpose of "Essentials of Our Faith" is to define core beliefs of the Christian Faith. It expresses historic Christian beliefs common to all true believers and churches throughout the world.

Both the Westminster Confession of Faith and "Essentials of Our Faith" are important documents in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. The Westminster Confession of Faith and "Essentials of Our Faith" are not alternative statements of truth, nor are they competitive statements of truth. They each serve important and harmonious purposes within the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. The Westminster Confession of Faith preserves our commitment to the historic orthodoxy of the Reformed Faith. "Essentials of Our Faith" preserves our commitment to historic evangelicalism.”

“The Westminster Confession of Faith has had a number of revisions over the years. Not only has the Evangelical Presbyterian Church adopted some important revisions that bring it up to date, but in addition, it has adopted a modern language version that has carefully maintained the integrity of the document while providing greater readability to our modern world.”

Random footnotes gathered from www.epc.org:

“We lie in the middle area of a continuum of American Presbyterian denominations. The EPC believes in historic Christianity as taught in Scripture, thus looking to the Bible as our guide on moral issues and believing in the reality of sin, salvation and judgment. At the same time, we want to give evidence of what we consider a mark of the true church-loving fellowship-by holding our convictions with charity toward others and charitably allowing a diversity of views within the EPC on non-essential issues. Thus we identify positively with those Presbyterian denominations which hold to biblical authority.”

“The congregation has the exclusive, inalienable right to own and control its own property.”

“The Evangelical Presbyterian Church has no "per capita tax." We do not believe that one court of the Church has the right to put a "tax" with obligation on another lower court. The Presbytery or General Assembly does have a per member asking which is a voluntary contribution of the particular congregation to support the administrative and benevolence work of the Church. Gifts may always be designated.”



The Reformed Church in America

What is their theology of Biblical Authority?

The final authority is the Bible– the revealed Word of God.

Do they Ordain Women?

Women can participate fully in the life and ministry of RCA churches. In 1958, General Synod adopted a statement upon recommendation of the Committee on Ordaining of Women:

“Scripture nowhere excludes women from eligibility to the offices but always emphasizes their inclusion, prominence, and equal status with men in the Church of Jesus Christ.”

What is their structure /form of government?

The Reformed Church in America is of 17th Century Dutch origin. Today, it spans two countries, the United States and Canada, and includes about 1,000 churches and 170,000 confessing members.

The Reformed Church has a presbyterian form of government. Although some of the terminology is different from the PC(USA), the structure is very similar.

The local church is governed by a board of elders and deacons drawn from within the church. Elders encourage spiritual growth in the church and help oversee ministry. Deacons help with ministries of mercy, service, and outreach. Together, the elders and deacons of a church form the “consistory.” A consistory governs each church, and is in turn governed by a “classis.”

A “classis” is comprised of minister and elder representatives from congregations. Most classes (the plural of classis, pronounced “class-ease”) are grouped by geographical proximity. The classis supervises the congregations and ministers within its bounds. It exercises judicial power over the decisions of individual consistories; receives new churches into the denomination; ordains, installs, and dismisses ministers; and oversees students of theology.

The next assembly in the RCA is the regional synod, which is responsible for all the classes in a particular geographical area. There are eight regional synods in the United States and Canada and each has three to eight classes within its jurisdiction. The regional synod also creates programs to further the work of the gospel and the denomination in its area.

The highest assembly and judicatory in the RCA is the General Synod. Its membership is made up of minister and elder representatives from each classis, as well as from each regional synod. In its annual meeting each summer, the General Synod sets the direction and tone for denominational

ministry. It has authority in all matters relating to denominational program and policy. It also has general responsibility over all lower assemblies (regional synods, classes, and consistories).

WHPC would be in Synod of the Heartland (includes North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, Minnesota, Iowa, and western Missouri). The Classis might be "Central Plains", but the churches listed there are in Nebraska, Kansas, and Oklahoma. I can find only three congregations on the Web in Texas: in Plano, Colleyville (outside of Ft. Worth), and a very small congregation in San Antonio.

What is their theology re. sexuality issues?

Their current policy was first adopted in 1978:

- The clear sense of Scripture is that human sexuality was created for heterosexual expression.... Those with a homosexual orientation are not to be treated with fear, loathing or recrimination, as is often the case. Such approaches must be pitied and resisted. The biblical approach is one of humility and compassion.
- Heterosexuality is not only normal; it is normative. Homosexual acts are contrary to the will of God for human sexuality.
- The homosexual invert [one who does not decide to become homosexual, but for whom genetic, hormonal, or psychosocial factors have influenced his or her sexual orientation] is no more to be blamed for his/her condition than a disabled person. It follows, then, that the church's ministry to the invert may best begin with the attempt to lift a burden of guilt that need not be carried. Inverts may not idealize their orientation as a legitimate alternative, but neither should they blame themselves for their sexual orientation.
- While we cannot affirm homosexual behavior, at the same time we are convinced that the denial of human and civil rights to homosexuals is inconsistent with the biblical witness and Reformed theology.

Since 1978, the General Synod has periodically discussed and reconsidered their position. In 2009, the General Synod voted to "affirm the value of continued dialogue and discernment on the topic of homosexuality within the church" and recommended that "officeholders and ministers avoid actions in violation of the policies of the earlier statements of General Synod on ordination and relevant state laws on marriage, with sensitivity to the pastoral needs of all involved."

A confessional church.

The Reformed Church accepts three creeds that were written in the first few centuries after Jesus' death:

- The Apostles' Creed

- The Nicene Creed
- The Athanasian Creed

In addition, four “standards of unity” tell what the Reformed Church believes:

- The Heidelberg Catechism
- The Belgic Confession
- The Canons of Dort
- The Confession of Belhar

In 1978 the Reformed Church approved “Our Song of Hope” as a contemporary statement of faith.



WESTLAKE HILLS
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Motion to the Clerk

Submitted by: Mike Ussery, Elder

Date: July 31, 2011 (for August 2, 2011 Called Session Meeting)

Motion: That Session ratify the action of elders Mike Ussery, Alex Alleman, Liza Martin & Betty Hood, in examining and receiving the following new members on July 31, 2011. Each of these prospective members responded affirmatively to the questions of membership in the Book of Order.

By Reaffirmation of Faith:

Alexis & Chris Guggenheim
Susanna & David Neahusan
Heidi & Charlie Rasner
Nicole Ruiz

(include any special notes, such as if person has affiliate membership with another Presbyterian Church and the name of that church.

By Certificate of Transfer:

Peggy & Ben Alexander
Rebekah & Paul Bonde
Marie & Thomas Jeah
Bill & Jo Lauglin
Amy Paylor
Charlie Sack

By Profession of Faith (already Baptized)

Morgan & Kyle Bender

By Profession of Faith (Baptism) NA

Supporting Documents / Data for Motion:

Explanation of Objective(s) and Summary

Justification for Motion

Other alternatives considered to meet objective(s) and reason(s) that they were not selected:

Typically these new members are received via a Called Meeting of elders and a moderator at the final session of a new member class. However, for the final session of this new member class a moderator was not available to call such a meeting.