

## CONGREGATION LETTER ON GRACIOUS DISMISSAL FROM THE PCUSA

Fellow Members of the Worthington Presbyterian Church:

Outlined below are the reasons the Session of our church has decided to explore leaving the Presbyterian Church of the USA (PCUSA). This decision has followed more than 5 years of discussion as the General Assembly of the PCUSA has become, increasingly, more radical in moving away from the fundamental concepts of the conservative Christian reformed theology upon which our denomination was founded.

During this more than 5 year period of time, several hundred Presbyterian churches throughout the United States have left the PCUSA for other Presbyterian denominations who continue to uphold our fundamental, conservative views on the theology of Christ. Some within our own Kiskiminetas Presbytery, as well as many from the surrounding Presbyteries, have already made this decision.

Please read the information below and feel free to ask questions of the Session upon issues which you feel are unclear. The process of "Gracious Dismissal" required by our Presbytery cannot proceed without a large majority of our congregational membership coming together in agreement.

Why are we seeking to leave PCUSA? We still want to be Presbyterian, but the simple truth is that the PCUSA left us years ago. Why would we say that? We will present three major areas of theological changes made by PCUSA (**response of Worthington Presbyterian Church (WPC) is in bold print**):

- I. **PCUSA is diminishing the authority of Christ. Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation.**
  - In 2001, the General Assembly (GA) debated whether salvation is won *only* by Christ. This debate resulted in the following statement, "Jesus Christ was unique *but not necessarily the only way to salvation.*" **Jesus' own words tell us, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)**
  - In 2011, the Office of the GA published a nationwide survey of PCUSA pastors. The pastors were asked how they felt about the statement, "Only followers of Jesus Christ can be saved." Only 41% of PCUSA pastors "agreed"; 45% "disagreed"; and the remainder responded that they did not know. **This is denial that Jesus' atoning death was necessary and casts doubt on the belief that Jesus is the Son of God. "There is no name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12)**
  - At the 2016 GA, a "Muslim partner" was invited to lead the gathered Presbyterians in a common prayer. However, he prayed to Allah seeking the Presbyterians conversion to Islam. In addition, Jesus was referred to as a mere prophet (like Muhammad) rather than the Son of God.
  - **What unites WPC with all Christians throughout the world is our faith in the "person of Jesus Christ"; his life, death, and resurrection. (John 5:23-24; 14:6, Acts 16:30-31, Philipians 2:9-11)** In recent years, PCUSA is moving away from this core belief toward a theology of universal faith in "something" not "someone":
    - **This means, a faithful Muslim, or a faithful Buddhist, or a faithful Hindu (who does not believe Jesus is the Son of God) will be viewed as equal to a faithful Christian in the eyes of God and can receive eternal life.**
    - **It is their faith in "something" rather than "someone" that makes them equal to a Christian in this new theology. (Romans 10:9-10)**

## II. PCUSA has become overly politicized to the extent that we now advocate for social issues rather than Jesus Christ.

These changes in theology have had a significant impact on the mission of the denomination. At one time, PCUSA prided itself in sending thousands of missionaries around the world to proclaim Jesus Christ. However, that emphasis on evangelism has been replaced by a great zeal for domestic and international advocacy. **The question is not whether you agree or disagree with these political issues; but, whether our mission money and our denomination should be devoted to issues of political advocacy.** Here is a very small sampling of issues where PCUSA has been involved:

- Energy carbon taxes, increased taxes to achieve income re-distribution, unrestricted abortion rights, support for sanctuary cities, energy pipeline opposition.
- The Moderator for next GA wants everyone in PCUSA to read one book, **NOT the Bible**, but instead Waking Up White and Finding Myself in the Story of Race
- PCUSA has filed briefs to lower courts and even the Supreme Court arguing that-it is unconstitutional for a state legislature or court to post the 10 Commandments. And it is unconstitutional for a city council to open its meetings with a Christian prayer. And, that the Second Amendment does not give citizens the right to bear arms.
- Divestment from holdings in Caterpillar, Hewlett-Packard, Motorola Solutions and other American companies who do business with Israel because of the Israeli and Palestinian conflict. And, the PCUSA has supported resolutions aimed to pressure Israel into accepting a Palestinian state without obtaining a written Palestinian agreement recognizing the nation of Israel.
- In 2016, GA rejected a motion to require PCUSA seminaries to include evangelism in their curriculum.

In contrast, WPC maintains that salvation is the business of the church, it is the reason the church exists. Christ is the *only* Savior. It is the responsibility of the church to deliver this message out of love for people and for the truth. To this end, we have been seeking to reestablish our role in missions (evangelism):

- Financial support for a missionary couple embedded in a Muslim community in France.
- Financial support for a young woman working with Coalition for Christian Outreach at Clarion University.
- Hosting a Grief Share support group which features biblical concepts for healing from grief.
- Hosting the Worthington Food Bank, financial support for Blessings in a Backpack (food for elementary children), and providing Blessing Bags for children entering foster care will hopefully be a witness for the work of Jesus Christ to the local community.  
(*Matt 5:14-16; 28:16-20, Acts 20:24, Mark 16:15-16, 2 Thessalonians 2:14-14*)

III. **The Bible is the Word of God. PCUSA has been weakening the authority of scripture and changing traditional teachings to accommodate cultural changes rather serving as a beacon of light to the world.**

- In 2010, changes were made to the PCUSA Book of Order concerning those called to office in the church. The change went from lead a life in obedience to Scripture to shall be guided by scripture. [Book of Order G-2.0104(b)] **Don't be deceived by what appears to be a small change, there is a significant difference between "obeying" and "guiding". Individual churches and presbyteries use this change to permit modification of the Word of God as they deem necessary. (2 Timothy 3:16)**
- In 2010, PCUSA used the aforementioned language change of "guided by scripture" to permit the ordination of practicing members of the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer (LGBTQ) community to the office of pastor.
- This was followed by the GA of 2014 where the "redefinition of marriage" allowed for same-sex marriage by PCUSA clergy in PCUSA churches.

**WPC upholds "obedience to Scripture" and the covenant of marriage as established by God in the Creation narrative (Gen 2:23-25) and affirmed by Jesus. (Matt 19:4-9)**

- **Christians simply do not have the authority to change God's Word, because "authority" means author's rights, and we are not the authors of God's words. (Proverbs 30:5-6, Galatians 1:6-7, 10, 2 Timothy 3:16, Revelation 22:18-20)**
- **Being a practicing homosexual is just one of many sexual practices that fall outside of the covenant of marriage and are clearly identified in the Bible as sinful and outside of God's will.**
- **Homosexuality happens to be the sin for which the PCUSA has chosen to alter the "intent of Scripture" to conform to the dictates of culture. However, regardless of the sin in question, the church must object to changing the "intent of Scripture". (Leviticus 18, Romans 1:26-28, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Colossians 3:5-6, Jude 6-7)**

IV. **What benefit does WPC derive from its association with PCUSA? The purpose of a denomination is to bring together a group of churches with a common theology and a common mission. If we are not bound by a common theology then what binds us? We believe the time has come to make a decision between two options:**

- To *remain in PCUSA* is actually a decision to change from the fundamental concepts of the conservative Christian reformed theology upon which our denomination was founded and instead support the views of PCUSA thereby conforming to the world. **The Apostle Paul, in Romans 12:2, reminds us that we are to resist conforming to the world and instead seek to be transformed to the Word of God. In (Romans 1:32), Paul reminds us of the condemnation associated with continuing to approve of those who practice what we know to be wrong.**
- To *pursue dismissal* from the PCUSA in order to join with another Reformed Presbyterian denomination of our choosing is actually a vote to continue our conservative Christian reformed theology and to seek the will of God.
- We acknowledge that some desire a third option: to remain in PCUSA while maintaining that we are seeking to adhere to the Word of God. This option cannot logically be possible; PCUSA does not seek to obey the will of God. Is this third option acceptable in God's eyes? (Rev 3: 15-22)

We understand the argument that the WPC should stay in the PCUSA and continue to argue our opinions vigorously and hope that the liberal decisions made over the last several years, will be reversed. However, we

know that as other conservative churches leave the PCUSA, our ongoing arguments will remain a minority opinion.

Therefore, with sadness, we the members of the Worthington Presbyterian Church Session have requested “Gracious Dismissal” from the Presbyterian Church (USA) Denomination.

V. **WPC has been upset with the course of PCUSA for many years.**

Although the option to leave PCUSA began to be explored just 5 years ago, the reality that PCUSA had drifted off course was addressed in 2001 by a group of churches called the Confessing Church Movement (CCM). This movement implored PCUSA to return to its reformed beliefs. You may not remember, but WPC was a part of this effort and adopted its own Confessing Church Statement on May 7, 2001. If you read through this statement, you will find that we are not seeking to rewrite this statement, but rather we seek to remain true to its intent.

**Worthington Presbyterian Confessing Church Statement**

- A. We confess that Jesus Christ is God’s only Son (Luke 9:35) and that he alone is Lord of all (Philippians 2:9-11)
  - We profess and believe that Jesus and God are One (John 10:30).
  - We profess and believe that salvation can only be received through Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross (Romans 5:6-10).
- B. We confess that Holy Scripture is the revealed and infallible Word of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
  - We profess that the Bible is God’s Word to us for faith and practice.
  - We Profess that all parts of the Bible, in their original form, are “inspired by God and profitable for teaching, reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness” (II Timothy 3:3-16).
- C. We confess that God’s people are called to Holiness in all aspects of life.
  - We profess that the sanctity of marriage between a man and a woman is to be honored as God’s unique gift in creation (Genesis 2:24).
  - We call on all people, including ourselves, to repent of sinful ways and receive Jesus’ forgiveness (I John 1:6).

**Worthington Presbyterian Vision Statement**

- A. In keeping with the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20), the WPC seeks to be a dynamic Christian community centered in the worship of the triune God and bearing witness to the Gospel of Jesus, our Lord.
- B. As Jesus’ disciples we strive to build vibrant lives, strong families, and a fellowship in which church members care for and love one another and together seek the well-being of our community.

Unfortunately, PCUSA ignored the pleas of this movement and continued its theological shift from Reformed doctrine. As a result, many of the churches involved in CCM have since sought dismissal from the PCUSA because they no longer recognized their denomination. WPC seeks to rejoin these “like-minded” churches. Although the name of our denomination will change, the theology that goes back many generations will remain the same.

We encourage you to carefully research the topics in this letter and read and reflect upon the Scriptures noted. Go to God in prayer and ask “Where can WPC best serve God and best fulfill our mission before the Lord.”