

Report of the Administrative Commission for First Presbyterian Church of Seattle

February 16, 2016

Executive Summary

After thoroughly investigating allegations of mismanagement by the leadership of First Presbyterian Church of Seattle (FPCS), the Administrative Commission for FPCS has determined that the governing board of FPCS (the FPCS session) is unable or unwilling to manage wisely its affairs. The Administrative Commission has, therefore, assumed original jurisdiction with the full power of the session, in accordance with the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). This decision was not arrived at lightly, but after much prayer and deliberation.

Seattle Presbytery appointed the Administrative Commission (AC) on November 17, 2015, and assigned it a number of responsibilities. First, the AC was asked to reiterate the Presbytery's invitation to the FPCS session to enter into the Presbytery's Communal Discernment and Gracious Separation process. Second, the AC was directed to investigate "... allegations, admissions, and events [which] suggest that the session is affected with disorder and call into question its ability and willingness to exercise its authority and manage wisely its affairs." And third, the AC was instructed to take actions it deemed appropriate based upon its findings. The accompanying Report of the Administrative Commission for First Presbyterian Church of Seattle describes how the AC discharged the responsibilities entrusted to it. It sets forth detailed findings and identifies the actions taken by the AC.

The Report's findings focus on the conduct of the session and former co-pastors of FPCS. The AC determined that the FPCS leadership:

- Failed to follow the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) and its own procedures;
- Failed to be truthful and forthcoming with its own congregation, ministry partners, and the Seattle Presbytery; and
- Failed to wisely manage the affairs of the church

FPCS leadership attempted to declare unilaterally that FPCS is no longer a part of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and not subject to the jurisdiction of the Presbytery. The FPCS session did this rather than engage in the process set forth in the Presbytery's Communal Discernment and Gracious Separation Policy.

The AC extended repeated invitations to FPCS leadership to enter into the Gracious Separation process, which were ignored or rebuffed.

The AC also repeatedly invited the FPCS session to engage in a non-conditional meeting "... to listen to your concerns, to build trust, and to find a way forward." The FPCS session refused these invitations and responded that they would meet only if the AC agreed to legal conditions that would treat any such meeting not as part of the AC's ecclesiastical process but rather as a confidential "settlement" negotiation.

The AC determined that the FPCS session's attempt to amend the existing bylaws of the church on October 27, 2015, was improper and ineffective, as was the congregation's subsequent vote to "disaffiliate" from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Therefore, the existing bylaws, adopted on May 8, 2005, remain in effect. The church remains a part of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) because it has not been dismissed--a step that only the Presbytery is constitutionally authorized to take.

The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) also requires that a congregation may be released only to another Reformed body. No Reformed body has advised the Presbytery that it is prepared to accept the FPCS congregation. In addition, some members of the congregation want to remain within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The AC has concluded that the actions of the FPCS session have caused a schism within the congregation and those who disagree with the actions of the FPCS session constitute the "true church," in accordance with the denomination's Constitution.

The AC reviewed pertinent available documents, but the FPCS session refused to provide any documents requested by the AC. The AC also met with and received information from more than 45 individuals. The AC's investigation confirmed the allegations made to the Presbytery about the FPCS session. It also revealed additional irregularities in the records and the finances of the church and a broad-based pattern of misconduct by the former co-pastors.

Because the former co-pastors of FPCS renounced the jurisdiction of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) effective December 16, 2015, leaving the church without a pastor, the AC has appointed an interim pastor.

In summary, the AC conducted a thorough investigation and afforded the FPCS session a full opportunity to be heard. But the FPCS session refused to produce any records, and it refused to meet with the AC except under unacceptable conditions. Despite this non-cooperation, the AC's investigation, as reflected in the Report, confirmed allegations and identified additional irregularities, which together show a broad-based pattern of misconduct by the FPCS leadership.

The AC has advised the persons who previously constituted the FPCS session that they no longer may act in that capacity. The AC has elected church officers and has appointed an individual to handle administrative matters. It also has called for an audit of the church's finances. The AC expects to supplement this report after it has had an opportunity to review church records.