

Escalon Presbyterian



Our Mission:

SEEK: *to bring others to faith in Jesus Christ*
SUPPORT: *personal growth through God's Word*



SERVE: *in Mission locally and globally*
SUSTAIN: *a Christ-centered Fellowship*

Denominational Update

February 8, 2013

To the EPC Family -

As many of you have read in our church newsletter, the Session of Escalon Presbyterian Church has been engaged with the Presbytery of Stockton relating to our concerns with the theological and organizational trajectory of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. These conversations have taken place over the course of the past year in Session (your annually elected governing board for congregational leadership). Additionally, our Presbytery convened two separate town hall meetings to facilitate discussion related to denominational concerns (March 10 & July 28, 2012). Our own church continued the conversation with two denominational discussion forums with handouts following worship (August 12 & September 16, 2012).*

As a result of these Presbytery and congregational forums, your Session formally requested a Review Team (RT) from the Presbytery of Stockton to discuss denominational concerns. Specifically, we wrote:

Our Session has deep concerns related to the direction of the PC-USA as a whole, evidenced by the many actions of the last two General Assembly gatherings of our denomination. For us, this is a systemic problem not centered around a few "issues" but rather related to a consistent Reformed understanding of what the Presbyterian Church believes, how it is properly ordered and how it engages in mission according to those beliefs.

The Presbytery appointed a review team which met with our Session on Tuesday, October 16, 2012. Following this discussion, which included a formal interview of the Session and the Pastor separately, the Review Team recommended that the Presbytery appoint a Presbytery Engagement Team (PET) to meet with our Session in accordance with the guidelines of the Gracious Dismissal Policy of the Presbytery of Stockton. The Session met with the PET on November 20, 2012 and the following question was asked:

Shall Escalon Presbyterian Church seek gracious dismissal from PCUSA to another reformed body?

The Session unanimously answered the question in the affirmative. While Session has made this decision, believing that it largely reflects the views of the congregation, our members alone make the final decision. We know you will have questions about what this means and the process that lies ahead. Therefore, future meetings for our congregation, and their purpose, will include:

- An Informational Meeting on **Sunday, February 24, 2013**, following worship in the Sanctuary. Members of EPC's leadership, along with members of the Presbytery Engagement Team, will offer information and seek to answer questions about dismissal from the PCUSA and the road ahead.
- An Advisory Poll Meeting on **March 10, 2013**, following worship in the Sanctuary. This meeting will involve discussion of issues related to the recommendation of the Session. This meeting is expected to conclude with an advisory poll of *members* present on the question: *Shall the congregation of Escalon Presbyterian Church seek dismissal from the PCUSA to another Reformed body?*

If the results of the above advisory poll reveal that a substantial percentage of the congregation concurs with the request of the Session for dismissal, then

- A Congregational Meeting will be held with at least 45 days notice to vote officially on this matter, including dismissal from the PCUSA, dismissal to an approved Reformed Body, and the terms of dismissal. This meeting requires that at least 40% of our active members be present. If at least 2/3 of active members present vote to approve the request for dismissal, the request will be validated and separate additional related votes will be taken.

Much prayer and study and discussion have been devoted in recent months to the matter now before us. We are certainly sad, yet not angry, to recommend dismissal from the PCUSA. Yet, we believe it has chosen to move in a direction where our consciences struggle to follow. We are, nonetheless, excited about the road ahead for EPC and eager for you to learn more about it.

Also, we are deeply grateful to the members of the Presbytery Engagement Team for their sacrificial service in walking through this season with us. We continue to pray that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, will guide us and shape our conversations and decisions for his glory. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact one of the Session members or our pastor. We love this church - desiring to honor God's will and you throughout this process.

In Christ,

Session	Ellen Nelson, Sherry Branscombe, Dick Nelson, Jeff Jarchow, Jerry Hougland, Steve Reader, Laura Alcantor, Michele Hood, Bob McCune, Rick Jones, Margy Sawyer, Sal Sandoval (<i>Rick Dodge & Dave Hall were installed in January 2013</i>)
Pastor	Troy J. Onsager
Stated Clerk	Jeff Hood

* Materials disbursed at these public forums can still be read on our website at <http://escalonpres.org/denomination>

Frequently Asked Questions :

Has EPC already decided to leave the PC-USA?

No. The decision to leave can only be made by an official vote of the congregation. On November 20, 2012, the Session recommended dismissal - of which the next step is the official congregational advisory vote in March. This advisory vote is not the final vote - simply a straw poll to determine next steps.

Is EPC going this alone?

No. We are among at least six churches from the Presbytery of Stockton whose Sessions have recommended dismissal. Most of these churches have already had overwhelming support in terms of a straw poll. These churches represent over half of the numerical membership of our Presbytery. We want to stay connected to local area churches.

What direction are many churches locally and nationally headed?

The formation of the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO) in January of 2012 presents a denominational alternative that represents a good fit for many churches. It is a denomination grounded in clearly defined essential Christian/Presbyterian beliefs which also provides congregations more freedom, less bureaucracy, and great support for its churches to live out their mission.

What would our name be?

Escalon Presbyterian Church.

What would change?

On a day-to-day congregational level, nothing would change. Our theological beliefs and our confessions remain as they were. Our organizational structure will remain intact. We all know that we need to continue to grow in faith. Yet we believe that joining another reformed body is the best way to ensure that the ethos of EPC doesn't change.

Would EPC still be Presbyterian?

Yes. The recommendation of Session is rather an *affirmation* of our Presbyterian beliefs and history, rather than a rejection of them. We would still be accountable to the confessions of the Presbyterian tradition, connected to churches in a regional Presbytery, and members of a National body with connections to the Global Church.

If EPC is dismissed, who owns our property?

Following dismissal, EPC would own sole title to our property.

Are there financial implications of dismissal?

Yes. There will be financial terms determined by the gracious dismissal process which factors into the amount the results of the congregational vote and a property assessment value. We anticipate that this amount will be minimal.

Will this process divide EPC?

We prayerfully believe that the answer is no. We believe this direction is the right course of action to keep our congregational unity intact in light of recent as well as anticipated denominational decisions. For us to move forward with a new affiliation, we are presenting no change in theology, organization or mission for EPC. In other words, there is no right or left turn being proposed here - we are continuing on as we are in a new place where we have the freedom to do so. We must continue to listen to one another, pray for one another, respectfully engage one another in areas of disagreement. Yet we believe we can continue to do this together - by the grace of Christ alone.
