



March 26, 2009

Dear SPC Member:

As you are likely aware, Southport Presbyterian Church has been in a long process of discernment regarding a response to the direction the Presbyterian Church USA has been moving over the last several years. The Session is in complete unity in the belief that our church could more clearly represent its unique mission in the world outside of this denomination and that our basic essentials of faith are no longer the same as those of PCUSA. So, the Session brought before the congregation this past Sunday a recommendation to seek dismissal from PCUSA.

Here is some of the history behind this recommendation: Last October, the second SPC Denominational Response Team (DRT) finished its work and reported to Session with a unanimous agreement that the mission of our local church was being negatively affected by the actions of our denomination. As a result, they advocated that Session prayerfully consider recommending that SPC separate from PCUSA.

The denominational direction has been deviating from our core beliefs for some time but recently the arc of departure has become dramatic. In addition to weakening stances on the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the ultimate authority of Scripture, our own presbytery (our district ruling body) voted earlier this month to agree with the recommendation of the denomination to remove fidelity and chastity standards from the requirements for ordination.

The situation has gotten even more challenging. A ruling late last year from the denomination's judicial body made it impossible for Pastors or Sessions to talk openly with congregations about any of these matters without potential serious consequences. As a result, we have not been able to talk freely with you without fear of repercussions. We do not believe such fear is God's intention and we want to step into the light and talk openly.

There will be many questions and be assured that they will be addressed as this process unfolds. One question we have already heard is about the role of our Pastors in this matter. You will notice that we are not listing our Pastors as main points of contact. That is on purpose. This is a congregational issue and because our Pastors are members of the Presbytery and not the individual congregation, they cannot be and are not included in this request for dismissal. When it comes time for a final decision by SPC about our denominational standing, it will be a congregational decision, and the Pastors will then

need to make individual, personal decisions about their relationship with the presbytery and PCUSA. Obviously, Pastors Kevin, June and Steve have great interest and concern for this matter, but their role as your pastors will be to continue providing spiritual support and guidance for this congregation. We ask you to honor this and direct any questions and concerns to the Elders.

But the final decision is ultimately yours. Since we have come to this recommendation, we, as the Session, have done two things: we've informed the congregation, and we have informed our presbytery that we wish to activate the official process we must engage in before we can be allowed to have a congregational vote. So this is both the end of one process and the beginning of another. The Elders have no authority to decide to leave the denomination. That requires a process that involves this congregation and the presbytery. We want the process to have integrity, we want you to hear all the information, and we trust that Christ will lead this congregation to the future he has for us.

This has been a long process and it is not over yet. But we are entering a new phase -- a phase required by Presbyterian policies we agreed to long ago. We ask for your continued prayers as we go forward not with fear but with confidence that we are taking a step which Jesus Christ has made clear to us through a lengthy and humble process of discernment. We encourage you to pray for the leadership of SPC, the Pastors, the denomination and each other. We also strongly encourage you to celebrate this Holy season of Lent with passion as we approach the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ on Easter Sunday.

We look forward with anticipation to the future of SPC and to the greater freedom to discuss this matter as a congregation, as we come together for the opportunity to grow as disciples of the one and only Lord -- Jesus Christ.

In Christ alone,

The Elders of Session of Southport Presbyterian Church
Todd Hoopingarner, Chairman, Denominational Action Team