

Southport Presbyterian Church - Summation of the Session's Rationale for Requesting Dismissal from the Presbyterian Church USA

Who is Jesus?

In Matthew 16:16, Peter answers this question by saying, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Southport Presbyterian Church affirms that Jesus Christ alone is King of kings and Lord of lords. He is before all things, the King of creation, the one Lord over the Church, and the only way to the Father. Jesus is not one Lord among many. Nor is He one way among others by which we may come to God. He is the one-and-only bridge to link broken, sinful people with God, and is the exclusive source of our salvation and eternal life.

Who are we?

We, the body of Christ Followers at SPC, are committed to Scripture as the authoritative Word of God. We are called under G-6.0106 of the Book of Order to "lead a life in obedience to Scripture and in conformity to the historic confessional standards of the church." Under G-6.0108(b), we recognize that our "conscience is held captive to the Word of God as interpreted in the Standards of the church." In its 2006 General Assembly PUP report, p. 17, the PCUSA expounded on this requirement, stating that "God alone is the Lord of the conscience," affirming the need to "respect one another's deep convictions of conscience and to exercise mutual forbearance as together we seek to discern God's will." Through a period of discernment, God has led us to see that the PCUSA has departed from our understanding and recognition of the historical confessional standards of the church, the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ, the unquestionable sole means of salvation for the world through Him and the recognition of the infallible authority of God's Word in all matters of faith and life. Therefore, as Elders chosen by the people to "exercise leadership, government and discipline and have responsibilities for the life of a particular church," (G-6.0302), **we recommend that SPC seek dismissal from the PCUSA.**

Why leave the denomination now?

While we have expressed deep concerns regarding the direction the denomination has taken regarding theological issues in recent years, it had been our belief that these differences did not materially affect the ministry and missional calling of God's people at SPC. **This belief has now changed.** Beginning with the 2006 GA, and most recently with the Oct. 27, 2008 Judicial Commission Ruling in Sundquist v. Heartland Presbytery, the PCUSA has:

1. Undermined our Trinitarian understanding of God the Father, Christ the Son, and the Person of the Holy Spirit with such euphemisms as "mother, child, womb," beginning with the 2006 study titled *The Trinity: God's Word Overflowing*.
2. Demonstrated a very different understanding of Jesus Christ as Lord of lords, not one lord among many, by calling for the joint worship with people professing a different faith (Islam).
3. Violated *Book of Order* statements regarding the exercise of church officers' conscience, which is to be "held captive to the Word of God."
4. Demonstrated an increasing desire to limit free and open conversations between congregations, pastors and Sessions through recent actions including Sundquist v. Heartland. We believe such open dialogue should not be limited and any attempt to limit communication must not go unchallenged.
5. Taken an increasingly confrontational approach toward member congregations seeking to leave the denomination. We disagree with many of the tactics which are being used against discerning churches who feel led to separate from PCUSA.

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Evidence

1. Based on observations by individuals attending the debate at the 2008 General Assembly, much of what people said in arguing for the abolition of clear, biblical ordination standards (the subject of Amendment 08-B) was contrary to the consistent witness of the Bible.
2. The Assembly adopted an overture "On Calling for Tolerance and Peaceful Relations between the Christian and Muslim Communities." Calling for Christians and Muslims to worship together, and at one point including language declaring that both faiths worship the same god, this action attacks the historic confession of the Church regarding the Doctrine of the Trinity.
3. The Assembly has submitted in its Proposed Amendments to the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church, a resolution calling for the repeal of the following text of G-6.0106b: "obedience to Scripture and in conformity to the historic confessional standards of the church." These words are to be stricken. While this amendment may still be defeated nationally, it was approved on March 7, 2009 by our presbytery. This amendment demonstrates a clear desire by some in the PCUSA to lead the denomination away from the historic confessional standards of the church that we, as elders, are bound to uphold.
4. The Assembly issued a new Authoritative Interpretation (AI) of the *Book of Order* declaring that interpretive statements related to sexual standards for ordination that predate the adoption of G-6.0106b in 1996 "have no further force or effect."
5. In the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission Ruling in *Sundquist v. Heartland Presbytery*, the GAPJC stated: "Free expression of conscience is limited for officers and pastors under G-6.0108b, and does not encompass the calling of congregational meetings, moving churches to seek dismissal from the denomination or obstructing constitutional governance of the church." This ruling is inconsistent with principles which are generally understood to be protected by most American citizens.

Why are the Elders leading on this issue and not the Pastors?

1. SPC has always been Presbyterian, however our affiliation with PCUSA specifically dates back only to 1983. The Presbyterian family tree has many branches, and we have been part of more than one of them during our 175 years. The decision to join PCUSA was made by appointed commissioners at a meeting of the Whitewater Presbytery. It was not made, nor led, by our pastors.
2. Per G-14.0100 of the *Book of Order*: "Ordination to the office of minister of the Word and Sacrament is an act of the Presbytery." Pastors are members of the Presbytery, not individual congregations. Thus, they cannot be and are not included in this request for dismissal. Their decisions will be separate, personal and are not necessary until SPC's future is clear.
3. The primary role of the pastors is to devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word of God. In Acts 6:1-6, a situation arose where the Apostles delegated the responsibility for dealing with more worldly matters to a group of select individuals whom they commissioned for that work by the laying on of hands. Thus, there is a biblical precedent for Elders to lead in worldly affairs to protect the time and energy of Pastors to preach, teach and evangelize.