

Proposal for First Presbyterian Church Wickenburg Settlement

First Presbyterian Wickenburg Administrative Commission – Presbytery of Grand Canyon

SEPTEMBER 16, 2016

Background/History

A small group of pioneers met in the schoolhouse on June 12, 1905 to organize the First Presbyterian Church of Wickenburg. There were eight residents who convened with a commission appointed by the Presbytery of Arizona for that purpose. For many months during Arizona's Territorial days, church was held in the schoolhouse, in the dining room of the old hotel, then located near present day Center and Kerkes Streets, or in private homes. In approximately 1907, Mr. Farnsworth contributed a portion of his land at the corner of Apache and Jefferson Streets to the church. Eventually, and with the help of almost every man in the community, a small one room frame building was constructed on the site. The building served the congregation as a church for more than a decade. Until about 1920, the first little church experienced alternating periods of upkeep and neglect, but it continued to be used by the Protestant ladies of the town. It is stated in "Forty-Five Years in Highlight, First Presbyterian Church, Wickenburg, Arizona," compiled by R. Wilson Brown in 1950, that "There were many times between 1908 and the beginning of World War II when the going was tough. Although the Board of National Missions contributed toward the upkeep of the church, there were financial reverses."

As if in answer to their prayers, Rev. William Borthwick and his wife, both missionaries to India on furlough in the US, appeared in Wickenburg in 1921. Encouraged by the arrival of the Borthwicks and new supportive members, the congregation began to seek methods for improving their neglected church. Some members wanted to enlarge and improve the old building while others felt a new structure was the answer. A representative from the Board of Missions came to Wickenburg to assist in determining the best course of action. After inspecting the old building, he recommended that a new church be constructed.

With a main goal, the congregation worked together. Townspeople contributed material and labor, and the new church soon became a reality. Before the Borthwicks departed to return to India, they participated in dedicating the new building. In an effort to attract a minister who would remain in Wickenburg to pastor their church, the congregation began renovating the first church building to use as a manse. Again, with assistance from the community at large, the manse was completed in 1929. At that time, the church became known as the Community Presbyterian Church.

In the early 1930's, new members arrived to join the congregation. By 1939, membership had reached 125 with many friends of the church attending services on a regular basis. For the first time in its history, financial independence was enjoyed. The new building was remodeled to include a steeple and other conveniences, and upon completion, the structure was painted white. Long term members often refer affectionately to "the little white church". The manse was reconverted back to church use to provide space for growing Sunday School classes in 1948. The need for a larger church began to be voiced. Shortly after this, primary grade Sunday School children started collecting pennies for the new church. Between July and December 1948, they dropped a total of \$15.32 into a small bank. Those pennies marked the beginning of the building fund that was eventually used to construct the present Presbyterian Church at 179 North Adams Street.

When Dr. Charles S. Poling arrived to serve as pastor in 1951, the larger church was still a dream. In 1952, a building committee was appointed and pledges were received from members and friends for the new structure. The site for the present church was purchased in June, 1953, but before construction could begin, the area required extensive work. To level the irregular terrain, retaining walls were needed on the southern and eastern boundaries. Members of the congregation were once again called upon to work together toward that goal.

In 1953, the congregation moved on Sunday morning in procession to the beautiful new church building one block north of the "little white church." This new building was built mainly with volunteers and volunteer finances. It is truly a beautiful edifice and dedicated to the glory of God.

Discernment

In 1958, United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America was formed by a merger of the Presbyterian church in the United States of America and the United Presbyterian Church of North America. So First Presbyterian Church became a United Presbyterian Church. In the early 1970s, our deeds were given to the Presbytery. Soon thereafter, our church began showing dissatisfaction with the General Assembly and wrote letters to the Presbytery and General assembly about those concerns. With no satisfactory response, many members left our church and stated another church in Wickenburg.

On April 9, 1975, the Clerk of Session sent a letter requesting our property titles be conveyed back to First Presbyterian Church. On April 17, 1975, the Presbytery responded to that request. On May 15, 1975, the Presbytery recorded Quit Claim Deeds to First Presbyterian Church for the following lots: Lots 7, 8, 9, & 10, Collins Addition; Lot 24, block 6, Collins Addition; Lots 26 & 27, Block 6, Collins Addition (Lot 27 was sold in 1976 - it was the manse and the trend was for pastors to own their own homes). Our congregation felt the return of deeds acknowledged understanding of the congregation's frustrations with the General Assembly.

Significant events followed. The "Trust Clause" was adopted in 1981. In June of 1983, the unification of the northern and southern branches of the Presbyterian church formed the Presbyterian Church USA. In 1984 our church corporation bylaws were updated to comply with PCUSA guidelines. On August 1, 2000, the church purchased Lot 23, Block 6, Collins addition (Little Brown House), still used by Wickenburg youth today. The deed for this property was returned to the Presbytery on December 12, 2004, satisfying the need to hold deeds to our church.

Several discernment actions followed actions of the General Assembly beginning in 2010. A discernment committee was formed. The Session of the church stopped sending per capita in 2011, while increasing its contributions to Missions, so that giving to God would not be diminished. The Discernment Committee was formally instituted in 2012, with responsibility to educate and inform the congregation where we are as a denomination today. A statement of Faith was created in 2013 so that members might better understand our differences with the PCUSA.

In October, 2015, First Presbyterian Church sent a letter to Presbytery requesting dismissal to ECO. This letter reflected the congregation's long standing frustrations with the General Assembly decisions. These decisions violate many beliefs of long-held Presbyterian faith and Biblical foundations. Up until the October 2015 date, the Presbytery was not involved in the discernment process. It was decided at that time that an Administrative Commission be formed to assist in the discernment decisions and provide guidance and guidelines for the requested dismissal process. The Administrative Commission was formed in January, 2016, with Ruling Elder Robert Orf as Chair.

The Administrative Commission was obligated to conduct meetings with members of the church to determine their perspective on the church's process, to ascertain their desire to remain in the PC (USA) or not, and to be clear about the direction of the church. The AC first met with the session and Pastor, both individually and together. The AC highlighted the process needed to give us a full view of the issues concerning their desire to depart. These issues, as expressed by the participants, are:

- Failure of the church to specify the Essential Tenets of our faith
- The redefinition of marriage and the Authoritative Interpretation to allow same-sex marriage ceremonies in PC (USA)
- Vagueness about the authority of Scripture and its importance in our theology
- Issues related to the divinity of Christ and to the GA refusal to acknowledge the "singular saving Lordship of Jesus Christ.
- GA decisions to replace the Fidelity and Chastity language of the Book of Order to allow "scruples" and in effect create "local option"

- The Administrative Commission conducted three small group meetings with members of the church, at which time many of the above issues were repeated. Members also expressed concern about the church being allowed to keep its property. All in all, with the meetings and the number of surveys returned to us, we heard from 130 members and worshipers of the church concerning dismissal from the PC(USA.). From those, we learned that more than 95% of the people want to leave and approximately 10 to 15 people want to stay or are undecided. Some of the surveys returned were from members we had visited with in small groups previously.

Issues for Consideration

- It is our responsibility to obtain an appraisal of the property, which was provided by Valbridge Property Advisors. After a thorough analysis of the property and the region in relation to church property, it was valued at \$475,000. There are some properties held by First Presbyterian Church Presbyterian that were not appraised at the time of this first appraisal. Further investigation added two additional parcels to the evaluation: one parcel, with a 798 sq.ft. structure was initially appraised at approximately \$82,000. Subsequent information received revised this estimate to \$30-50,000, as the structure is in need of much repair. The second parcel is a lot adjacent to the main church property, having an appraised value of approximately \$26,385. The total property appraised value adding these two properties is \$551,385.
 - First Presbyterian Church has cash funds of approximately \$10,000. Additionally, there is approximately \$175,000 ± in the Strategic Reserve Fund. Total assets as of August 24, 2016, are \$216,065.
- During the past five years (2011-2015), as previously noted, the church had stopped its per capita payments to the Presbytery, Synod and General Assembly. The amount of unpaid per capita in Presbytery records is \$22,162.50. Projected per capita for 2016 is \$5,508. The Wickenburg church has participated in mission giving, though not through the Presbytery of Grand Canyon. The 2015 mission giving was in the amount of \$19,486.06. Distribution of those monies or other specific mission giving in the past years is not known at the time of this proposal. During discussions, the Administrative Commission agreed to adjust the per capita arrears amount, and utilized actual yearly member numbers, reducing this amount to \$18,530 for settlement purposes.
- The Gracious Dismissal Policy of Grand Canyon Presbytery and the Trust Clause of the Book of Order require that the AC take into account the value of the church's property and also recognize the burden of history which allows the congregation to get to the place where it is now. In this case, we recognize that all congregations emerge and grow from the collective gifts of God's people, and they often include the direct gifts of individuals (through their labors or their money) and gifts from other congregations (furniture and supplies), along with the support of the community of Wickenburg.
- We also affirm that the Pastor and Wickenburg Presbyterian Church desire to leave the PCUSA and become members of ECO (a Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians.)

Therefore: First Presbyterian Church and the appointed Administrative Commission Conclude:

Proposed Dismissal Terms:

In keeping with the Gracious Dismissal Policy of the Presbytery of Grand Canyon and in keeping with the charge to our commission, especially item (e): "in consultation with the session, to seek a mutually agreeable proposal for the disposition of all property, contents, and historical documents, with the aim of furthering the mission of Christ through good stewardship of resources", we propose the following:

- That First Presbyterian Church of Wickenburg be dismissed from the PC(USA.) and allowed to become a member of ECO (a Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians) when the way is clear.

- That the church's pastor, The Rev Jonathan K Evans, also be allowed to transfer his status as a Teaching Elder to ECO, when the way is clear.
- That the church will be responsible for the following costs for this dismissal process:
- \$3,500.00 – Appraisal cost from Valbridge Property Advisors/MJN Enterprises, Inc.
- \$498.24 – Cost for Commission operations/expenses including mailings to members.
- \$750.00 - Cost for copying all of church documents for historical records – all records concerning membership records, session minutes, lists of officers/pastors, all legal transactions, as required. First Presbyterian Church has reproduced those records they wish to retain for historical purposes.
- \$1000 - cost for transferring property ownership to First Presbyterian Church upon final settlement of dismissal.
- \$18,530 – Per Capita reimbursement for period of non-payment, adjusted to reflect actual church membership from the years 2011 (partial) and to include 2016.
- \$46,500 – value of the property as adjusted for purposes of Gracious Dismissal settlement. This amount is 8.3% of the revised property valuation.

The total amount of this settlement due from First Presbyterian Church to the Presbytery of the Grand Canyon is \$ 70,778.24.

This may be paid in yearly payments for 7 years in the amount of not less than \$10,111.18 each year. As a stipulation agreed to First Presbyterian Church, upon completion of all payments within the guidelines, the Presbytery of the Grand Canyon will release Deeds of Trust for all property, to be filed at the time of closing. If the total balance of the \$70,778.24 is not paid in full within the 7-year period, or if payments are not made in the yearly amount specified, or if First Presbyterian Church leaves the denomination to which they are dismissed with an unpaid balance, the presbytery will file a Deed In lieu of Foreclosure on the property to collect the unpaid balance of monies due. The Administrative Commission received a request from the church to possibly sell property to offset unpaid balances of the settlement amount at some time. In the view of the Administrative Commission, discussion on this action is not within the scope of this commission and should be addressed to the Presbytery at such time as the church requests this consideration.

We are grateful for the sustained work toward a Gracious Dismissal by First Presbyterian Church. WE are confident that both the church and the AC have worked together for the future of both the church and the Presbytery. We would like to thank particularly Mr. Larry Lake, the appointed Session Committee representative of FPC, for his prompt responses and open communication during this dismissal process.

Your brothers and sisters in Christ,

First Presbyterian Church Administrative Commission

Bob Orf, Moderator; Rev. KelsyBrown; Rev. Gordon Letizia; Kathryn Owens; Rev. Terry Palmer; Paul Rooker; Gloria Young