

**Frequently Asked Questions of Committee Regarding
The Approval of B. J. Otey to be Temporary Supply
for the Springhill Community Church, P. C. U. S. A.**

How was it that Rev. Otey became a candidate for the PNC of the Springhill Church?

B. J., an ordained minister in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church and serving as an associate pastor for a large EPC congregation in St. Louis, sent his “PIF” to the PNC. On listening to some of his sermons on line, the PNC was quite taken with him. The PNC had been through a difficult process and, somewhat in recovery, asked if they could consider candidates from the EPC or other Reformed denominations. They received at least one other as well” The committee was still carefully considering other PCUSA candidates at that time. As the EPC is in correspondence with the PCUSA, the response included, “Only conditionally, if he can, in writing, answer questions in the following areas which would be in keeping with the PCUSA and satisfactory to COM.”

These questions covered the following:

1. Why are you seeking to serve outside the EPC?
2. Do you understand that, if called to our church, you would have to leave the EPC and your ordination there?
3. Would you be willing to face re-examination, re-ordination, and a whole-hearted embracing of the PCUSA?
4. Will you lead our church out of the PCUSA and into the EPC?
5. Can you more clearly define your view of women in leadership of the church?
Will you ordain and work with ordained women (elders and pastors were focus)

Each question was answered in writing to the satisfaction of the PNC and the CoM.

After these written responses were received and forwarded to the COM, the PNC eliminated another non-PCUSA candidate and continued to narrow their field. (These written answers from BJ and at least one other.) B. J. was determined to be one of their two finalists. The other is PCUSA.

What Process did the CoM use to interview and approve B. J. Otey as Temporary Supply?

BJ was interviewed by telephone by the Springhill’s CoM liaison, then by both the Co-General Presbyters. George did an equivalent “reference check” with the EPC Clerk in that presbytery.

When B. J. Otey was brought to interview with Springhill’s PNC, the CoM designated a sub-committee to interview B.J., as it did with the other finalist. The sub-committee was Steven Lympus, Ron Hanson, and Jean Johnson (She had just rotated off CoM, and was willing to do this as CoM wanted to ensure diversity on the subgroup and to be sure there was a woman clergy as part of it, in light of his background.)

CoM, after the PNC selected BJ as their choice, talked extensively with the PNC chair, Dr. Lynn Owens at their June Meeting (during the General Assembly).

Why did CoM decide to Approve B. J. Otey?

The CoM also interviewed BJ in July.

Reasons for their approval included:

1. The sub-committee who interviewed him was diverse theologically and BJ.'s answers were satisfactory to the whole.
2. The PNC was very vocal in support of B. J. Very clear and passionate that he was their ONLY choice
3. B. J. reiterated his commitment to these written answers, pursuing the PCUSA ordination process immediately and at the time indicated that he expected to find a home in the PCUSA. He spoke of strengths he saw in the PCUSA and what it had to offer with many and creative resources for pastors and congregations.
4. BJ possesses gifts the CoM saw as adding to what this presbytery would benefit from including creativity, passion and gifts in preaching, passions for church planting and reaching younger generations and the unchurched, the arts, a keen mind.
5. Though it is unusual for an EPC pastor to seek a call in the PCUSA, it is not unheard of and has and is happening other places in the country. CoM thought that B. J. was a good theological match for Springhill, following Dick Mc Neely's retirement.
6. Because the PNC brought BJ's name to the CoM in June, hoping for him to begin ministry in late August and because the Presbytery would not meet until November, the CoM approved B J. for Temporary Supply for one year, contingent upon his pursuit of the PCUSA ordination process as per his written answers and what was agreed upon with the PNC. B. J. took his first battery of ordination exams in August just as he arrived in Montana, a Book of Order requirement for ministers transferring in from other denominations who have been ordained less than five years. He passed three of the four, and only narrowly failing polity on the second reading.

What Happened? From interviews with B. J. Otey and Dick McNeely in June of 2009, the CoM has determined the following:

1. While Dick has served faithfully in the presbytery during his ministry, he has had a growing intense dissatisfaction with what he views as the "theological drift" apparent to him in the votes and policies being presented and adopted by recent General Assemblies. The 2006 PUP Report and then 2008 GA approved amendment which would open the way for people who are self-avowed practicing homosexual persons to be ordained was particularly disturbing to Dick based upon his convictions regarding biblical interpretation and principles. These convictions he shared with others on the session – and had been sharing his perspective for some time with others in that congregation.
2. So members of the session and Dick began to publicly study the issue through a process they started in the summer of 2008, though CoM would come to understand that there were those encouraging dismissal prior to B. J. being called. Dismissal, it now turns out, was already latent in the church. That the

Yellowstone Presbytery voted in March at Springhill to concur with the amendment was particularly upsetting to the session and the staff.

3. COM had previously begun to talk about the need for a dismissal policy in light of the wake of departures of congregations and unfortunate “fights” in other presbyteries nationally. As of 2008 there was no presbytery policy to governing a dismissal process. CoM began to work on this in the summer/fall of last year and it was adopted at the March, 2009 meeting at Springhill. The CoM believed at the time that it was a good policy, and had it reviewed by Zane Buxton for constitutionality, and looked at policies already in place at other presbyteries. However, it does not call for the Stated Clerk to be notified until the session is going to vote to call a congregational meeting to vote on dismissal. We believe not that this is not soon enough and the policy must be revised.
4. Springhill had organized a Denominational Issues Team to help the session and congregation study options, including but not limited to: the whether to remain PCUSA, be a part of a possible 17th Synod, or seek dismissal to the EPC. Town hall meetings were held on a nearly monthly basis. The Co-General Presbyters tried to attend each of these meetings. They were never asked to present, but they were afforded privileges of the floor and spoke in that capacity to clarify statements made, often about the PCUSA. It seems that it was during this process of reviewing the issues and stances of the PCUSA and the EPC that BJ Otey, now more aware of the nature of the PCUSA and the EPC, shifted his position on whether he could, in good conscience serve in the PCUSA.
5. At the CoM meeting on May 1, CoM began to address in earnest how to present the case for remaining in the PCUSA to the Springhill session and congregation. We pursued this course, but in retrospect, it was already too late. A large core of the church was already committed to leaving and pursuing the Dismissal Policy.

Why was B. J. Otey not removed from the position of Temporary Supply / moderator of session in the summer and why was his position renewed for six months in August?

CoM was hopeful of maintaining the congregation in the PCUSA and removal was thought to likely make him into a martyr, disaffecting the great majority of the congregation and forcing an abandonment of the dismissal process for disaffiliation. For the presumed health of the congregation, he was accorded the additional six months.

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