

**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
ABOUT THE PROPOSED SEPARATION OF
SPRINGHILL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH FROM
THE PRESBYTERY OF YELLOWSTONE**

**Written by the Pastoral Team of the Presbytery
October 2009**

How was the proposed settlement reached?

A dismissal team elected by the session of Springhill Presbyterian Church met with the pastoral team of the presbytery on October 1, 2009. Zane Buxton was present as process observer. The initial proposal of SPC was a financial offer to compensate for per capita, mission giving, and giving to administrative support for 3 years, based on 2008 and 2009 contributions. The initial proposal of the pastoral team included these items as well as compensation for the property, over 5 years. The proposed settlement is a compromise between the two proposals.

Since the Book of Order is clear that all property is held in trust by churches for the denomination, why consider letting Springhill Presbyterian Church leave with the property?

Our goal is to be faithful stewards of the resources God has entrusted to us and ensure that these are used for God's honor and glory. We are governed by the Book of Order, which states that property is held in trust for the denomination. Yet the Book of Order is humble before God's word and the needs of ministry, for it also states that "all Church power . . . is only ministerial and declarative." For "the Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and manners. . . and all (our) decisions should be founded on the will of God" (G-1.0307). Thus the decision becomes a matter of discernment of God's will, and negotiation is appropriate based on the situation.

On August 30, 116 members of the congregation were present to vote, and they voted 114-2 in favor of dismissal. The Book of Order calls for the presbytery to determine if there is a faction in a church in schism which can be identified as the true church. In this case, the number of those desiring to remain in the PC(USA) is small enough that the pastoral team concluded that it is not viable as a congregation or ministry. The Springhill congregation is growing and the property is vital to their ministry. The pastoral team believes that the proposed agreement will further the peace, unity and purity of both the PC(USA) and the Springhill Presbyterian Church, and display to the world the love and justice of Jesus Christ.

Why not let SPC leave without asking for any settlement?

Our constitution, which all officers have vowed to uphold, is clear about the property being held in trust for the next generations of Presbyterians in the PC(USA). We honor those who have gone before when we acknowledge that the ministry of SPC has been supported and encouraged by the PC(USA) and its predecessor denomination for more than 100 years. According to presbyterian theology, the presbytery is the original governing body and particular churches are local expressions of the universal Church. Finally, our presbytery still has responsibility and commitment to witness to Jesus Christ in Gallatin Valley in diverse ways, and this will require resources. This negotiated settlement recognizes the historical commitments of the SPC, and will provide the presbytery a portion of the resources needed for its future life and mission.

How does the recommended settlement amount compare with the value of the property?

An assessment of the property completed in July 2009 values the land and buildings at \$435,500.

What guarantee is there that the \$15,000 payment will be made each year over the full term of 5 years?

An administrative commission will be elected to complete the legal and ecclesiastical work needed for this separation. They will be charged with including appropriate legal language in the final documents to assure this. In some other presbyteries, a lien for the amount has been filed on the property.

How does this settlement compare with dismissal settlements in other presbyteries?

While there are many variables which make comparisons between settlements difficult, our research into several situations which did not result in court cases yielded the following data.

Plains & Peaks (First, Greeley) - \$300,000, spread over 10 years

Pittsburgh (Beverly Heights) - \$250,000, spread over 10 years

Western Reserve (Bay) - \$700,000, spread over 7 years

It has been an important value to the pastoral team and to Springhill Presbyterian Church to follow the wisdom of 1 Corinthians 6:1-8 and avoid civil court.

Is the Evangelical Presbyterian Church a Reformed body to which we can dismiss this congregation?

Yes, and that is a requirement of our dismissal policy.

What will the presbytery do with the money from the settlement?

A portion will be used to pay the Synod and General Assembly per capita owed by Springhill in 2010 (and 2011, depending on how long the legal paperwork takes to be settled.) The administrative commission will recommend to the presbytery what happens to the rest of the money.

What happens if Presbytery refuses the recommendation of the pastoral team?

The negotiated settlement will be void. Presbytery may decide to pursue other options according to our constitution.

What are the implications of this settlement for other churches which may be unhappy with the denomination?

This is the presbytery's first experience using the Process for Separation. A number of changes will be proposed to the process, for approval by the presbytery, which would involve the presbytery at an earlier stage in the discussion and might dissuade this sort of action. Each situation is unique and would be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, following the process for separation, subordinate to the Book of Order, subordinate to the holy scriptures, subordinate to our Lord Jesus Christ.

The agreement with Springhill Presbyterian Church is that they will not recruit any other PC(USA) churches to join the EPC.