

First Presbyterian Church of Grand Rapids, OH PC(USA)

From the Clerk

Whereas a letter dated December 10,2016 was sent to the Administrative Commission for Grand Rapids First Presbyterian informing the AC that the congregation voted on November 13, 2016 "to withdraw from the PCUSA and affiliate with the ECO,"

Whereas the letter states "We have since been accepted into the ECO denomination and are now the 312th church in the ECO denomination."

Whereas this same letter effectively ends the negotiation between the church and the AC which has gone on for nearly two years

Whereas the Clerk of Maumee Valley Presbytery upon receipt of this letter informed the Administrative Commission that they now have Original Jurisdiction over the now abandoned session of the First Presbyterian Church of Grand Rapids, OH PC(USA)

Whereas there are members of the First Presbyterian Church of Grand Rapids, OH PC(USA) who do not wish to be transferred to the new ECO congregation.

AND given that our Book of Order in G-4.0207 states that "The relationship to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) of a congregation can be severed only by constitutional action on the part of the presbytery (G-3.0303b). If there is a schism within the membership of a congregation and the presbytery is unable to effect a reconciliation or a division into separate congregations within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the presbytery shall determine if one of the factions is entitled to the property because it is identified by the presbytery as the true church within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). This determination does not depend upon which faction received the majority vote within the congregation at the time of the schism."

Therefore

ON MOTION that Maumee Valley Presbyter declare that the First Presbyterian Church of Grand Rapids, Ohio is hopelessly divided and that a schism be declared.

AND ON MOTION that the remnant members of the First Presbyterian Church of Grand Rapids, Ohio under the leadership of the Grand Rapids Administrative Commission be declared "true church within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)"

First Presbyterian Church of Grand Rapids, OH PC(USA)

From the Commission

Grand Rapids Commission Report to Presbytery
January 2017

Since we were appointed by Presbytery in January of 2015 to work with the First Presbyterian Church of Grand Rapids and their request to leave the PCUSA, the commission has carried out its responsibility to meet with the congregation and session of Grand Rapids. We have surveyed the congregation, provided information to the congregation, asked the Presbytery's wisdom on transfer to ECO. We have met regularly with the session, and tried several models to negotiate a dismissal. Because of the exceptional mission of the congregation, we offered a financial settlement of significantly less than a tithe, and significantly less than what they have in cash at hand. They have refused an extremely generous offer.

In December, the leaders of the congregation called a congregational meeting without a Moderator present, and voted to transfer the congregation to the ECO. Not only was the meeting out of order, this is not an action a congregation can take. In our form of government a congregation can be dissolved or dismissed by the Presbytery, but cannot unilaterally take itself out of the denomination.

Thus, the Administrative Commission now has original jurisdiction and is acting as the session of the First Presbyterian Church of Grand Rapids PCUSA. We have asked the Clerk of Presbytery to declare the church in schism at the February Presbytery meeting. There are members of the church who do not agree with the decision to transfer the congregation to ECO. The congregation is hopelessly divided.

The Administrative Commission acting as the session will continue to care for the members of the PCUSA church. We will respond to any requests to transfer membership, are offering pastoral care, may provide worship opportunities, and carrying out other duties as is appropriate.

Ruling Elder Joel Youkers

Rev. Gary Saunders

Rev. Tom Steensma

Rev. Karen VanderPloeg