

Morgan Hill Presbyterian Church

16970 DeWitt Avenue, Morgan Hill, CA 05037

Mark Inouye
Pastor

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Dear MHPC Members and Friends,

In September I wrote to you on behalf of the Session to let you know that because of the concerns the Session was having about the direction of the Presbyterian Church (USA) (the denomination to which we belong) it was putting together what was named the “Denominational Relations Task Force” in order to help them discern how to respond to these concerns.

I’m writing today to let you know that based on the recommendation of this task force, our Session voted during its October meeting to recommend the congregation leave the PC(USA) and move to an appropriate Presbyterian denomination, and to “begin the process of interacting with the congregation in order to ascertain their desires as soon as possible.” While the Session is still discerning which Presbyterian denomination to recommend, the Denominational Relations Task Force has reported to the Session that it has narrowed it down to two options, both of which they believe could be a good fit for our congregation: the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) and the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO).

While Session’s concerns are too numerous to list in a letter, they can be summarized as follows:

Authority of Scripture: While MHPC has repeatedly affirmed their belief that the Bible alone is the Word of God and the sole authority for faith and life, there are a growing variety of views of the Bible held by and allowed by leaders of the PC(USA). For instance, a recent PC(USA) vice-moderator called the Bible “not the Word of God, you know, capital W. It’s only a reference point.”

Theological Drift: There is no defined set of essential tenets affirmed by the PC(USA) – no clear summary of its theological foundations. For instance, while MHPC has repeatedly affirmed their belief that “Jesus Christ alone is Lord and the way of salvation,” this is a statement that less than half of the PC(USA) s ordained leadership can now affirm, according to the denomination’s own research,.

Ethical Compromise: While MHPC believes that the Bible calls us to holiness in life, including “the belief that God gave us sex as a gift to be expressed in a marriage relationship between a man and a woman” the PC(USA), by recently changing its ordination standards, has intentionally affirmed lifestyles that the Bible clearly declares to be contrary to His plan for humanity.

Denominational Direction: While MHPC has sought to be engaged with the PC(USA) in productive ways, it has become clear to us that the PC(USA) has not only moved away from the foundations of Christian faith, but is moving toward intolerance toward those who might disagree with them. Not only do we find ourselves increasingly unwelcome in the denomination, we believe it will get worse.

These things have brought about what can only be described as a crisis. The PC(USA) has lost 21% of its members in the last decade. Contributions to the denomination have fallen by more than \$20 million in the last year alone. Since 2007 more than 200 churches have left, and today hundreds more are considering it. All of this has led the Session to the above recommendation to leave the PC(USA)

and join a denomination where our convictions will be affirmed rather than tolerated or even perhaps repudiated.

Now, in order to help the congregation understand the Session's recommendation, and to begin to discern the congregation's feelings about it, the session has scheduled a series of opportunities for you to hear from the Session and task force, to ask questions, and to give input. Below is an outline of these opportunities:

Sunday Morning Informational Meetings (10:05 AM-10:55 AM, Nov. 18 and Dec. 2):
These identical meetings will be done in the Fellowship Hall for an informational presentation and question/answer session

Open Forum (Sunday Evening Dec. 9, 7:15 PM - 8:30 PM): A time to interact and discuss whatever issues, concerns, or questions you might have.

We will also be providing more information on our website (follow the links on our home page) for those who would like to learn more. And of course I as your pastor would be happy to spend time with any of you who have questions, as would members of the task force or Session.

Following these meetings (during the week of Dec. 9-16), ***the Session will be conducting a "straw poll" – a non-binding vote*** – designed to help ascertain the congregation's opinions concerning the Session's recommendation. This will not commit us to anything – but is a means to get important information to the Session. Ballots will be available at church, and can be turned in anytime that week. The Session will then take this information and bring a recommendation to you about possible next steps.

The Session wants you to know that it understands that the path we are headed toward is not necessarily an easy one, and that it is not one without some costs. For instance, some of us have been long time members of the denomination, and the thought of leaving is hard. I understand. I've been an ordained pastor in the PCUSA for twenty-four years, and the thought of possibly leaving brings real sadness. There could also be some financial ramifications as well, as the PC(USA) constitution states that they hold our property in trust. While San Jose Presbytery's current Gracious Dismissal Policy provides for a fair and reasonable financial settlement (estimated between \$25,000-\$75,000), there are unknowns about the process and so nothing is set in stone. Please be assured that any final recommendation from the session would be made with more concrete information about financial ramifications. Note also that nothing can move forward without an official vote of congregational members at a later date.

This said, the Session also believes that being faithful might mean doing what is hard – even costly. Which is why, as I close, I suggest we all do these two things.

1. ***Pray:*** Please be praying that God might truly direct us as He desires. Please be praying as well for our denomination, the PCUSA, that He might be working through it as well.
2. ***Engage yourself in the process:*** Come to the informational meetings. Get your questions answered. Read the information on the website. Make sure you vote in the straw poll.

And again, if you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to call, email, or just talk to me in person.

Grace and Peace,

Mark Inouye
Pastor
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