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September 8, 2022

Dear Church Family,

During this season of discernment, we have been consulting the faithful to hear your perspective in response to actions affecting our ministries and pastors from within our denomination these past four years, and particularly the actions of the recent General Assembly. We are writing to summarize what we have heard, answer questions for which we have answers, and identify those questions for which we do not yet have complete answers.

In our three fireside chats, we shared that there are three basic directions we could go. We could (1) change Memorial to become the kind of church our critics want. We could (2) change our denominational alignment to a denomination that would support us. Or we could (3) continue to fight for change within our current denomination.

No member of our church family has expressed support for that first option. We heard a lot of love for Memorial, for our emphasis on grace, family and mission, and for our officers, staff and pastors. We hear you telling us that these are things you want us to protect.

We heard a desire to come together to seek God in prayer. We heard a desire that we stay together as a church family, whatever we do. We heard a need to be sensitive to the needs of those whose perspective may differ.

We heard you share things about the PCA that you want to support: Covenant College, Covenant Seminary, Mission to the World, Mission to North America, and especially Reformed University Fellowship. We hear how you value our commitment to our PCA missionaries and RUF campus minister.

We also heard a lot of frustration with the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). Concern about bullying and slander, litigious spirits, lack of accountability for pastors who slander. Concern for the emotional and physical toll this has taken on our pastors and staff, on members who are same-sex oriented, and on all of us who love them. We heard particular concern for the impact on Greg's health and the possibility of his being

tried before a jury of 3,000 at next year's General Assembly. We heard concern that defending ourselves from denominational critics is distracting our pastors from the disciple-making they want to be focused on. We heard concern about the way PCA critics online are damaging our witness here in St. Louis.

We heard questions about the costs and benefits of denominational realignment versus staying to fight for the denomination.

We heard from some of you that you want to stay and fight, but not at the cost of Greg's health and emotional wellbeing. Your questions involved several areas. How grave is the threat? How might this relate to our vows as members and pastors? And—if we stay—what is the likelihood of our being able to successfully shift the culture of the denomination?

We also heard from many of you who want to pursue denominational realignment. Your questions involved identifying where we would go. Would these same issues—or property issues—come up there? And will we (along the way) reexamine the question of women in leadership, a question on which the PCA gives little room for disagreement?

Below, we will address these questions with what information we already have, which we shared in the various fireside chats.

How grave is the threat?

- We believe Overture 15 banning celibate, chaste same-sex oriented pastors is unlikely to pass at the presbytery level.
- There will be other attempts to accomplish the same thing.
- At least two cases against Greg appear to be working their way to our denominational supreme court, and changes in that court could leave Greg facing trial before next summer's General Assembly.
- Our regional presbytery has supported us more often than not, but many are weary from supporting us. They have spent hundreds of hours working to faithfully execute their calling and responsibilities and are understandably tired. This matter has taken a toll on them just as it has on Memorial.
- Out of their concern for the peace of the denomination, our presbytery is likely to forbid us from hosting perceived controversial art in our Chapel arts venue. If this occurs it will impact our ministry to our non-Christian neighbors in the art world.
- The toll so far on our pastors and their families has already been great—trauma, heartbreak, anxiety attacks, anti-anxiety drugs, heart medication, shaking, professional counseling.
- Presbytery leaders—our friends—have advised us that the coming year is likely to get worse for us within the PCA.

How does this relate to our vows? And have we first tried to use the structures of the PCA to resolve these matters?

- Member vows are to the congregation, not to the denomination.
- Our four teaching elders have taken vows to their regional presbytery to be subject to them. We remain subject and have been working through these matters in conversation with and with support from presbytery leaders. They are helping us in this discernment process.
- Our denominational constitution states: “Particular churches need remain in association with any court of this body only so long as they themselves so desire. The relationship is voluntary, based upon mutual love and confidence, and is in no sense to be maintained by the exercise of any force or coercion whatsoever.”
- Should we decide to align with a different denomination, our goal would be to keep it positive, with our presbytery “sending” us to another denomination’s presbytery, doing so with mutual love, thanks and blessing. Our posture is not adversarial. We would continue to support RUF, MTW, etc and would continue to serve Covenant Seminary students and interns.
- We have attempted to resolve these matters using the systems of the denomination. In 2018, after facing slanderous attacks online, Greg requested his presbytery investigate him. Greg has submitted to three investigations including a denominational court case. The church has submitted to investigations. Those investigations and court case have cleared Greg. Within our denominational structure, that should have been the end of the matter. Sadly, Greg’s exoneration only emboldened his critics to change the makeup of the court and submit new demands for another trial.
- Similarly, we have sought out individuals in other presbyteries to enter into Matthew 18 confrontation with certain pastors, but with little success.

What is the likelihood that our staying will shift our denomination in a healthier direction?

- Greg reports that many pastors have privately thanked him for his ministry.
- At the same time, some denominational leaders and agencies have shunned him, likely out of fear of losing donors or supporters.
- The denomination’s public statements about believers who are same-sex oriented have gotten more extreme each year beginning in 2019. There has been a marked shift in a more fundamentalist direction.
- Greg shared that his leaving the PCA could remove the “wedge issue” that the fundamentalist wing of the denomination has been using to gain power within the PCA. It is possible that Greg’s leaving might make it easier for PCA moderates to retain control over the denomination and its agencies.

If we sought realignment, where might we go?

- The easiest transition would be to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC), which shares our same Confession of Faith and Catechisms.
- EPC congregations in St. Louis include City Church, Central West End Church, Central Pres, Greentree and Riverside. Most of these churches have Covenant Seminary trained pastors and share the grace ethos we so value.
- Non-presbyterian denominations would require a greater retooling of how we do ministry.

Would we keep our property, and would we face the same problems in another denomination as we have in the PCA?

- The building is property of the church, and remains with us whatever we do.
- Like Memorial, the EPC is culturally northern, unlike the PCA. (Though Covenant College and Covenant Seminary have been culturally northern, having come into the PCA with the northern Reformed Presbyterian Church Evangelical Synod in 1982.)
- Conversations with EPC pastors George Robertson and Zach Eswine (both formerly PCA) and with other current and former leaders within the EPC suggest far fewer difficulties for us there, though we cannot predict the future.
- The EPC is a smaller denomination with an emphasis on “liberty in non-essentials.”
- The EPC's culture is relational. Differences are addressed first over lunch, not in a church court.
- Memorial's front garden is dedicated to Rev. George Scotchmer, who pastored Memorial from 1961 to 1981, and who subsequently became one of the three founders of the EPC.

Will we reexamine the question of women in leadership along the way?

- When Memorial entered the PCA in 1982, we had to agree to no longer ordain our deaconesses. We had ordained deaconesses since the 1800s. Since entering the PCA, we have consecrated them without ordination. The EPC would allow us to once again ordain deaconesses.
- The EPC considers the ordination of women elders to be a matter of nonessentials, meaning it is up to the congregation to decide the matter. Most Missouri EPC churches do not have female elders. Most EPC churches nationally do.
- Our four teaching elders (Greg, Keith, Doug and Sam) have been on the more traditional side of this question based largely on their understanding of 1 Timothy 2. But they have held this view with much moderation. As a session, we aren't yet ready to reopen this question—we have a lot we're working on right now—but the EPC would give us a safe context within which we could reexamine this question from Scripture at a later date.

Further Work: There were also questions about which we elders must do further due diligence.

1. What exactly is the process to transfer to the EPC?
2. What problems might we face if we entered the EPC?

3. If Greg is tried (or re-tried) by the PCA sooner rather than later, will that hold up the church's process until after the trial and ruling has come—a process that can take months or years?
4. Whatever we decide—and it will be the congregation that decides, not the elders—we are your servants—how can we do it together as a family, with love even when perspectives differ?

What should you expect going forward? You can expect us to continue to work on answers to these remaining questions.

We will also be scheduling some informal gatherings to process and pray together as a church family.

As we gain answers to these remaining questions, you can expect us at some point to bring a recommendation to the congregation, whether to remain under our denomination—with the steps we will take to protect our pastors and ministries—or to realign with a denomination better able to support us as we follow Jesus in mission. Either way, the congregation's vote will determine the path we take.

We want to encourage you in Christ to continue to love those who are causing us pain. It is in the trying times that we truly glimpse the unfathomable depth of the love of Jesus for us, what it cost Jesus to love us, and the love he calls and empowers us to give to others.

We see God doing amazing things in and through this church. We are not anxious. God is in control. In the 1930s, we stayed in an unhealthy denomination to fight for it. And God blessed us. Fifty years later, we left that denomination to seek out something more biblically rooted. And God blessed us. However God leads us, our hope is that he will use this process to draw us nearer to him and nearer to one another.

We love you and thank God for you.

Your servants in Jesus,

The Session of Memorial Presbyterian Church



Eric Kenyon, Clerk of Session



Arun Venkatesan, Ruling Elder



Mark Leary, Ruling Elder



Doug Mendis, Teaching Elder



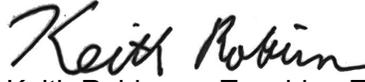
Christian Madsen, Ruling Elder



Sam Dolby, Teaching Elder



David Risko, Ruling Elder



Keith Robinson, Teaching Elder



Ted Spaid, Ruling Elder



Greg Johnson, Moderator



Joe Thompson, Ruling Elder