

Recommendation from the Administrative Commission  
to  
Muskingum Valley Presbytery - Coshocton, Ohio  
March 10, 2012

*Let us with confidence draw near to the throne of grace; that we may receive mercy  
and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)*

1. The Administrative Commission recommends to Muskingum Valley Presbytery that Westminster Community Presbyterian Church of Canton, Ohio, be transferred to the Presbytery of Allegheny of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, a denomination officially in correspondence with the PC(USA), along with all of their assets and property and members who are willing to be transferred. In light of our Presbytery "Guidelines for Seeking Reconciliation and/or Gracious Separation we see this recommendation as a way for this church to continue its witness to Jesus Christ in the world for the Kingdom of God (G-4.0201). The Administrative Commission disagrees with the Westminster Session's decision to forego the commitment made by the church officers when loans were made to the church by the Presbyterian Church using mission dollars donated by fellow Presbyterians. We recognize the valid request from PILP: The Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program director requested that the Muskingum Valley Presbytery not release Westminster Presbyterian Church until there is an agreement in place to repay these Mortgage Grants that is satisfactory with the congregation, the presbytery and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).
2. The Administrative Commission further recommends that Rev. William Pawson be transferred as a member in good standing in this presbytery to the Presbytery of Allegheny of the EPC, to be effective on the date the church is received.
3. The Commission requests that Stated Clerk Paula Lane oversee the transfer to the Presbytery of Allegheny. She will also request the Clerk of Session of Westminster Community Presbyterian Church communicate to the entire congregation the option of remaining in the PC(USA) either on the roll of presbytery or by transfer to another church.

Background:

On May 15, 2011, at a Congregational meeting, the Westminster Community Presbyterian church voted 53-9-2 to affiliate [by transfer] with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church; and 52-10-2 to be dismissed with their property by Muskingum Valley Presbytery. (An additional twenty sealed envelopes were received from shut-ins, but not counted in the tally.) Stated Clerk/Associate General Presbyter Marty Radcliff counted the votes. Membership is 111. On September 17<sup>th</sup>, Rev. Bill Pawson and two elders met with Allegheny Presbytery. Westminster had sent a letter of intent for a "seamless transition" aiming at February or March, 2012.

In September the Administrative Commission requested and received information from Judy Walton, Director of Credit Operations, Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program (PILP). PILP administers the loans and mortgage grants that are the assets of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), a Corporation, and the Board of National Missions. PILP listed four related mortgage grants.

1. \$2,550 mortgage grant signed in 1947 providing that if the church ceases to exist or leaves the denomination they will owe the principal plus 5% interest per year. That would be \$10,710.
2. \$12,000 with same stipulations, but with 5% interest from 1949 for a total of \$49,200.
3. \$3,500 not a mortgage grant, but a grant with no expectation of repayment under any circumstances, therefore, nothing owed.
4. \$19,454.94 grant signed in 1964 with the interest clause marked out and initialed, therefore a payment only of \$19,454.94
5. for a total due of \$79,364.19 (with interest) if paid by December 31, 2011.

At their request, Rev. Jon Carlisle, Rev. Darrell Holmes and elder Martha Gerber of our Administrative Commission met with the Westminster Session on September 28, 2011. Rev. Pawson noted that three of the ten voting "not to leave" had later told him they misunderstood the vote. They had a town meeting (attended by 40-50) with Rev. Tom Sawyer as liaison from Allegheny. Rev. Carlisle distributed copies of the four Church Mortgage Grants and also copies of his personal notes from conversations with Judy Walton (Director/Credit Operations of the Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program (PILP); Tim McCallister, Office of Mission Program grants; and Tom Hay, Office of the General Assembly.

Rev. Carlisle and Elder Gerber met October 26, 2011, and November 16, 2011, with a commission of the Westminster Session made up of Michael Reed and James Eakin. The folks at Westminster spent many hours researching church and local court records. We invited their leadership to consider how to meet their obligation and to consider a love gift/offering of gratitude to the denomination. Rev. Carlisle had additional phone conversations with Judy Walton (12/13/11 and 1/9/12 and later ones), Michael Reed (1/4/12), and Rev. Pawson (1/9/12 and 2/25/12).

At its stated meeting on January 15, 2012, the Session of Westminster Community Presbyterian Church approved the following statement about a "Kingdom Ministry Gift":

That with our departure from the PCUSA, in thanksgiving to God and in recognition of the long history of common Kingdom ministry as part of Muskingum Valley Presbytery, we resolve to make a gift of \$5,000.00 (to be paid out in not more than 5 years at a minimum rate of \$1000/year) to be given in the name of both MVP and Westminster Community Presbyterian Church to one or more local ministries, charities or community service organizations mutually agreed upon by both MVP and Westminster Community Presbyterian Church.

Mortgages were signed between the congregation as a corporation and the corporation of the denomination. There was no expectation of repayment except following a congregation's choice to depart from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (as successor to the earlier denomination). All other recipient congregations who have voted to leave the denomination have repaid their grants. This repaid money has then been used as seed money for New Church Development. Our denomination made a commitment to the original donors of these funds. Therefore the Loan Program is seeking repayment with specified interest, so that the funds can be granted to another congregation within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

"The Administrative Commission continues to urge the congregation and leadership of the Westminster Community Presbyterian Church to review their commitment to honor the contract made in good faith between the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the Westminster congregation and hope that at some time in the future they will choose to honor that responsibility."

At our request, the Westminster Session has submitted this statement for Presbytery.

**Statement from Westminster Presbyterian Church, Canton, sent to the Administrative Commission on February 22, 2012, to be included in our recommendation to the Presbytery on March 10, 2012.**

With a consistent and long-standing commitment to belief in the full inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility of the Holy Scriptures as the sole authority for faith and practice on the part of Westminster Community Presbyterian Church, Canton, OH, and our perception of the institutional abandonment of such a commitment on the part of the PCUSA upon adoption of the New Form of Government, we found we had no Biblically based moral standards left in common to bind us to one another. So it was with deep regret that the congregation of Westminster Church felt compelled to vote on the question of separation from the PCUSA. For many Westminster members, it seemed to be like an unwanted but unavoidable divorce given the irreconcilable differences in certain fundamental theological issues now enshrined in the constitutional documents of the PCUSA. While we recognize that there are many individual ministers and members of the PCUSA who remain faithful to Biblical standards and who may sense God's direction to remain within the institution, even as we had over the recent years of contention on issues of practical morality and ordination standards, it had become impossible for Westminster Church to remain connected to the institutional body of the PCUSA. The vote for separation was made overwhelmingly in the affirmative.

Both the Session of Westminster Church and its Special Commission appointed for the purpose met with the Administrative Commission of Muskingum Valley Presbytery on several occasions to discuss and negotiate a gracious separation of Westminster Church from the PCUSA to a sister Reformed Body, to wit, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.

With regard to negotiations for separation and dismissal, much of the discussion was focused upon resolving any possible financial issues or obligations. All documents regarding title and deed vest the ownership of the property in the congregation and do not make mention or reference to any denominational body or the establishment of a trust agreement. In addition, after close scrutiny of all documents connected with certain financial claims made by the Presbytery it was determined that any possible obligation under Ohio law had expired with those claims attached to mortgages upon their expiration after 40 years (the newest mortgage expired about 15 years ago). Hence, Westminster Church believes, and the Administrative Commission of MVP has concurred, that any and all financial obligations which may have existed are cleared and resolved, as well as any other matters pertaining to effecting a gracious separation with our property from the PCUSA and dismissal to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.

Respectfully submitted by direction of the Session of Westminster Community Presbyterian Church, Canton, OH,

Rev. William R. Pawson  
Moderator of the Session

Elder Allan R. Brown  
Clerk of Session