

PRESBYTERY OF SOUTHEASTERN ILLINOIS
GUIDELINES AND PRACTICES FOR
CONGREGATIONS WHO MAY BE CONSIDERING SEPARATION
FROM THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (USA)

If a congregation begins to consider separation from the Presbyterian Church (USA) the Presbytery will expect to be an active partner in the early stages of this conversation.

1. A Listening Team will be appointed by the Presbytery's Committee on Ministry.

The Listening Team's purpose will be to learn from the Pastor, Session, and Congregation the particular concerns and expectations which lead them to consider separation.

The Listening Team's Process will be in partnership with the Session, to provide the opportunity for everyone who has a stake in the conversation and the outcome, to learn, to speak, and to be heard without fear of being ridiculed or diminished in any way.

2. In the event the congregation elects to pursue division, dismissal, or dissolution, the Presbytery may appoint an Administrative Commission with powers to divide, dismiss or dissolve the congregation, and the official records of the congregation shall be retained by the Presbytery.

In all interactions between the Presbytery and a congregation considering separation from the Presbyterian Church (USA), The spirit of the Commissioners Resolution 04-28 (below) shall guide and inform the Presbytery.

The 218th General Assembly (2008) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

1. Directs the Stated Clerk to send this resolution to the presbyteries, synods, and sessions, indicating the will of the assembly that presbyteries and synods develop and make available to lower governing bodies and local congregations a process that exercises the responsibility and power "to divide, dismiss, or dissolve churches in consultation with their members" (*Book of Order*, G-11.0103i) with consistency, pastoral responsibility, accountability, gracious witness, openness and transparency.
2. Believing that trying to exercise this responsibility and power through litigation is deadly to the cause of Christ, impacting the local church, other parts of the Body of Christ and ecumenical relationships, and our witness to Christ in the world around us, [the General Assembly] urges [congregations considering leaving the denomination], presbyteries and synods to implement a process using the following principles:
 - *Consistency*: The local authority delegated to presbyteries is guided and shaped by our shared faith, service and witness to Jesus Christ.
 - *Pastoral Responsibility*: The requirement in G-11.0103i to consult with the members of a church seeking dismissal highlights the presbytery's pastoral responsibility, which must not be submerged beneath other responsibilities.
 - *Accountability*: For a governing body, accountability rightly dictates fiduciary and connectional concerns, raising general issues of property (G-8.0000) and specific issues of schism within a congregation (G-8.0600). But, full accountability also requires preeminent concern for "caring for the flock".
 - *Gracious Witness*: It is our belief that Scripture and the Holy Spirit require a gracious witness from us rather than a harsh legalism.
 - *Openness and Transparency*: Early, open communication and transparency about principles and process of dismissal necessarily serve truth, order, and goodness, and work against seeking civil litigation as a solution.¹

¹ Commissioner Resolution (item 04-28). 218th General Assembly (2008).