

UPDATE ON DENOMINATIONAL DIRECTIONS

Approved by Session on February 21, 2008

The Sunset Presbyterian Church Elders (Session) and denominational leadership team recently began a process to work with our regional governing body (Presbytery of the Cascades) to explore changing our denominational affiliation from Presbyterian Church (USA) to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. The purpose of such a change would be to more closely align our theological beliefs and our mission of outreach with a denomination that shares our vision of reaching the world for Christ.

Such a move is not to be taken lightly and will require a vote of Sunset's membership and of the Presbytery of the Cascades. We expect this process to be gracious and amicable and may take up to one year. We are asking everyone to pray for God's wisdom and guidance for our Session and leadership team as they engage in these discussions.

WHY ARE WE CONSIDERING LEAVING?

Irreconcilable theological differences and a centralized bureaucratic structure that doesn't fit our mission of outreach have caused Sunset's Session to vote to begin discussions about denominational change. After more than 25 years of attempting to reform our national denomination from within, recent PC(USA) actions and positions have made it clear that we still have irreconcilable theological differences that are best handled by Sunset moving to a new Presbyterian denomination. For instance, Sunset believes Christ is "The Way" to God, while an increasing number of leadership in PC(USA) now believes Christ is just one of many ways. In addition, these same leaders in PC(USA) believe that parts of the Bible can be debated, while Sunset believes all of God's Word is infallible. In response to this movement in PC(USA), some leaders, members and staff have either left Sunset or declined membership because of our relationship with PC(USA). In addition, PC(USA)'s bureaucratic structure is working in conflict with Sunset's mission to reach people for Christ. Excessive red tape is inhibiting our ability to designate our missions giving to aligned causes. Finally, PC(USA) has become more concerned with the survival of its central structure than supporting its member churches.

WHERE WOULD WE GO?

Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) is a denomination that was formed 25 years ago out of PC(USA). It is a "reformed" denomination designed to support a grassroots network of churches who share a vision for Kingdom collaboration, connectedness, accountability and reaching the world for Christ. Our financial obligation to the new denomination would stay relatively the same, but we would be linked arm-in-arm with a network of churches working together to bring people to God.

WHEN WOULD THIS HAPPEN?

First, we believe God would have us retain our property and campus facilities. We believe our property is a stewardship responsibility given to us by God to accomplish our mission. Ensuring that this happens could elongate our process of leaving. Sunset's denominational leadership team began discussions with the Presbytery of the Cascades in 2007. A congregational vote of our membership will be needed and could happen sometime in 2008. Session will keep the congregation informed as the process moves forward.

HOW WOULD THIS AFFECT OUR CHURCH LIFE AT SUNSET?

During this process we expect our worship and ministries to continue unhindered and strong. However, movement to EPC will allow us to make a number of improvements at Sunset and retain our own unique identity in the Portland community. The new structure will empower lay leaders and staff currently at Sunset to take on greater ministry opportunities and responsibilities in serving the body in ways the PC(USA) currently inhibits and it will stabilize senior leadership.

HOW CAN I HELP?

Pray. The denominational leadership team, staff and Session all need the prayers, thoughts and feedback of the entire congregation. This is a significant change, but one that can truly benefit Sunset's members and our ability to reach the world for Christ for years to come.

If you have questions, comments or would like more information please contact:

Ken Mulder – Minister of Outreach at kenmulder@sunsetpres.org

Ken has served as our senior associate pastor and is the only other ordained PC(USA) pastor on our staff (other than Pastor Ron). Ken has worked for renewal within our denomination and has led the denominational strategy team as we begin this process. Ken has also worked with New Wineskins.

Jim Blanchard – Elder (not currently serving on Session) and leader of the Negotiation Team and Denominational Strategy Team – Jamesiblanchard@cs.com

Jim has worked extensively on Presbytery of the Cascades committees and worked tirelessly toward renewal in the denomination. He has served on the board of Sunset several times and served on the denominational strategy team. Jim is currently leading the negotiation team that will begin this process with Presbytery.

Dennis Kviz – Elder (not currently serving on Session), member of Denominational Strategy Team and the Denominational Communication Task Force – Dennis@AvalarRealty.com

Dennis has served on the board of Sunset and for many years as a member of the Denominational Strategy Team and now on the Communication Task Force.

Rachel Hansen – Deacon of Communications

Rachel serves as part of the Operations Missional Team working with our Communications team. She is currently serving on the Denominational Communications Task Force both as liaison to the communications team and with an ear to the congregation.

In addition to speaking to one of the above individuals look for upcoming leaders forums on this topic or contact Cindy Heinz at cindyheinz@sunsetpres.org for when these will be scheduled.