

JUNE 24, 2016

ABOUT

This is a written update from your Session prepared by the Senior Clerk. These topics represent some of the things we are working on as a Session and a Church in 2016-2017.

WHO IS SESSION?

The Session has the responsibility for governing the congregation and guiding its witness to the sovereign activity of God in the world, so that the congregation is and becomes a community of faith, hope, love and witness. - *Book of Order*

YOUR SESSION

2017

Bill Gutermuth, Clerk
Don Barber
Chris Champion
Merry Davis
Randy Schorre
Randy Wilson

2018

David Calkins, Clerk
Michael Harada
Julie Harris
Sabrina Espinoza
Cindy Marion
Matt Offenbacher

2019

Cindy Cook, Clerk
Brent Dorsey
John Going
Chris Herbold
George Mallory
Edet Okon

A Note from the Clerk



Dear Friends:

On June 1, FPC began a new fiscal year and on June 5 we installed a new class of Ruling Elders to the Session. The Class of 2019 consists of Cindy Cook, who was elected Clerk of the Class of 2019, Brent Dorsey, John Going, Chris Herbold, George Mallory and Edet Okon. We also welcome Merry Davis, who is filling a vacancy in the Class of 2017, and Susan Miclette, who is the Session's at large member for this fiscal year.

The start of the new fiscal year also means that we bid farewell to the Class of 2016, who served the Session with great faithfulness and distinction for the last three years. That class consisted of David McCarty, who was Clerk of the Class of 2016, and Dorian Benn, Lori Johnson, Marilyn McDonald, Dan Morris and Danny Taylor. We owe the Class of 2016 a great debt of gratitude for their service and their leadership.

We start this year free from the overhang of the litigation with Presbytery that was settled last month. I think I can speak on behalf of the entire Session when I say that while we are pleased that the ownership of FPC's property has been conclusively determined, we also mourn the divisiveness and distraction that accompanied the litigation. We start this new year looking forward rather than backward.

I would like to devote this letter to providing the congregation with information on some new initiatives that the Session is undertaking and an update on certain denominational matters. First, however, let me remind you that we continue to work diligently on the rollout of Vision 2020, including our partnership with Presbyterian School as we work collaboratively on a significant campus expansion plan, as well as on our growing relationship with the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Jim Birchfield will be providing you with an update on Vision 2020 later this summer, followed by a report from David Calkins, the Clerk of the Session Class of 2018, on the progress of development projects being undertaken by Presbyterian School and MFAH.

New Session Initiatives.

The primary role of the Session is to provide spiritual leadership to the congregation, and to do so effectively requires the Session be dedicated to its own spiritual development as well as that of the congregation. To that end, the Session is studying Andrew Murray's book, *Humility*, in a small group setting moderated by Julie Harris and Cindy Cook. The Session is also building on its commitment to ongoing and intentional prayer time, both during and outside of Session meetings, which includes a prayer retreat scheduled for late August. Michael Harada and Cindy Marion are organizing and maintaining Session prayer lists and are providing other related structure around the Session's prayer discipline. Feel free to contact either of them with specific prayer requests for the Session.

There are several other Session initiatives that will be the subject of communications to the congregation in the upcoming months. As a part of implementing Vision 2020, the Session reorganized itself and its committees to be aligned more closely with the FPC staff structure and the objectives of Vision 2020. Sabrina Espinoza has led the Session's efforts on committee restructuring and you should expect to hear more from her on that topic in July.

In addition, in response to input from the congregation, the Session has committed to participate more actively in worship and to be more visible and accessible to the

(Continues)



ADVISORY COUNCIL

In addition to Session, there is an Advisory Council composed of the clerks from each class, the Senior Pastor, Executive Pastor, treasurer and a member at large. This committee acts as the executive council of the Session and includes, **Bill Gutermauth**, 2017 Senior Clerk, **David Calkins**, 2018 Clerk, **Cindy Cook**, 2019 Clerk, **Jim Birchfield**, Senior Pastor, **Bill Heston**, Executive Pastor, **Chris Champion**, Treasurer, and **Susan Mickette**, member at large.

SESSION MEETINGS

Third Tues of Every Month

All are welcome to join Session for their monthly meeting at 6:30pm in LC181.

PRESBYTERY

The next meeting is Saturday, July 16 at Orange, First Presbyterian Church. Visit pbyofnewcovenant.org for more information and directions.

(Continued)

congregation. Don Barber and Brent Dorsey are brainstorming these initiatives, the details of which will be the subject of a letter to the congregation later this summer. Don and Brent will be interested in any thoughts you have along these lines.

As was mentioned at the called congregational meeting in May, the Session intends to submit to the congregation for approval updated governance documents replacing the current ones, which were adopted in the late 1800s. Copies of those documents, along with a detailed description of the changes and rationale for the updates, will be made available to the congregation by Randy Wilson and Randy Schorre, well before the Annual Congregational Meeting.

The accomplishment of the goals of Vision 2020 requires a level of technological capability and sophistication that until recently FPC did not have. In May, following an exhaustive study of available software systems, FPC purchased the Fellowship One software package. Session members Matt Offenbacher and Edet Okon are leading the way along with FPC staff to determine the best way to maximize the capabilities and opportunities afforded by this very robust software, which will be the topic of a communication from Matt and Edet, probably in the fall.

Finally, the Session is focusing attention on how best to identify and train future leaders for FPC. This is a long-term undertaking headed by Sabrina Espinoza and George Mallory, and you should expect to hear more about their plans after the first of the year.

Input on any of these topics is always welcomed.

Denominational Update.

Within the last month, Memorial Drive Presbyterian Church concluded a process that resulted in its request to Presbytery to be dismissed from the PC(USA) to ECO. That request will be acted on by Presbytery at its meeting next month.

A number of our members have noticed that MDPC followed a significantly different process from the one engaged in by FPC several years ago. When FPC entered the discernment process under the 2012 version of the Gracious Reconciliation and Dismissal Procedure, a dismissal motion required a supermajority of the members voting to pass. Subsequently, the Permanent Judicial Commission of the PC(USA) concluded that a congregational vote to effect dismissal is not authorized under the Book of Order. Following the decision of the Permanent Judicial Commission, the guidance from our Presbytery is that the decision to request dismissal from the PC(USA) resides exclusively with a church's Session, and that any vote on dismissal by the congregation is non-binding on the Session. As a result, MDPC did not have a vote of its members, relying instead on several town hall meetings and a questionnaire to provide the opportunity for the membership to speak into the process.

The FPC Session regularly assesses the relationship of FPC with the PC(USA) and considers whether continued affiliation is in the long-term best interest of FPC. That assessment is ongoing and will continue.

We have set an ambitious agenda for the year ahead. The Session appreciates your prayers and support as we work to execute Vision 2020, to expand our relationships with Presbyterian School and the MFAH, to implement our new initiatives and to discern the best denominational path for FPC.

I am honored to work alongside such a talented and Christ-centered Session and I am privileged and humbled to serve as the Clerk of your Session.



Bill Gutermauth
Senior Clerk