



November 1, 2016

Dear Members of First Presbyterian Church of Houston,

This evening, the Session of FPC voted 21-2 to request dismissal from the PC(USA) and to affiliate with ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians. The vote, taken by secret ballot in an open Session meeting, concludes a process that began in late 2015 and included many months of prayer, discussion, study, and more recently, the evaluation of congregational feedback through individual conversations and emails, two town hall gatherings and a survey completed by nearly 1,200 people. The results of that survey are available [here](#).

Though tonight's vote brings that process to a conclusion, we recognize our membership holds diverse positions on this question and that the reaction to our decision will vary from agreement, to relief to disappointment. As our congregation's elected leaders, it was sobering and difficult to have to make a decision that we knew would disappoint many within our body, regardless of what was decided. That said, the vote demonstrates our firm and prayerful conviction that FPC's long-term best interests will be better served by joining ECO than by remaining in the PC(USA).

In the next day or so, Session will inform the Presbytery of New Covenant of the results of tonight's vote and will ask them to include our request for dismissal on the agenda for their next meeting, which is on Saturday, November 19, 2016. At the same time, we will submit our application for membership in ECO's Presbytery of Texas and Louisiana.

It is our sincere hope that all of you will want to maintain your membership at First Presbyterian Church as we continue to work together toward the goals outlined in Vision 2020. If you do desire to remain an active member of First Presbyterian Church, or would like to retain your membership in FPC while giving consideration to the matter, there is nothing that you need to do. By virtue of your membership in FPC, your denominational affiliation will be transferred into ECO on the day that First Pres is received into the denomination.

While our hope and prayer is that no one will make a quick decision regarding membership, if you are thinking that you would prefer to maintain affiliation with the PC(USA), you will have the opportunity to either transfer your membership to another PC(USA) church in the area, or to transfer your membership to the Presbytery of New Covenant while you consider other options. On Sunday, November 6, Rev. Mike Cole, General Presbyter for the Presbytery of New Covenant, will be available to discuss those options and to answer any questions that you might have. That meeting will be in the Chapel from 5-6pm.

Friends, as we move forward from here, let us not be afraid to acknowledge that this has been a difficult season in the life of our great church. At the same time, however, let us also acknowledge that if we keep our eyes on Jesus Christ, he will lead us through this season, just as he has led us through other difficult challenges over our long history in Houston.

Finally, let us acknowledge that the next days and weeks will test our ability to love one another even across our disagreements – and that the healing of relationships within our body cannot be accomplished in a single worship service, or through a committee, but only through hundreds of individual decisions to seek that healing and to intentionally do our part in reaching out to those with whom we need to reconcile. May we join together in Christ to accomplish that purpose.

In Him,

The Session of First Presbyterian Church of Houston