

## Denominational Concerns Timeline

In 1988 the Session of East Main Church voted to stop giving our tithes and offerings to support the work of the national denomination. At least that far back our church has been concerned over the drift of the PCUSA away from the Biblical standards that we embrace. This concern was realized more concretely in May of 2011 when the denomination's ordination standards were changed by removing the fidelity and chastity clause. The Session immediately issued our first response statement, which was available on the church website and at church.

In June, a Denominational Issues Team was formed, which consists of Session members and others in the church who are interested in this issue. In December and January several new members were added to this team, but the purpose remains the same. The Denominational Issues Team has been charged with learning as much as possible about the changes in the PCUSA, possible responses by East Main Church, and options for a new denominational home should the church decide to disaffiliate with the PCUSA. The Denominational Issues Team has also been asked to communicate the information they gather with both Session and the congregation. Among the items they have provided is the Denomination Issues Packet which is still available at the Welcome Center.

Also this summer, the Session voted unanimously that the change to the PCUSA's ordination standards is a wrong to which we must respond. We have discussed for many hours during many Session meetings what our Biblical standards should be and how the denomination has moved away from such standards. In addition, we have concluded that we have two options: to stay in the PCUSA with integrity, most likely by joining together with other likeminded churches, or to change our denominational affiliation.

In November, the Session called a meeting to focus solely on this issue of response to the PCUSA. Among the issues we discussed was Shenango Presbytery's newly passed dismissal policy. At this and other meetings the Session has prayed for wisdom in deciding where God is leading us and for the courage to follow His leading.

As a result of these prayers and discussions, which have continued through December & January, on January 10, Session voted unanimously (with 13 of the 15 elders present) to inform Shenango Presbytery of our "desire to explore withdrawal from our PCUSA denomination." This is the first step required by Shenango Presbytery's dismissal policy. The next step is for a Dismissal Consultation Team, which will be appointed by Presbytery, to work with us in our future deliberations. About six steps are included in the actual withdrawal process; so far the only step taken is to explore withdrawing. Be assured that the church cannot disaffiliate without a congregational vote.

If we were to disaffiliate, we have found two possible new denominational homes for our church: the Evangelical Presbyterian Church and the New Reformed Body of the Fellowship of Presbyterians. Some members of Session have attended EPC Presbytery meetings and have had dialogues with people in this denomination. We have been to meetings about the New Reformed Body and are sending two Session members as well as Pastor Hoffman to the NRB's Covenanting Conference January 18 – 20. At this conference the NRB will become a new denomination.

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The Session's job continues to be to stay as informed as possible and to pray for God's leading. We want to keep our congregation informed and answer whatever questions you have. We are not taking this decision lightly, and are making a thorough study of our options. If you wish to discuss this issue in more detail, please contact any of the members of the Denominational Issues Committee or members of Session.

Yours in Christ, the Denominational Issues Committee:

Non-Session Members: Mary Sodergren, Heidi Mech, Dave Jones, Charles Clauss, Josh Browne.

Session Members: Dick Leo, Mike Jackson, Dave Dayton, Van Campbell, Pastor Hoffman (ex-officio).

*Presented to the congregation on Sunday, January 15, 2012 by Elder Mike Jackson.*

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### **Internet links to related documents and/or web sites:**

East Main Session's [initial response](#) (issued in May 17, 2011)

Shenango Presbytery's [Dismissal Policy](#)

Evangelical Presbyterian Church's [web site](#)

Fellowship of Presbyterians' [web site](#)