

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

UPDATED QUESTIONS WILL BE POSTED ON THE IRPC WEBSITE

The following Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) have come from and to the Discernment Committee. As IRPC moves through this process, please email or call any member of the Discernment Committee as you have further questions.

We will continue to update this document as well as address additional questions as they are asked.

FAQ's

1. Why was the Discernment Committee established?

In response to actions taken by our denomination, the PC(USA), that seem to be in conflict with IRPC's theological beliefs, the IRPC Session asked for the formation of a Discernment Committee to evaluate the different options available to Indian River Presbyterian Church, inform and solicit feedback from the congregation, and report back to the Session with recommendations on remaining with the PC(USA) or moving to another Denomination.

2. Why all of a sudden do we feel denominational issues warrant us to consider a move?

After their return from Minneapolis, Pastor Bryan and Pastor Dana both felt, and the Session concurred, that it was time to form a committee to gather information and discern how best to educate the congregation. This document and the other scheduled town hall meetings are a result of that committee's work.

With regard to the question 'why all of a sudden'. This is not simply a reaction to recent denominational changes, the root goes much deeper. For more than a decade, the denomination has been undergoing a transformation. It has occurred and will likely continue with increased denominational infighting and political maneuvering, which brings to question whether PC(USA) remains a "good fit" for the congregation of IRPC. Such behavior is not glorifying to God and takes our focus off of our mission.

As one example, we have seen a continual change in interpretation of the Authority of God's Word. In the old ordination standards the language was that we were to "live a life in obedience to scripture." The language now for ordination standards is that we are "to be guided by scripture." The PC(USA) has changed that language to say we are no longer required to be obedient to scripture. This makes it extremely challenging for those who examine candidates for ordination to have any standards of behavior or theology -- if scripture is merely a guide.

We have also seen international Presbyterian churches cut ties with the PC(USA). For example, the Presbyterian church in Mexico cut ties with the PC(USA) resulting in IRPC no longer having a sister Presbytery in the Yucatan.

In addition, at the next General Assembly in 2012 we will most likely see an affirmation of same-sex unions by the PC(USA). The issue was extremely close to passing in 2010. This would most likely require that pastors participate in same-sex marriage or be disciplined by the denomination which could include the possible revocation of their authority as Ministers of the Word and Sacraments.

Change may be necessary in order for IRPC to stay where it is and to continue to be true to what it believes.

3. If we leave the PC(USA) will we still be Presbyterian?

Yes, we will remain in a “Presbyterian” denomination, much like the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS), which was the denomination IRPC belonged to back in 1983, the PC(USA), Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC), and Presbyterian Church of America (PCA). We would still be *Indian River Presbyterian Church*.

In many ways, IRPC will continue to function in exactly the same way. If we went to a new Presbyterian denomination, it is likely we would retain the same number of elders, deacons, and pastors; will have the same hymnals; and still have The Presbyterian Women. You will notice very few changes in the day-to-day activities of our church. Again, the irony is that IRPC may need to change to stay who it has been for so long.

4. Will this be a location move?

No, within our Presbytery we have a gracious dismissal policy that allows us to be transferred to another Presbyterian or reformed denomination with our property if 80% of those attending a congregational meeting vote to leave. So if, as a congregation, we agree to a move we would retain our property and even gain sole ownership of it in the process.

5. If we leave, what about our land and any/all financial implications of a change?

Currently, while the titles of our properties are in the name of IRPC, they are held in trust of the PC(USA). Our Presbytery has a gracious dismissal policy that allows us to be dismissed to another Presbyterian or reformed denomination with our property if 80% of those attending a congregational meeting vote to leave. In some Presbyterian denominations, congregations hold sole ownership of their property, which is very good news. When selecting a new denomination, ownership of property would be a consideration.

6. What would be the effect of a move on Grace Way Village?

Grace Way Village is located on the Hartman Road (west campus) of Indian River Presbytery Church. Dismissal with property includes both the Virginia Avenue and the Hartman Road properties. If IRPC chooses to move to another denomination and is dismissed with property, both properties would go with IRPC to a new Reformed body. There would be no effect on the ministries of Grace Way Village.

7. What about IRPC’s potential building campaign?

Because of these pressing issues for our congregation our building campaign will be postponed at this time.

8. What support (financially or other) comes from the Presbytery that we won’t get if we should leave?

If we left the PC(USA) we would no longer receive the grant from Presbytery for the church plant and would no longer have access to the pastoral call services. If IRPC were to make a move to another Presbyterian denomination we could potentially pick up new or other financial benefits. Per capita requirements may be less for a denomination with less infrastructure.

9. What is the rush? It seems this is moving forward very quickly.

Currently, the local Presbytery has authority over congregations seeking to leave the PC(USA) with or without property. Our Presbytery, Tropical Florida, is one of the most gracious in the country

on this issue. Under a new Gracious Dismissal Policy, if 80% of a church's members vote to leave the denomination, they leave with their property - with a requirement to pay three (3) years of per capita to the Presbytery. Other Presbyteries have not been as fair.

There is concern about what will happen in the future as General Assembly institutes rules to prevent Presbyteries from dismissing churches with their property (and thus make our Presbytery's policy null and void). We do not want to wait and potentially get caught up in legal battles. Such action by the General Assembly could occur as early as early July 2012.

10. Can IRPC do nothing and what would be the potential ramifications if it did so?

If IRPC chooses to 'do nothing' it is very likely it will be forced to 'change' some of our theological thinking and practice. This is why we say 'in order to stay the same IRPC will have to change'.

However, some believe little will happen as most of the business of the church will remain local. There is evidence that indicates this might not always be the case. In one recent case, the denomination required a theological professor to espouse the new PC(USA) ordination standards above that of his own conscious and convictions. He refused and disassociated himself from the denomination. Some have expressed concern that pastors and churches are likely to see more direction from the top.

11. What are the major theological differences between the current PC(USA) and IRPC?

IRPC, along with many Reformed churches, has as part of our Essential Tenants, which are the statement of what we believe, the statement:

The Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are God's uniquely revealed and written Word, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and are the church's first and final authority in all areas of faith and life including theological doctrine, mission, church order, character, ethical behavior, and lifestyle choice.

Decisions of the PC(USA) over the past few years have lead to changes in wording that allow behaviors that are not in alignment with God's written word in Scripture. The impact of these decisions can be seen in a change in ordination standards for those in leadership. The old standard:

"Those who are called to office in the church are to lead a **life in obedience to Scripture** and in conformity to the historic confessional standards of the church. Among these standards is the requirement to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman (W-4.9001), or chastity in singleness. Persons refusing to repent of any self-acknowledged practice which the confessions call sin shall not be ordained and/or installed as deacons, elders, or ministers of the Word and Sacrament."

The standard above:

- Affects those in leadership positions – ordained positions (pastors, elders, deacons) not members
- Does not target homosexuality; it is a requirement for all those in leadership to live in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman or chastity in singleness
- It is specific to behaviors -- not orientation or temptations

- There is forgiveness for repentance

What drove the change is the desire to allow ordination of practicing homosexuals which necessitated the need to change the standard. First was to remove the explicit standard to live in fidelity in marriage and chastity in singleness. Second, the authority of scripture had to be changed. You couldn't say you have to live life in obedience to scripture because the clear witness of scripture is that sexuality is to be in marriage between a man and a woman.

So the new standard is:

“Standards for ordained service reflect the church’s desire to submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life (F-1.02). The council responsible for ordination and/or installation (G.2.0402; G-2.0607; G-3.0306) shall examine each candidate’s calling, gifts, preparation, and suitability for the responsibilities of ordered ministry. The examination shall include, but not be limited to, a determination of the candidate’s ability and commitment to fulfill all requirements as expressed in the constitutional questions for ordination and installation (W-4.4003). Councils shall be **guided by Scripture** and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates.”

Ramifications – Scripture has been officially relegated to being a guide rather than the authority. Now candidates for ministry are to be examined to determine that scripture has guided them in their understanding of God and not how they use it as the authority for living their lives.

A significant ramification of scripture being a guide is the ability of the reader (including pastors) to honor that which they like and correspondingly to ignore that which they do not. This could include God's redemption plan through the saving grace of His Son and our Lord Jesus Christ. Ignoring this would serve to diminish the person and work of Christ.

Unfortunately, this has occurred. It is not uncommon to hear General Assembly officials, Presbytery Commissioners and Pastors say: "Jesus is *my* way, but who am I to say He needs to be *your* way."

Internationally, because of decisions of the PC(USA), the Presbyterian Church in Mexico has now disassociated with the denomination. Thus, we now no longer have a sister Presbytery in Mexico. As well, the Presbyterian Church in Ghana and Brazil are in the middle of similar action, following Mexico's lead. There will, no doubt, be others.

12. How does moving from the PC(USA) affect our Pastors and other employees?

There are two effects. First, there are pension and medical concerns, the hope is that we could share pension medical benefits with the PC(USA) Board of Pensions. Another option is the possibility that our staff (Pastors and Debbie) could take a hit on their retirement and we would need to find another group medical plan for staff. The second effect for pastors is emotional separation from the PC(USA) and their friends and colleagues who don't make a move, as well as going into a smaller denomination where there aren't as many job opportunities. Our pastors have looked at the potential effects of leaving the PC(USA) and are prepared to do what is best for our church and believe that God will honor that decision.

13. In response to the action of the PC(USA), what options are available to IRPC?

The options are, do nothing, stay with the PC(USA) and stay under its authority or leave and

move to another Presbyterian denomination.

14. Why did the PC(USA) set it up whereby the Presbytery owns a church's land and not owned outright by the church?

The Presbyterian Church is structured as a hierarchical organization. As such, it is organized in successive ranks or orders. The local Church is under the authority of the Presbytery, who is under the authority of the Synod, who is under the General Assembly.

15. Is voting by the Congregation in April to leave (not to look at possibilities to go or stay where we are)?

The Congregational meeting in April will be to vote to determine to either stay with the PC(USA) or seek dismissal from the PC(USA) and move to the another Reformed Denomination.

16. Why do we have to draw out this for such a long time?

The Gracious Dismissal Policy of the Presbytery of Tropical Florida includes the process we are to follow. It is designed to allow a congregation to come together, have time to research options, pray together, answer questions, and discern God's direction.

17. Does the 80% requirement apply to the total active membership number or is it 80% of those members present at the meeting.

There are two issues related to the percentages required for the vote for dismissal. A two thirds (2/3) vote is required for dismissal. An 80% vote is required for dismissal with property.

The Gracious Dismissal Policy requires two (2) called Congregational meetings during the dismissal process. The Session of the Church shall call a congregational meeting for the purpose of discussing the question "Shall our congregation request dismissal to another Reformed body of its choice?" The required quorum is one fourth (1/4) of the active membership of the congregation. At this meeting no vote for any purpose will be taken.

The second congregational meeting may be called no sooner than three (3) months from the date of the 1st meeting. At least one third (1/3) of the active membership shall be present. The question to be discussed is: "Shall our congregation request dismissal to another Reformed body of its choice?" After ample time for speakers speaking for dismissal and those wanting to stay, discussion, and prayer, a secret written ballot shall be taken on this question.

If two thirds (2/3) of those active members present vote to request dismissal, the request shall go to Presbytery. Generally, the Presbytery will normally grant dismissal upon a 2/3 vote from a congregation.

The Property issue is a separate issue and poll. The Gracious Separation Policy requires the Presbytery Response Team (PRT) to be assigned and active with a church during the process to ensure that the process is followed appropriately. If the PRT in their process of consulting with members of the congregation feel that they are overwhelmingly united in their conviction to disassociate from the PC(USA), the PRT will recommend to the Presbytery that the congregation be allowed to depart with their property. This determination of consensus has historically been determined by the polling of the congregation taken during the 2nd congregational meeting. If this polling results in at least 80% of the gathered congregation in the duly called congregational meeting favoring departure from the PC(USA), then normally the PRT will recommend that the congregation be dismissed with all of its property.

18. How and when will we determine which Denomination to move to?

The timing is basically the same as the vote to seek dismissal:

- The Discernment Committee would make a recommendation to the Session after the January Congregational meeting.
- The Session would include it in the call for the congregational meeting in April.
- The Active Members would then vote at the Congregational meeting in April to either stay with the PC(USA) or seek dismissal from the PC(USA).

The Session votes on which Denomination is selected. The Congregation should be fully aware and on board with which denomination, have already received information, and be aware that their vote to leave is also an affirmation of moving to the new Denomination.

19. Has the PC(USA) been given an opportunity to answer the accusations leveled against them?

The Gracious Dismissal Policy requires a church seeking dismissal to work collaboratively with the Presbytery and to allow representatives to meet with and discuss issues, questions and concerns with congregations.

Representatives of the Presbytery of Tropical Florida will be present and on the agenda of the Congregational Meeting called for January 22, 2012, 1PM, in the Sanctuary.

20. Does the congregational vote on dismissal have to be in person? Can there be absentee ballots?

Voting at the congregational meeting is by secret ballot cast by those active members physically present at the meeting.

21. When is the January meeting in Orlando and how can we find information to attend?

The Covenanting Conference of the Fellowship of Presbyterians is January 18-20, 2012 in Orlando, Florida. Information on the event, registration and hotel information can be found at <http://www.fellowship-pres.org/>. Registration is open now. The link is posted on the IRPC website www.irpcfamilly.org.

22. The material mentioned that the Gracious Separation Policy within the Presbytery includes paying several years worth of per capita Apportionment. What specifically is the cost?

The Policy states: In consideration of the ongoing work, ministry and life of the Presbytery the departing congregation will make a voluntary gift of three (3) years of its per capita assessment. (This would be due over a three-year period.)

IRPC currently budgets \$20,000 per year for per capita. Therefore, over a 3-year period, the total cost would be \$60,000.

23. When does the General Assembly meet next; Can they over-rule the local Presbytery's present decision regarding dismissal with property; And are we on track to avoid the action of the General Assembly?

The next meeting of the General Assembly (GA) is in June 30 – July7, 2012. There are two ways that the GA can render the Presbyter's dismissal policy invalid. The first would be through an amendment to the Book of Order to not allow Presbyteries to dismiss congregations. This would require a majority of the Presbyteries to approve the change and if approved would go into effect in

July 2013. Alternatively, GA could make an authoritative interpretation on a relevant section of the Book of Order saying that “Presbyteries could not dismiss churches with their property.” If this were to take place it would go into effect at the close of the General Assembly on July 7, 2012. This would not be retroactive, meaning that if a Presbytery has already dismissed a church prior to July 7, it could not go back on that action. This is why if a church desires to leave it is best to do so prior to July 7, 2012.

24. If the Church votes to leave in a 85%/15% split, what happens to the other 15%?

If IRPC progresses through the process and the Session calls for a 2nd congregational meeting, members will be asked to vote if IRPC shall request dismissal or not request dismissal. Once the vote is taken, regardless of how they personally voted, members will be welcomed and encouraged to stay with IRPC and move to another reformed body or they may wish to move their membership to another church of their choosing.

25. The Session and Congregation makes the decision about which Presbyterian Denomination IRPC should will. The pastors also make a decision about what denomination they join. Could the pastors make a different decision than the congregations and still be our pastor?

Whatever denomination the church is a part of, that denomination determines if pastors from other denominations can pastor those churches. The three (3) most likely choices for denominations for both the congregation and the pastors are to either stay in the PC(USA), go to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC), or go to the new Presbyterian denomination.

Right now the PC(USA) allows pastors of a few denominations to maintain their ordination in that denomination and still serve a PC(USA) church. The PC(USA) does not allow pastors of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) to serve as pastors in the PC(USA) and vice versa. The PC(USA) will decide next summer if pastors of the new Presbyterian denomination can serve as pastors of PC(USA) congregations. Also, the main stipulation is related to *senior* pastors, so the most crucial decisions are the one that Pastor Dana makes and the one the congregation makes.

The best way to understand how the current relationship between Pastor Dana and the congregation would be affected is by proposing a few scenarios:

1. If IRPC and the pastors made the same decision with which body to affiliate, then this is obviously the easiest way forward and there are no issues.
2. If IRPC went EPC then Pastor Dana would have to transfer his ordination to the EPC in order to remain the pastor of IRPC. Pastor Beth and Pastor Bryan would not have to do this.
3. If IRPC stays PC(USA) and Pastor Dana felt he needed to align with the new denomination, then the PC(USA) would have to recognize pastors in the new denomination in order for Pastor Dana to remain our pastor.
4. If IRPC went to the new denomination, the new denomination will let PC(USA) pastors remain as the pastor as long as they adhere to the theological, biblical, and moral standards of the new Presbyterian denomination.

The chart below illustrates the pastoral relationship if IRPC aligns with a denomination and Pastor Dana aligns with a separate denomination:

	And Dana selects PCUSA	And Dana selects EPC	And Dana selects NPD
If IRPC selects PCUSA	YES	NO	Maybe
If IRPC selects EPC	NO	YES	NO
If IRPC selects NPD	YES	Probably not	YES

** PCUSA – Presbyterian Church USA * EPC - Evangelical Presbyterian Church * NPD - New Presbyterian Denomination*