

CALLED MEETING
September 27, 2016

NORTHEAST GEORGIA PRESBYTERY

On a very warm day in September, a Called Meeting of Northeast Georgia Presbytery was held at 11:00 a.m. at Covenant Presbyterian Church in Athens. Moderator Helen Epps call the meeting to order and gave the opening prayer.

DECLARATION OF QUORUM

K. Travis Adams, Stated Clerk, declared that a quorum was present in accord with the Book of Order.

Moderator Helen Epps presented the procedures that would be used to conduct this meeting. The purpose of this meeting is as follows:

The sole purpose of this Meeting is to hear the Second Reading of the Report from the Washington Administrative Commission concerning the dismissal of the Washington Presbyterian Church to Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians, ECO.

Following the Second Reading, there will be discussion of the actions for dismissal contained in the report and a vote on those actions and dismissal of Washington Presbyterian Church.

Those calling the meeting are:

The Rev. Andy Cooke, Chair
The Rev. Ford G'Segner
The Rev. Boyd Lien
Ruling Elder Wanda Butler, Christ
Ruling Elder Judy Grieve, Covenant, Augusta
Ruling Elder Jim Newland, Covenant, Athens

Rev. Andy Cooke, Chair of the Administrative Commission for the Washington Presbyterian Church, read the second reading of the Report.

The Administrative Commission for the Washington Presbyterian Church was initially established by action of the May 19, 2015 meeting of Northeast Georgia Presbytery and activated by the Committee on Ministry on August 25, 2015. Members include Wanda Butler, Andy Cooke, Judy Grieve, Ford G'Segner, Boyd Lien, Jim Newland, and Deb Trimpe. Andy Cooke was appointed chair by action of the presbytery, Judy Grieve was elected secretary by action of the commission,

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and Wanda Butler was appointed Vice Chair by action of the commission. We held a training meeting on July 22, 2015. We conducted business meetings on September 11, October 5, November 2, and November 30, 2015 and on January 25, February 22, March 21, July 22, and July 26, 2016. Other business was conducted via email. A consultation with other Administrative Commissions was held on June 14, 2016. Citing the potential for the appearance of a conflict of interest, Deb Trimpe resigned from the commission on July 17, 2016 with a letter to the Stated Clerk. Following her resignation, the commission reconsidered all decisions separate from her influence.

On August 16, 2016, a preliminary report was presented at a stated meeting of Northeast Georgia Presbytery. An open consultation was held at Covenant Presbyterian Church in Athens on September 1, 2016 in which all members of Northeast Georgia Presbytery were invited to give feedback. After that meeting, the members of the Administrative Commission requested a called meeting of Northeast Georgia Presbytery on September 27, 2016 to vote on this final report.

As an administrative commission of Northeast Georgia Presbytery, we were “...empowered to consider and conclude matters...” referred to us by Northeast Georgia Presbytery on May 19, 2015 (G-3.0109). In accordance with G-3.0109b(5), we were given authority to visit a particular congregation over which Northeast Georgia Presbytery has “...immediate jurisdiction reported to be affected with disorder, and inquiring into and settling the difficulties therein...” We did not consider any matters regarding ecclesiastical judicial process and or pastoral relationships, which would have required us to seek action by Northeast Georgia Presbytery (G-3.0109b and G-3.0109b(5)). While we had no restrictions placed on our powers, we were given the power to assume original jurisdiction, which we did not elect to use. In consideration of the fact that the May 19, 2015 motion did not explicitly grant us the power to dismiss the congregation and in consideration of an Advisory Opinion of the Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church (USA), which cites the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Case *Sundquist v. Heartland*, stating that, “While a presbytery could delegate dismissal of a congregation to an AC, such a decision is of such missional importance to a presbytery that the entire presbytery would likely wish to discern such a matter together,”¹ we have determined this it would be best to present this report before a meeting of Northeast Georgia Presbytery, so that the presbytery may have the option to “...rescind or amend an action of its administrative commission in the same way actions of the council are modified.” (G-3.0109b). This will also serve the spirit of our polity, which says that an administrative commission shall,

¹ http://oga.pcusa.org/media/uploads/oga/pdf/advisory-opinion_19.pdf

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“...before making its decision final, afford to all persons affected by its decision fair notice and an opportunity to be heard on matters at issue.” (G-3.0109b).

We began our work in July 2015 by committing to prayer, establishing authority, clarifying roles, and building clear channels of communication. We gathered information about the congregation and the Washington-Wilkes community. After spending time in discernment to determine the best way forward for the Washington Presbyterian Church, Northeast Georgia Presbytery, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and the Church of Jesus Christ, the Administrative Commission determined that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) does not have a potential viable witness in this community apart from the current members of the Washington Presbyterian Church, nor do we see a potential viable witness within the next ten years. In addition, if we were to hold the property apart from the congregation, we do not believe that it would be an asset to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

In regards to our work as an Administrative Commission, we in no way conferred any right to the Washington Presbyterian Church to “self-execute” their dismissal.² We never asked them to call a congregational meeting to vote on their dismissal, nor did the congregational meeting that they held shortly after the formation of our Administrative Commission have any binding effect on our decision. There was not predetermined, formulaic mechanism at work in this process. We did survey the congregation and we found only one person who wanted to remain as a member of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). That one person has since asked to be removed from the roles of the congregation, so there are no current members of the Washington Presbyterian Church who have stated that they would like to remain in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Regarding the trust clause of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), we took into account that the property and assets associated with the Washington Presbyterian Church are held in trust for the benefit and use of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).³ We undertook a full study of those assets across time and for the future, and we believe that our recommendations will have the greatest benefit to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). We also considered the needs of the Washington Presbyterian Church in terms of its operation. While the assets associated with this

congregation exceed \$600,000, a significant majority of those assets are tied to property and designated funds. Our financial decisions did not come from any formula or precedent, nor are they intended to create a formula or set a precedent.

As such, the Administrative Commission of the Northeast Georgia Presbytery for the Washington Presbyterian Church approves the July 18, 2015 request from the

² see *Presbytery of New York City v. McGee, et al.*

³ see *Tom, et al. v. Presbytery of San Francisco*

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session of the Washington Presbyterian Church for dismissal from the Presbyterian Church (USA) to ECO: Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians, pending acceptance and completion by the Washington Presbyterian Church of the terms and conditions set by the Administrative Commission for Washington Presbyterian Church.

The terms and conditions for the dismissal of the Washington Presbyterian Church from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), as mediated by the Administrative Commission of Northeast Georgia Presbytery for the Washington Presbyterian Church, are as follows:

1) Northeast Georgia Presbytery will gift all assets connected to the Washington Presbyterian Church to that congregation, with the exception of \$22,000 in cash and the Richard and Gus Stapler Lowe Memorial Fund (account no. 1021100942). The Washington Presbyterian Church, which currently holds these assets, will make payment to Northeast Georgia Presbytery of \$22,000. In order to ease any potential burden caused by this, payment will be made in the amount of \$4,400 per year for five years with the option of early payoff. The five-year period begins on the date of the first payment.

2) After this report has been approved at a meeting of Northeast Georgia Presbytery and 90 days has passed, Northeast Georgia Presbytery will present a quit claim deed to the Washington Presbyterian Church for the two parcels in Washington, Georgia that are associated with that congregation, namely parcel #W29 047 (.73 acres) and parcel #W29 046 (.24 acres), and all of the buildings, furnishings, and improvements contained on those parcels.

3) The session of Washington Presbyterian Church will send a letter to the Special Gifts Committee of the Presbyterian Foundation requesting that the Presbyterian Foundation change the beneficiary of the Richard and Gus Stapler Lowe Memorial Fund (account no. 1021100942) to Northeast Georgia Presbytery. (Note: It is the judgment of the Administrative Commission that this will happen anyway, but we believe that this will aid the process. The value of this permanent endowment fund was \$22,898.70 on October 20, 2015.)

4) All cash payments made to Northeast Georgia Presbytery that are unencumbered by previous action of Northeast Georgia Presbytery will be used first to pay the expenses of the Administrative Commission itself. Once those expenses are settled, remaining funds will be assigned to ministries of Northeast Georgia Presbytery via a recommendation from the Coordinating Team of Northeast Georgia Presbytery. The final decision for the use of these funds will be made at a meeting of the Northeast Georgia Presbytery.

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5) In accordance with G-3.0107, all records will be transferred to the Presbyterian Historical Society, 425 Lombard St, Philadelphia, PA 19147. Records are to include all minutes, membership registers, annual reports, bylaws/charters, incorporation records, annual budgets, and annual financial statements from the founding of the congregation through the date of dismissal in original, paper form. The Administrative Commission will reimburse shipping expenses for up to \$200. The session may opt to have the records digitized and returned at their expense. This action will be completed within 180 days of the date of dismissal.

6) Washington Presbyterian Church will change their name to “Washington Evangelical Presbyterian Church” following their dismissal from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and remove all logos representing the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

7) The officers of the corporation named “Washington Presbyterian Church, Inc.,” which was formed in 1992, will dissolve the corporation within 180 days of the date of dismissal. The session may reincorporate using a name that is not identical to the prior name of incorporation.

8) Washington Presbyterian Church will be required to apply for a new federal taxpayer ID number.

The Stated Clerk of Northeast Georgia Presbytery will communicate by letter the effective date of dismissal to the Clerk of Session of the Washington Presbyterian Church, the Moderator and General Presbyter of Northeast Georgia Presbytery, the Chair of the Administrative Commission, and the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of the South (ECO).

The Administrative Commission requests that the session of Washington Presbyterian Church invite the members of the Administrative Commission and representatives of ECO: Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians to worship together at a regular Sunday morning worship service with the congregation so that we may mark this transition together and affirm our unity in Jesus Christ.

Respectfully submitted on September 1, 2016 to the Stated Clerk of Northeast Georgia Presbytery,
The Rev. Andrew E. Cooke, Chair of the Administrative Commission
Ruling Elder Wanda Butler, Vice Chair
Ruling Elder Judy Grieve, Secretary
The Rev. Ford G’Segner
The Rev. Boyd Lien
Ruling Elder Jim Newland

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After the second reading, Andy Cooke answered questions regarding the report. There will be a name change of the church to Washington Evangelical Presbyterian Church ECO and Church Records will be sent to the Presbyterian Historical Society. The Administrative Commission honestly thinks that this is the best way going forward. The first payment has been received at the presbytery office and is being held in escrow until the Washington Presbyterian Church has been dismissed to ECO.

After hearing and answering questions regarding the report from the floor, and giving an opportunity to speak for or against the report, a motion was made that the report of the Washington Presbyterian Church Administrative Commission be adopted and that Washington Presbyterian Church be dismissed to ECO: Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians in accordance with the terms and conditions outlined in the report. The motion was made to accept the report and approve the requests, terms and conditions. The motion was then overwhelmingly passed with one negative vote.

Moderator Helen Epps showed the appreciation of Presbytery for the time, work and dedication of the Administrative Commission for the Washington Church. Rev. Andy Cooke thanked the Presbytery, and recognized the members of the Washington Church and Clerk of Session Sharleen Anderson and Rev. Glenn Kohlhagen. Rev. Kohlhagen also thanked the members of the Administrative Commission and Presbytery Staff, Rev. Hilary N. Shuford and Rev. K. Travis Adams.

An announcement was made that there would be a church service at the Washington Church on October 9th at 11:00 a.m. and that all were invited.

Rev. K. Travis Adams made an announcement that Rev. Alice Wood will retire as Pastor of Wiley Church on Friday, September 30th. Also he recognized Rev. Glen Kohlhagen and the membership of Washington Church and asked Presbytery to keep them in our prayers. After singing "Blest Be the Ties That Binds" verses 1 and 4, a motion was made to dismiss the Administrative Commission for the Washington Presbyterian Church, which was approved.

REPORT OF ATTENDANCE

Teaching Elders

K. Travis Adams, Susan Balfour, Don Barber, Jr., Cheryl T. Barnes, Robert H. Bohler, Jr., Tara Bulger, R. Brock Burnett, Jeffrey A. Cain, Andy Chambers, Andy Cooke, Paul W. Eans, Teresa Franklin, Ford F. G'Segner, Mark C. Harper, Harold

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Teaching Elders continued

Harris, Garland S. Hart, Jennifer Horton, David P. Keister, Jasper Keith, Glen Kohlhagen, M. Beecher Mathes, Stephen L. Nelms, R. Montgomery Nelson, David Powers, Robert W. Prim, Edward Rees, Stuart Ritter, Decatur Rodgers, Holly Shoaf-O’Kula, Hilary N. Shuford, Deborah L. Trimpe, Alex W. Williams, Alice T. Wood, and Theodore S. Worley.

Ruling Elder Commissioners

Leslye Queen, Richard Stone, Jerry Rogers, **Athens First**; Matthew T. Hoots, Lawton Stewart, Bonnie Pinkerton, Philip Gibson, **Central**; Wanda C. Butler, **Christ**; Tina Evans, Mary Harlan, **Clarksville First**; Melanie Kress, Bob Sosebee, **Commerce**; Sue Rathbun, **Covenant, Athens**; Judy Grieve, Ruth Mayhall, **Covenant, Augusta**; Catherine Davis, Susie D. G’Segner, **Eatonton**; Mary Carden, **Gainesville First**; Gabe Martin, **Hebron**; Sylvia McDonald, **Jefferson**; Norm Gullick, **Lavonia**; Peggy A. Bullard, Jan Wilbanks, **Madison**; Nancy Miller, Gloria Burns, **Milledgeville First**; Joanne Jordan, Tom Matthews, **Monticello**; Ann Leonard, **Mount Hermon**; Jessica James Weems, Bill Jackson, Ted Brothers, **Nacoochee**; John Gregg, Dawn Skinner, Phyllis Meyer, Kathy Little, **Oconee**; Margit E. Adams, Jenny Bell, **Toccoa First**; Sharleen Anderson, **Washington**; and Bonnie Flick, **Wiley**.

Ruling Elder Commissioner to a particular church

Rick Billingslea, **Hebron**

Church Educator

Kathy Boardman, **Covenant, Athens**

Moderator, Coordinating Team Chair

Ed Boland, Coordinating Team; Helen Epps, Moderator

Visitors

Louie Boyd, Eloise Williams, Lollie Hoots, Julee Schoenfeld, **Central**; Marc Galvin, **Oconee**; Bob Anderson, Miriam Kitchens, **Washington**; Linda Turner, **Presbytery Staff (Recording Clerk)**.

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ADJOURNMENT

The Called Meeting of Northeast Georgia Presbytery held on September 27, 2016 was dismissed with prayer by Moderator Helen Epps.

Respectfully Submitted,

Linda C. Turner, Recording Clerk

K. Travis Adams, Stated Clerk