

John Calvin Presbytery
P.O. Box 787
Shell Knob, MO 65747

August 11, 2015

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

For decades John Calvin Presbytery and its predecessor bodies have worked side by side and hand in hand with First and Calvary Presbyterian Church and its predecessors, all to the glory of God and the growth of the Kingdom. This has been a strong and vital partnership that has been a source of spiritual strength, guidance, support, and prayer that has worked in both directions. The mission and ministry of First and Calvary is, and has been, a beacon of light for our presbytery in the Springfield area and a model for other congregations. Many of your teaching and ruling elders have served in leadership at the presbytery level and have always brought great insight and wisdom to the body of Christ.

In recent months however, the tide has turned within the leadership of the congregation. A seemingly few leaders have asserted their desires over the rest of the congregation and against the presbytery. The most recent and saddest act being the restraining order that was filed against the presbytery with no provocation or imminent threat. This act has cost the church and the presbytery a great deal of money that was donated with the intention of mission and ministry, not civil court action.

Your session voted by a $\frac{3}{4}$ majority to call a congregational meeting after worship on August 16, 2015 for the purpose of voting on whether to disaffiliate with the PC(USA). The remaining $\frac{1}{4}$ of the session wanted to request the presbytery to begin a discernment process that would bring about a decision about whether to stay in or to leave the PC(USA). The congregational vote on August 16 will not be recognized by the presbytery, as this is not an issue on which the congregation votes, according to our polity, which all deacons, ruling and teaching elders have vowed to uphold.

In response to the filing of the restraining order, the presbytery declared that a schism exists within the congregation. This was done in order to provide a clear avenue of spiritual nurture and support for those who know that they wish to remain in the PC(USA), at least through the appropriate process of discernment.

All the cost and heartache of the civil court actions could easily have been avoided. The presbytery has not ever threatened to remove a congregation from its building or to tamper with its ministry, and never will do so. The discernment process would have taken a few more months during which time some relationships between church members that have been damaged over these months could have been healed. After hearing the concerns of all church members, the end result of that process would be a decision by the presbytery on whether to dismiss the church to another. We are currently using this process with three other churches, one of which has property that probably are in excess of those of First and Calvary.

At the court hearing on the temporary restraining order, Judge Cordonnier encouraged the presbytery to form an Administrative Commission to facilitate reconciliation and a resolution of the schism that currently exists. It is clear that the presbytery will not be able to prevent the vote on August 16, but we did want the membership of the church to know that the presbytery stands ready to work with the session and congregation in a decent and orderly process of discernment. A vote of the congregation not to disaffiliate would show a desire to move through a process that could bring healing and wholeness to all while achieving the end result of discerning God's will.

¶At its meeting on August 3, the presbytery expressed its heartfelt desire to continue to work within our polity and process with the congregation and leadership of First and Calvary. The body vowed to be in prayer for you, your session and your pastor.

In Christ's Service,