

**Bethany Presbyterian Church
Reason for Requesting Dismissal from
Holston Presbytery and Presbyterian Church (USA)**

After considerable prayer, reflection, study and discussion, the Session of Bethany Presbyterian Church (BPC) voted unanimously to seek dismissal from the Presbyterian Church (USA) (PCUSA) to another reform denomination.

PURPOSE

This document is an effort to explain why the Session requested to be dismissed from PCUSA and to demonstrate why the Session believe Bethany is called by God to separate from the PCUSA, but to do so without dishonoring our brothers and sisters in the PCUSA. Also included are the following:

- An overview of PCUSA's theology
- Four overarching principles for the Session's action with biblical support
- A listing of how PCUSA practices now deviate from the stated theology
- Conclusion reached by the Session.

BPC has labored with Holston Presbytery and the PCUSA since the merger of 1983 to bring the Gospel of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, to all persons in fulfillment of the "Great Commission". We have fought the "good fight" of faith and doctrine to affirm the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ, the infallible authority of scripture, and the tenet of salvation by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone. We have conducted this effort through countless testimony and votes in our denomination meetings and discussions among church leaders. We continue to have many friends within the presbytery, so to seek dismissal from the PCUSA comes after many years of struggle, continued prayers and tears over the continued decline of the doctrinal purity of the PCUSA. However, in the providence of almighty God and the leading of the Holy Spirit within BPC, we seek dismissal from the PCUSA as we join another reformed body. The rationale for taking these actions is based on four overarching principles which led the Session to conclude PCUSA has deviated from church theology and is acting in a manner inconsistent with biblical principles and its own governing documents.

The question can fairly be asked, "Why take this action now, and not before?" BPC for some years has been concerned about the direction the PCUSA was headed, as noted in the preceding paragraph. We watched with dismay the actions taken by the General Assembly and Presbyteries, but had not been confronted directly with the need to take a stand – at least not until recently. After 2 years of the Holston Presbytery Committee on Ministry considering the ordination of a practicing homosexual (with two tied votes during that process), the issue was referred to the full Presbytery. At the September 4, 2012 Holston Presbytery meeting at Holston Camp, those present were asked if their congregations could remain members of Holston Presbytery should a practicing homosexual, who's a member of Pittsburg Presbytery, be transferred and admitted as a Minister of the Word and Sacrament. By this action, the Presbytery forced the hand of BPC and caused us to confront the issue directly. We are acting now because we are at the crossroads of being faithful to our sacred and historical doctrine or having to follow what we believe to be a humanistic and relativist path that has no grounding in biblical principles.

PCUSA THEOLOGY

The PCUSA Book of Confessions contains the Creeds and Confessions defining PCUSA's stated theology and includes:

The Nicene Creed	The Shorter Catechism
The Apostle's Creed	The Larger Catechism
The Scot's Confession	The Theological Declaration of Barmen
The Heidelberg Catechism	The Confession of 1967
The Westminster Confession	A Brief Statement of Faith

These are documents that have stood the test of time while faithfully setting forth the theology underlying our Reformed faith. The Book of Confessions affirms the following:

- Divinity of Jesus Christ
- The Trinity as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost
- The atoning sacrifice of Christ by death upon the cross
- Christ's bodily resurrection and ascent to the Father in Heaven
- The Bible is God's Word.

THE FOUR OVERARCHING PRINCIPLES

I. The absolute authority of Scripture has been diminished and the "enlightened conscience" now takes precedence in the guidance and governing of the PCUSA.

God's Word: (All quotations are from the NIV unless otherwise specified)

Psalm 119:160 all your words are true; all your righteous laws are eternal.

Matthew 4:4 Jesus answered, "it is written: "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Luke 24:44-45 He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

Then He open their minds so they could understand that Scriptures.

Revelation 22:18-19. I warned everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

The erosion of authority: Although the PCUSA still affirms in its Confessions that the Bible is the source of our faith and life, in its practice, individual interpretations are valued above the propositional truths of scripture.

1. The Confession of 1967 states that Scriptural authority is determined not by Scripture, but by the interpreter. In effect, this means that our intellect is valued above the plain meaning of the text. [C67 – 9.27]
2. Those who deny key biblical doctrines remain unchallenged. For example, in a sermon on Pentecost 2012, Rev. John Shuck denied that most of the events in the Book of Acts

ever happened. Previously, Rev. Shuck has denied many central tenets of the Christian faith. [shuckandjive.org/2012/05/pentecosts-miracle-sermon.html]

3. In the recent General Assembly Permanent Judicial Parnell case, those who sought to reference the authority of Scripture were told that the Bible cannot be used to prove any one position since there are so many interpretations of the Bible.
[ora.pcusa.org/media/uploads/oga/pdf/pic22003.pdf]

II. The absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ over every area of life has been abandoned in favor of a growing “pluralism” and “inclusiveness” within our denomination in violation of Scripture and our own historic Reformed standards.

God’s Word: (All quotations are from the NIV unless otherwise specified)

Matthew 2:21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.

Luke 1:31-33 you will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.

John 1:1-3 in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

John 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

I Timothy 2:5-6 for there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time.

2 Corinthians 5:19-21 that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Romans 5:18-19 Consequently, just as one trespass resulted condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. For just as though the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one-man the many will be made righteous.

I John 4:1-2 this is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

I Peter 3:18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit.

I John 2:1-2 my little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have the Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.
(NASB)

I John 4:8-10 the one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us that God has sent his only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Ephesians 1:19-23 and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength He exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age, but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fulfills everything in every way.

The erosion of Christology: Although the PCUSA still affirms the importance of the example, teachings, and work of Jesus Christ, it seems much less certain about his Lordship.

1. The Advocacy Committee for Women's concerns brought a resolution to the 2012 General Assembly encouraging participation in the "Words Matter" project, which seeks to eradicate the term "Lord" for Jesus.
[pcbiz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id+=3941&promoid=238]
2. According to the Fall 2011 Presbyterian Panel Report only 41% of pastors agree that "only followers of Jesus Christ can be saved". The number drops to 27% of specialized clergy.
[pcusa.org/media/uploads/research/pdfs/panel_profile_survey_2011_summary_color.pdf]
3. The 2008 and 2010 PCUSA General Assemblies struggled with the fact that exclusive claims for Jesus were a stumbling block in efforts at interfaith dialogues. So the decision was made to join Jews and Mohammedans in claiming that "We are all children of Abraham", and to omit any references to the Trinity and Christ's divine nature. *[Solas Page 3]*
4. The 2001 General Assembly failed to support a motion to declare "the singular, saving lordship of Jesus Christ".
5. The new Form of Government begins with a claim that "the triune God...redeems...all people". This is universalism, the belief that all people will be saved, regardless of belief in Christ. (F-1.01)
6. The new Form of Government guarantees the full inclusion of all people "irrespective of theological conviction", without mention of Christ as the means of salvation. (F-1.0403)
7. In 2002 at a Covenant Network Conference, a speaker declared the atoning death of Christ to be an outdated doctrine. *[covnetpres.org2002/11/qwho-do-you-say-that-i-am/]*
8. Traditional language for God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit has been rejected, both by radical feminists who disapprove of masculine language, and by those who do not wish to offend people of other religions or those with no religion at all.
[gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/interfaith/interfaith-toolkit/]
9. Over the past two decades, representatives of The Jesus Seminar, which blatantly denies the divinity of Jesus Christ, have been invited to speak at PCUSA, conference centers and have been published by PCUSA funded publishing houses.

III. The “essential tenets” of our faith are not being specified by our denomination.

God’s Word: (All quotations are from the NIV unless otherwise specified)

Deuteronomy 6:4 Hear, O Israel: The Lord Our God, the Lord Is One.

Isaiah 45:5 I am the Lord, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God...

Revelation 4:11 “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will, they were created and have their being.”

Matthew 28:19 Therefore: make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Psalms 51:5 surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

Psalms 143:2 do not bring your servant into judgment, for no one living is righteous before you.

Romans 3:19-23 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law, we become conscious of our sin. But now, apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Matthew 28:18-20 then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age”.

I Corinthians 12:13 For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body – whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

I Corinthians 11:23-26 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks He broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

I Corinthians 10:16 is the cup of Thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break up participation in the body of Christ?

Philippians 2:14-16 do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, "children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation". Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life...

1. In 1993, at the “Re-Imagining” conference, supported by PCUSA funds, one speaker declared, “I don’t think we need folks hanging on crosses and blood dripping and weird stuff...” [*brfwitness.org/?p=628*]
2. On June 22, 2002, the 214th General Assembly – by a 77% vote – approved a statement that sanctions late-term abortions.
3. In 2010, Margaret Miles gave the Sprunt Lecture at Union Seminary in Richmond, VA in which she suggested replacing the cross with a lactating breast. She said, “The cross is inappropriate as a symbol of God’s love.” [*christiancentury.org/article/2008-01/gods-love-mothers-milk*]

4. Liberation Theology, with Marxist overtones, has replaced salvation with justice and evangelism with political activism. Many extreme left wing causes have received support.

[layman.org/Commentaries/Columns_by_Parker_T_Williamson/Robert_Mugabe_Presbyterian_financial_beneficiary.aspx]

5. St. Andrew Presbyterian Church in Austin, TX received an avowed atheist into membership, not because of religious conviction, but because he approved of the church's politics. *[likethedew.com/2011/11/07my-presbyterian-cult/]*
6. A 1993 conference entitled "Re-Imagining God" was funded by the PCUSA mission budget and plan largely by PCUSA staff at denominational expense. "Worship" leaders deny the existence of a transcendent God, worship the God within ourselves," and exchanged the goddess "Sophia" for Jesus Christ.

IV. The PCUSA General Assembly (through the action and vote of its 173 presbyteries) and our new form of government have removed key Biblical standards for ordination so they now allow those who are openly practicing sin to be ordained, installed, and received into church leadership positions (Minister of the Word and Sacrament, elder, deacon, etc.)

God's Word: (All quotations are from the NIV unless otherwise specified)

Genesis 19:1-11 the two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. "My lords," he said, "please turn aside to your servant's house. You can wash your feet and spend the night and then go on your way early in the morning." "No," they answered, "we will spend the night in the square." But he insisted so strongly that they did go with him and entered his house. He prepared a meal for them, baking bread without yeast, and they ate. Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house. They called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them." Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him and said, "No, my friends. Don't do this wicked thing. Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don't do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof." "Get out of our way," they replied. "This fellow came here as a foreigner, and now he wants to play the judge! We'll treat you worse than them." They kept bringing pressure on Lot and moved forward to break down the door. But the men inside reached out and pulled Lot back into the house and shut the door. Then they struck the men who were at the door of the house, young and old, with blindness so that they could not find the door.

Leviticus 18:22 Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman; that is detestable.

Leviticus 20:13 If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They are to be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.

Judges 19:16-24 that evening an old man from the hill country of Ephraim, who was living in Gibeah (the inhabitants of the place were Benjamites), came in from his work in the fields. When he looked and saw the traveler in the city square, the old man asked, "Where are you going? Where did you come from?" He answered, "We are on our way from Bethlehem in Judah to a remote area in the hill country of Ephraim where I live. I have been to Bethlehem in Judah and now I am going to the house of the LORD. No one has taken me in for the night. We have both straw and fodder for our donkeys and bread and wine for ourselves your servants—me, the

woman and the young man with us. We don't need anything." "You are welcome at my house," the old man said. "Let me supply whatever you need. Only don't spend the night in the square." So he took him into his house and fed his donkeys. After they had washed their feet, they had something to eat and drink. While they were enjoying themselves, some of the wicked men of the city surrounded the house. Pounding on the door, they shouted to the old man who owned the house, "Bring out the man who came to your house so we can have sex with him." The owner of the house went outside and said to them, "No, my friends don't be so vile. Since this man is my guest, don't do this outrageous thing. Look, here is my virgin daughter, and his concubine. I will bring them out to you now, and you can use them and do to them whatever you wish. But as for this man, don't do such an outrageous thing."

1 Kings 14-24 there were even male shrine prostitutes in the land; the people engaged in all the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites.

1 Kings 15:12 He expelled the male shrine prostitutes from the land and got rid of all the idols his ancestors had made.

2 Kings 23:7 He also tore down the quarters of the male shrine prostitutes that were in the temple of the LORD, the quarters where women did weaving for Asherah.

Romans 1:18-32 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error. Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, and no mercy. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Ephesians 4:17-24 so I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to

indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed. That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You are taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

1 Timothy 1:8-10 we know that the law is good if one uses it properly. We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine.

Jude 7 In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.

1. In 1991, the General Assembly Task Force on Human Sexuality recommended a "Justice/Love Principal" to the General Assembly. In its report, the task force concluded that all sexual activity among adults – whether marital or extramarital, heterosexual or homosexual – is good if it occurs by mutual consent, is not coerced (justice), and is motivated by a sincere desire to please the partner (love). The task force report recognized that this quote “Justice/love principal” does not comport with Scripture, so it offered a new understanding of Scriptural authority: "Whatever in Scripture, tradition, reason or experience embodies genuine love and caring justice, that bears authority for us and commends an ethic to do likewise. Whatever in Biblical tradition, church practice and teaching, human experience and human reason violates God's commandments to do, love and justice that must be rejected as ethical authority." The report failed to gain approval in the General Assembly, but, the assembly agreed the report could be used as a "study resource" for the church. The concept of "Justice/Love" has since appeared in numerous denominational conferences, study guides, curricula and promotional materials.
2. Stated in the 2006 Report on Peace, Unity and Purity (PUP), General Assembly, Birmingham (2006): “Therefore, we believe the church should seek constructive, Christ-like alternatives to the ‘yes/no’ forms in which questions about sexuality, ordination, and same-gender covenantal relationships have been put to the church in recent decades.”
3. In June 2008, the General Assembly nullified all previous proscriptions against sexual behavior outside the covenant of marriage by a new Authoritative Interpretation, which attempted to overrule the PJC decision in respect to the PUP report.
4. In 2010, for the fifth time, the PCUSA General Assembly voted in favor of submitting to the Presbyteries its recommendation to overturn the "fidelity-chastity" clause governing ordination in the Book of Order. The same General Assembly voted to recommend to the Board of Pensions that same-gender couples be provided with benefits comparable to those offered to opposite-gender couples.
5. Wrote Bill Tammeus, Presbyterian Outlook, July 26, 2010, in his article "Who will be the last Presbyterian?": "Let's acknowledge that the PCUSA has been a reactionary voice of condemnation and not a joyful voice of love." Ignoring the preponderant weight of Orthodox understanding of Scripture on this topic, Tammeus implies that one must accept homosexual behavior to truly care for the homosexual person.
6. In May 2011, what became known as Amendment 10A was ratified by a majority of Presbyteries. The “fidelity-chastity” language was removed from the constitution and

Presbyteries began ordaining and installing Ministers of the Word and Sacrament whose lives do not conform to the denomination's own espoused confessional standards. In its Frequently Asked Questions on Amendment 10-A and Ordination Standards, the Office of the General Assembly of the PCUSA states that "a person in a same gender relationship can be considered for ordination as deacon, elder, or Minister of the Word and Sacrament.

7. The Rev. Tara Spuhler McCabe, on April 28, 2012, officiated a wedding for two women despite the fact that the PCUSA's Book of Order and Book of Confessions defines marriage as between one man and one woman. Rather than discipline the Rev. McCabe, the PCUSA accepted her candidacy as a vice moderator of the 2012 General Assembly.

CONCLUSION

This action of seeking dismissal, as mentioned earlier, is being taken after much prayerful consideration. It is not intended to show disrespect or dishonor to anyone. It is our desire to act in the way that we believe is faithful to the traditional beliefs and doctrines of our denomination. While we maintain a strong affection and love for our brothers and sisters in Christ within the PCUSA, we believe we must take this action to be true to our faith.