

The following is a summary of a Procedure paper adopted by the Presbytery Council:
PROCEDURAL GUIDELINES FOR ADDRESSING CHURCHES WITHIN THE PRESBYTERY OF LOS RANCHOS CONSIDERING WITHDRAWAL FROM THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)

A copy (paper or electronic) of that document will be provided any person who requests it. It was reviewed and approved by the Committee on Ministry, on Property and Finance, on Presbytery and Congregational Development, and the Presbytery Council.

Our affirmation is that each local congregation is the setting of a particular chapter in the history of this presbytery; for its members it is the site of baptisms, of confirmations, of marriages, and of celebrations of the resurrection. Such significant personal experiences make the local congregation important to their members. We believe we are better together than when we are apart. We work continually to deepen communication and partnership both in our most difficult challenges and in our greatest excitements and joys.

We are thus sensitive to events over the past decades that have strained relationships in many governing bodies. Tensions have, in some instances, created stresses that have sometimes broken the bonds of presbytery fellowship, including some leaders and congregations choosing to disassociate themselves from the PC(USA).

We are unaware of any church in our presbytery considering leaving our denomination. On the contrary, most of our churches feel deep appreciation for this presbytery and we would grieve the loss of any of our churches or fellowships; the departure of a single one would diminish the presbytery's witness to Jesus Christ's love and unity.

Consequently, your Council believes it would be prudent to preempt confusion and mitigate disaffection by having a plan for addressing the kinds of concerns and dynamics that sometimes lead to schism. **As your Council, we hope these Procedures will be an affirmation of our responsibility to treat one another lovingly, respectfully, attentively, and pastorally.** The goal of this presbytery will always be **reconciliation and continued relationship** for all congregations and fellowships within the presbytery. The Procedures call for a pastoral response when any congregations finds itself in conflict with the denomination.

This Procedure anticipates four possible, overlapping levels of contention that could require presbytery's response:

- I. A congregation and/or its leadership indicate concern about their relationship with the denomination;
- II. A congregation and/or its leadership indicate concern about the implications of Chapter VIII of the *Book of Order* regarding church property.
- III. A congregation and/or its leadership indicates it is considering the option of withdrawal from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.);
- IV. A congregation and/or its leadership has initiated specific, concrete action to withdraw—and/or is engaging in civil action involving property matters.

We are aware that, within congregations, there may be members and leaders with varying degrees of dissatisfaction, disaffection, and discontent. Across our congregations there is a continuum of anxiety and confusion regarding the future of the church (local) and Church

(denomination). The result may be support for some kind of action to address complaints, the extent of which varies from congregation to congregation.

Level I: *DIALOGUE, DELIBERATION, AND DISCERNMENT.* One of the first tasks of presbytery representatives will be to assess the degree and extent of the concerns and to determine which level of response is most appropriate. In doing so, presbytery will normally make use of the existing options for COM as set forth in G-14.0502j. These primarily seek to provide a pastoral presence: to listen, to dialogue, and to bring about reconciliation.

Level II: *EDUCATION AND NEGOTIATION.* This level continues the process above providing a pastoral response to relational and polity concerns; clarifying, educating and exploring options for restoring trust. This level likely reveals more intense feelings, more widespread dissension, and more firm opinions. Conversations need to be directed toward exploring together options to considering withdrawal.

Level III: *PROACTIVE ENGAGEMENT.* At this level, the congregation has made clear its intent to determine whether or not it will seek to withdraw from the denomination. By its actions, the congregational leadership and/or the congregation itself has begun limiting the presbytery's options for response. The objective at this level is to make clear possible consequences while continuing conversation and seeking options.

Level IV: *ADMINISTRATIVE COMMISSION.* Normally, the primary task of an Administrative Commission is to attempt to "settle the difficulties" G-9.0503a(4) without recourse to civil action by any party; insuring that "the great ends of the church" are fulfilled. In this Procedure, an Administrative Commission is formed in response to an adversarial situation created by the decisions and actions of the leaders of a congregation. At this level, the congregation and/or its leadership has made public its intention to schism and/or has taken some kind of formal step(s), ecclesiastical and/or civil, to withdraw from the denomination. Regrettably, such actions create a barrier that restricts the use of the preferred pastoral responses used at Levels I through III.

MOTION: The Presbytery of Los Ranchos, consistent with the Procedure for Addressing Churches Considering Withdrawal from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A), delegates to the Docket Committee of Council authority to appoint an Administrative Commission with any and all powers needed to complete its work—and to report such action and authority to the next meeting of Presbytery.