



New Hanover

P R E S B Y T E R I A N C H U R C H

Dear New Hanover Family,

During the last eight months, we have been engaged in the Presbytery of the James' process for requesting dismissal from the Presbyterian Church (USA). After many years of prayer and discernment, we acknowledge that there is an ever-growing divide in our denomination over issues that are among our core beliefs, and these things are affecting our ministry.

We have met often with the Presbytery of the James and their representatives during this process. This is a challenging time for them and for all of the churches who are involved. We seek to go through dismissal with grace, and we ask you to commit to praying for us and our brothers and sisters in Christ in the Presbytery of the James and for the PC(USA) during this process.

Our Presbytery's Stated Clerk has recently been kind enough to meet with our pastors (along with the pastors of the 5 other churches seeking dismissal) to make sure that they will be taken care of benefits-wise in the transition to another denomination. This month, the General Assembly of the PC(USA) also graciously acknowledged the many churches leaving the denomination, and voted this year for the PC(USA) Board of Pensions to reach out to two of the denominations to which many of the churches are being dismissed to and discuss the possibility of shared benefits. We are also focusing on these issues to ensure a smooth transition for our pastors and their families.

Over the past eight months, we have received many questions related to the dismissal process. As a result, we have provided written answers in a **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) #2**, attached.

We also encourage you to go to our church web site which has more resources that will help answer your questions: <http://www.nhpc.org/denomination/>. You can also call our church office at 730-9700 if you have any questions or would like to schedule an appointment to discuss these issues.

In Christ,

The Session of New Hanover Presbyterian Church

To grow families in our community to serve Christ in the world.



New Hanover – Dismissal from PC(USA) Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) #2

1. Catch me up on where we are in the Dismissal Process. What’s been going on, and what’s next?

The following table provides key dates so far in our dismissal process:

November 13, 2011	The Session of New Hanover voted to begin the process of exploring dismissal from the PC(USA) into another Reformed body. With all but one ruling elder present for the vote, the Session vote was unanimous.
November 30, 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Session announced to our congregation at a Family Meeting of NHPC that we were asking to enter the process for requesting dismissal from PC(USA). • Our Clerk of Session sent this notification to the Presbytery. The goal of doing this was to honor the spirit of the dismissal process by beginning the conversation with <u>both</u> our congregation and our Presbytery. • We stated then, and it may be helpful to restate now, that entering the presbytery’s process was a decision of session, but whether or not to finally request dismissal is a decision of the congregation.
December 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We held another Family Meeting to discuss dismissal from PC(USA). • Representatives from Presbytery then asked our pastors that our church not hold any more church-wide meetings on the topic of dismissal. • Session empowered a Communications Commission to answer questions about the dismissal process.
Late December 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presbytery told our pastors that our conversation with them about dismissal could not proceed until we chose a denomination into which we could be dismissed. The Listening Team later told us that this was not the case. • Session then established an “Exploring Options” Committee to study dismissal possibilities – most notably, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) and the newly-formed ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians.
March-April 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presbytery dispatched a Listening Team to engage the Session and the congregation as a whole in a time of prayer and dialogue aimed at understanding the areas of disagreement and conflict. • Listening Team and Session held meetings together. • Members of NHPC shared their thoughts with the Listening Team.
June 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Session and Listening Team held joint meeting with the congregation. • Listening Team conducted conversations with members of the congregation.

Here are our likely next steps (After This Summer):

1. Once the Listening Team sends their final report to the Presbytery’s Committee on Ministry (sometime before their September meeting), we have been told that we can begin holding church-wide meetings to discuss dismissal. At that point, we will also be able to discuss the recommendation made from our Exploring Options Committee with the congregation. We also plan to hold multiple church-wide meetings to allow everyone to ask questions and discuss issues related to dismissal.
2. Once the congregation discusses the recommendation from the Exploring Options Committee and once Session has a chance to consider feedback from the congregation, the Session will determine which denomination will be in a motion to be put before the congregation as to whether or not to request dismissal.



3. If the Presbytery votes in October to establish an Administrative Commission to continue the dismissal process with New Hanover, then the Session will work with the Administrative Commission and no sooner than a month after the Administrative Commission is formed will call a meeting where there will be a “straw vote” of our congregation to determine if the congregation of New Hanover wishes to request to be dismissed. If more than 50% vote for requesting dismissal, then the Session will meet with members of the Administrative Commission to discuss possible arrangements for a dismissal.

If more than 50% vote for dismissal in the straw vote, the Session will call a second special congregational meeting 3 to 6 months later in which there will be a formal congregational vote. The Administrative Commission will report the results to the Presbytery and may bring a recommendation to consider the request for dismissal. Our web site provides a presentation on the detailed dismissal process at <http://nhpc.org/denomination/>.

2. When the Session voted to seek dismissal, did our pastors vote?

Yes. Our pastors, Billy Craig and Jeff Lee voted in favor of entering the process for requesting dismissal. If New Hanover is dismissed from the PC(USA) into another denomination, they would be dismissed along with the congregation.

3. Why did Session announce the decision to request beginning the dismissal process without consulting the congregation first?

After a season of much prayer, led by the Holy Spirit, your Session felt led to seek dismissal from the PC(USA). After reviewing the Presbytery’s dismissal policy, the Session decided that it would honor the spirit of the dismissal process by beginning the conversation with both our congregation and our Presbytery at the same time. On November 30, 2011, the Session announced to our congregation at a Family Meeting that they voted to ask to enter the process for requesting dismissal. At the same time, our Clerk of Session sent this notification to the Presbytery.

As the Presbytery’s dismissal process is new, and as we are among the first group of churches to go through this process, we did not know that the Presbytery would ask us not to hold any church-wide meetings regarding dismissal after our two Family Meetings in December. We were hoping to *begin*, not end, the discussion with our full congregation in December.

In talking to our Listening Team, we have been assured that we will be able to begin having these discussions with the congregation again after they submit their report (which will be in the next few months)– so that we can discern this process together as a family. We look forward to doing so!

4. Are other churches in the Presbytery of the James seeking dismissal? Who are they?

As of July 2012, we know of six churches currently in the Presbytery’s dismissal process: Christ, Crestwood, New Hanover, Spotsylvania, St. Giles, and Third. Given the most recent 2010 membership statistics released by the Presbytery of the James, this represents around **18%** of the Presbytery’s membership. This is a new process for the Presbytery of the James, and we ask for your prayers for everyone involved.

5. Has our church abided by the Presbytery’s Dismissal Guidelines?

Yes. We have been very careful to abide by the Presbytery’s guidelines for dismissal, and these guidelines are published on our web site (<http://nhpc.org/denomination/>).

There has been some confusion during this process related to communication with the congregation, and that is not addressed in the Presbytery’s guidelines. After talking with our Listening Team assigned by the



Presbytery, we have abided by their wishes by not holding meetings with our full congregation or sharing the results of our Exploring Options Committee. We will be able to do that soon!

Our Listening Team has a very difficult job in discerning the next steps for New Hanover during this process, and we ask you to continue to pray for them. We seek to go through dismissal with grace – showing love to our Brothers and Sisters in Christ during the process, and we commit to praying for the Presbytery of the James and for the Presbyterian Church (USA).

6. Remind me, again – why are we in this dismissal process?

After many years of prayer and discernment, the Session has determined that there is an ever-growing divide in our denomination over issues that are among our core beliefs, and feels that these things are affecting our ministry. The actions of PC(USA) have repeatedly shown that most of the leaders in our denomination have a different view of the authority and interpretation of Scripture than we do, and a different view of who Jesus is and what He did. We believe that the Bible is the written Word of God, completely true in all that it says. We believe that Jesus is Lord of all and the only way of salvation. These have always been our beliefs at NHPC.

For three decades, our denomination has been deeply conflicted in debates on theological, cultural, and political issues. Some of these disagreements have raised more attention than others, but we feel that the root cause that underlies these debates is a difference on the authority and interpretation of Scripture.

Our denomination's Book of Confessions and listed beliefs have not changed, so *on paper* the PC(USA) seems to have an orthodox faith. The actions, decisions, and statements of our denomination, however, have shown that this is not the case. In fact, during this past 2012 General Assembly, our stated clerk advised, the moderator ruled, and, on appeal, the Assembly concurred (70% to 30%), that our creeds, catechisms, and confessions of faith from our Book of Confessions are not binding on the governance of the life of the church. Human reason and popular cultural trends seem to have more authority than God's written Word. This change in thinking has been developing and increasing over the last 100 years, and it has manifested itself in many ways, including different views of who Jesus is and what He did.

We have been trying to maintain our faithfulness to Scripture as the ultimate truth, but we find that we can no longer ignore the distractions brought on by this fundamental disagreement in our denomination. For years, we have been working within the PC(USA) to try and change from within, but we can no longer agree to disagree and continue our ministry with integrity. Asking to be dismissed simply recognizes the current reality. In the past, we have written statements of disagreements and have shared these statements with our church family, our Presbytery and with the greater church. But these disagreements have led to a conflicted witness, divided loyalties, and divided energies.

Over the last 20+ years, the PC(USA) has become increasingly dysfunctional. This can be seen by the constant re-structure, reorganization, and continued internal battles over ordination and core theology. Over the years, our connection to our denomination has actually *hindered* our witness and our ability to achieve our mission, and we can no longer ignore this. As other churches like ours continue to leave PC(USA), we can envision the problem only getting worse. We believe that we can serve Christ best if we are part of another denomination that shares our core beliefs. We are excited and look forward to that future!

7. Can you give me more *concrete* examples of things New Hanover leadership disagrees with in the PC(USA)? What are some of the issues that New Hanover has struggled with over the years?

The following are merely examples, but they tell a story and show the trends in our denomination over the past twenty years.



- In 1993, a conference entitled “Reimagining God” was funded by the PC(USA) where Presbyterian worship leaders denied the existence of the transcendent God, denied the atonement of Jesus, worshipped the “god within ourselves” and encouraged the exchange of Jesus Christ for the goddess Sophia. This brought much media attention to the PC(USA).ⁱ
- In 2000, The Rev. Dick Ficca, a member of Chicago Presbytery, was paid by PC(USA) to speak at a “Peacemaking Conference”. He said that world peace is threatened by religions that make exclusive claims. He asked, *“If God is at work in our lives, whether we’re Christian or not -- what’s the big deal about Jesus??”* Ficca said that Jesus is not the sole instrument of salvation.ⁱⁱ
- In 2001, the General Assembly (GA) voted down a motion that declared, “the singular saving lordship of Jesus Christ” because the Assembly was persuaded that it would be offensive to other religions.ⁱⁱⁱ As a result of this vote, New Hanover and other like-minded churches in PC(USA) joined together to form “The Confessing Church Movement”, adopting a statement that “Jesus Christ alone is Lord of all and the only way of salvation” so that we could differentiate ourselves from PC(USA).^{iv}
- In 2002 at a conference sponsored by the Covenant Network of Presbyterians, Anna Case-Winters, associate professor of theology at PC(USA)’s McCormick Seminary declared that the atoning death of Jesus Christ is an *“outdated doctrine.”* At that same conference, Paul Capetz, a former professor of theology at our Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, agreed saying, *“We don’t need any more crucifixions,”* implying that Jesus’ crucifixion was just a cultural phenomenon.^v
- In the 2006 GA, a group of delegates affirmed their belief that Christ was only one among many paths to salvation. A debate ensued, and by the narrowest of margins, the Assembly affirmed that Jesus was uniquely Savior. This debate once again showed the theological divide related to the belief of whether Jesus is the only way to salvation.^{vi}
- In the 2006 GA, a paper on the Trinity was received by the General Assembly, which suggested the use of other language for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, such as *“Compassionate Mother, Beloved Child, and Life-giving Womb”*.^{vii}
- In the 2008 GA, the commissioners approved a first step in revising the PC(USA)’s official translation of the historic Heidelberg Catechism from our Book of Order, removing language from 1 Corinthians 6 that makes a negative statement about homosexual behavior. This new translation was accepted by the General Assembly this year, but will have to be voted on by the presbyteries.^{viii,ix}
- In 2008, there was an overture to the GA that stated “Muslims, Christians, and Jews worship the same God.”^x Charles Wiley, the Coordinator of the Office of Theology and Worship in PC(USA) has recently written that “there doesn’t seem to be a universal answer to this question [of whether we worship the same God].^{xi}”
- In 2010, Research Services of the PC(USA) provided results that showed less than half of the members, elders and pastors believe that Jesus is the only way to salvation.^{xii}
- In recent years, several prominent PC(USA) pastors have made public professions of unbelief, but continue to preach without disciplinary action. Pastor John Shuck of Elizabethtown TN, who has a popular blog and radio show, was elected as a Commissioner to our General Assembly this year, and is quoted on his blog as saying: *“There is no afterlife. There is no heaven, no hell, and no need for salvation from one realm to another”; “Jesus may have been historical but most of the stories about him in the Bible and elsewhere are legends”^{xiii}; and, “No deity exists. Not Jesus Christ, not Yahweh, not Baal, not Marduk, not Allah, not Zeus, not the Flying Spaghetti Monster. None of them exist.”^{xiv}* Other pastors



have publicly declared their inability to believe that Jesus rose from the dead, including the aforementioned John Shuck, Rob Martin of Palo Alto, Helen Dekker from the Presbytery of West Jersey, and James Rigby of Austin. John Shuck, a few years before his election to the GA this year, wrote: *"I have been pretty clear on Shuck and Jive (his blog) that I don't think/believe/hope/trust/have faith that Jesus rose from the dead ..."*^{xv}

- In 2011, there was the removal of the requirement of "fidelity in marriage and chastity in singleness" from the standards for ordination with Amendment 10(A). Language removed from the Book of Order reads "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..." Amendment 10(A) replaces this language with "Governing bodies shall be **guided by Scripture** and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates." This reduces the Bible and our historic confessions of the church to be non-binding "guides"^{xvi}.
- In 2011, the PC(USA) adopted a New Form of Government in our Book of Order, and its first chapter includes sentences that fundamentally change the theology of our church. In F-1.01, it says that the triune God "redeems, sustains, rules, and transforms all things and all people." Christians have always believed that Jesus redeems those who *have faith in Him* (John 3:16). This new statement brings even more theological confusion in our denomination, pointing to Universalism, not Christianity.^{xvii}
- In October 2011, Scott Anderson was ordained as the first openly practicing homosexual pastor in the PC(USA)^{xviii}. In April 2012, the PC(USA)'s highest court body, the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission, cleared the way for the ordination of practicing homosexual Lisa Larges to the office of pastor, saying there is nothing in the Bible or in our confessions to prohibit her ordination^{xix}. In July 2012, the General Assembly narrowly defeated an overture from many Presbyteries asking that marriage be declared to be "between two people" and not a man and a woman, and other overtures are requesting that pastors should be allowed to marry same-sex couples.^{xx}
- In 2012, Research Services of the PC(USA) released another survey which showed that the majority of pastors, specialized clergy, elders, and members do not believe that Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation.^{xxi}
- Since 2004, when it was discovered that representatives of the PC(USA) were meeting with and praising the Hezbollah foreign terrorist organization, our denomination has been accused of "emboldening international terrorism"^{xxii} and has been repeatedly accused of Anti-Semitism by Jewish groups such as the Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA) and the Simon Wiesenthal Center.^{xxiii,xxiv,xxv} The PC(USA) has continued to adopt anti-Israel policies, such as divestment from corporations aiding Israel in the Israeli-Palestine conflict (first adopted in 2004^{xxvi}, then rescinded in 2006, and now being re-proposed in 2012)^{xxvii}. Several Jewish groups, including the American Jewish Council, the Simon Wiesenthal Center, and the JCPA have publicly pleaded with PC(USA) to cease its efforts in the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. The JCPA in February of 2012 publicly asked PC(USA) to "address its anti-Israel, anti-Zionist and at times anti-Semitic content that has been all too common in the Israel Palestinian Mission Network [of the PC(USA)]."^{xxviii} The Washington Post reported as recently as June 19, 2012 that 1,300 American rabbis have called on American churches to reject those (like the PC(USA)) who hype divestment from Israel as a tool for resolving the current conflict between Palestinians and Israelis.^{xxix}
- In opposition to the clear positions of Scripture, the PC(USA) has consistently supported a pro-abortion stance.



- The 1970 GA declared that abortion should not be restricted by law.^{xxx}
- In 1992, the GA expanded PC(USA)'s pro-abortion policy with the paper, "Prayerfully Supporting Women and the Choices They Make – Problem Pregnancies and Abortion."^{xxxi}
- In 2004, the GA failed to condemn partial-birth abortion, and the Session of New Hanover responded with a written statement sent to the congregation, to the Presbytery, and to the greater church. New Hanover's statement is published online^{xxxii}.
- In 2006, the GA reaffirmed their pro-abortion stance, with the exception of partial birth abortion.
- The PC(USA) continues to advocate for "universal health care, including contraception and abortion...."^{xxxiii} and is a member of the Religious Coalition for Representative Choice, a powerful lobbying group aggressively advocating for international abortion without limits, and is opposed to parental notification laws, informed consent laws, and waiting period recommendations.^{xxxiv}
- In nearly every GA over the last two decades, a motion has been made to have the PC(USA) affirm the sanctity of life and oppose abortion. Not one of those motions has been voted in the affirmative.

There are many other actions and events that could be listed here. Sometimes, unbiblical actions are corrected in the PC(USA), but sadly, many are not. These actions show a continuing trend in our denomination where leaders in the PC(USA) are moving away from God's truth expressed in the Bible.

The bottom line here is that not one of these actions is our main "reason" for seeking dismissal. Together, however, they provide insight into the "battles" within our denomination that take time and resources away from ministry. In fact, many of the PC(USA)'s actions at the General Assembly level are highly political actions that have nothing to do with church business.

Since 2001, we have been involved in the renewal movement of PC(USA), and you can see a brief history, along with many statements that we released over time on the following page on our church web site: <http://www.nhpc.org/resources/past-statements-on-the-denomination.html>.

After more than a decade, we no longer feel the need to write statements of disagreement every few years. We feel that "fighting" these battles in our denomination distracts us from ministry. At the same time, we feel that our association with PC(USA) hinders us, and our conscience compels us to seek change. We believe that our church can serve Christ best if we are part of another denomination that shares our core beliefs. We are excited about a future in a new denomination.

8. If our church were to stay in the PC(USA), how would this affect our selection of pastors?

Over the years, it has become increasingly difficult to find pastors who are in theological agreement with us. As pastors and churches are now leaving the PC(USA) this year at an unprecedented rate, we are concerned that it will be even more difficult to find a pastor in our denomination who believes that the Bible is true in all that it says, and that Jesus is the only way of salvation. Finding a pastor with our beliefs is *already* difficult, and it is a very real issue for the selection of our next lead pastor if we remain in the PC(USA).

9. Wasn't Amendment 10(A), discussed in our last FAQ, simply a return to the original language of the Book of Order?

No. This is new language, but this is a good question.

In the 1970s, before New Hanover was a church, there were questions about sexual standards for ordination of leaders, specifically focusing on whether candidates in homosexual relationships could be ordained. Our denomination's General Assembly was asked to study this question and give guidance. As a result, there was



a 1976 task force who studied the issue, and their recommendation was adopted in 1978 as “definitive guidance”. Later, in 1993, it was stated that this guidance was an “authoritative interpretation.”

The reasons for the 1978 definitive guidance were both Biblical (based on explicit Bible instruction), and also based on the language on sexual standards in our Book of Confessions of our church. But more importantly, it is based on the historic Reformed principle that Christians are to live in obedience to Holy Scripture as the “only rule of faith and manners” (G-1.0307) and the “only rule of faith and life” (Westminster Confession, 7.113). It is a false dichotomy to separate Jesus Christ from Holy Scriptures, “which are received and obeyed as the word of God written” (Confession of 1967, 9.27), just as we are to trust and obey “Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture” (Barmen, 8.11). These contemporary expressions of understanding agree with the historic Reformed confessional standards--Scots (3.18-3.19), Second Helvetic (5.002-5.004), and Westminster (6.050, 7.002-7.003).

In 1979, a similar interpretive statement was adopted by the Presbyterian Church in the US, which reunited with the United Presbyterian Church in the USA in 1983 to form the current PC(USA). (Minutes, PCUS, 1979, Part I, p. 201-210). In 1993, the 205th General Assembly of the PC(USA) stated that the 1978 “Definitive Guidance” carried the weight of “authoritative interpretation” and officially adopted it as such.

An in-depth study of this history can be seen at <http://www.presbycoalition.org/historicalperspective.cfm>.

As of last year, as a result of a majority vote of Presbyteries in the PC(USA), there is no longer the requirement for officers to have “fidelity in marriage or chastity in singleness”, and gone is the requirement to “live a life in obedience to Scripture and in conformity to the historic confessional standards of the church.” There is now what many in PC(USA) call a “Constitutional Crisis” related to ordination, meaning that our Bible and our Book of Confessions speak clearly on this issue, but our Book of Order no longer does. The General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission (our highest judicial body) ruled that the Book of Order trumps anything in the Bible or the Book of Confessions on this issue.

The bottom line for us here at New Hanover is that up until last year, the standards for ordination for church office have been the same since we have been a church. We believe that leaders are to be called to a higher standard, and we believe that God calls *all of us* – not just leaders – to be obedient to His Word.

10. Isn't all this debate about homosexuality, really?

No. For us, the issues are not around the questions of homosexuality and the ordination of practicing homosexual persons. The ordination of practicing homosexuals may be one of the presenting issues with 10(A) that was adopted by our denomination, but the more problematic issue is one of Biblical authority. As we stated in question #5, there are many issues in PC(USA), but 10(A) received the most publicity.

Related to the 10(A) issue, when we declare that the church may set aside what the Bible defines as sin, then we are rejecting the authority of God's written Word. The Bible, throughout the Old and New Testament, is clear in defining sexual activity outside of marriage to be sin. This applies to both heterosexual and homosexual behavior. One reference, Romans 1:26-32, provides a clear teaching on sexual sin, using consensual homosexual activity as an example. The point is not the activity itself, but it is one example of sexual sin and shows the damage that sexual sin can do.

Let us be clear here. We are sinners – and we are all sinners who need Christ. Jesus came to save sinners like us. As leaders in the church, we are called to a higher standard, and we are called to be obedient to Scripture. But most of all, we are called to love each other and spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We will do so while declaring the Bible to be true in all that it says. We will never shy away from teaching what the Bible says – but sexual sin is not our main focus. If you are gay, know that you are welcome in our church. If you know



someone who is gay, invite them to church! We invite all to come in and worship our Lord and be exposed to the Word of God.

11. In December, we were told that our Session would be educating us about the two possible denominations that we could be dismissed to. --- So, When will we hear something?

In late December 2011, your Session established an “Exploring Options” Committee to study two possibilities – the **Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC)** and the newly-formed **ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians**. The Committee was co-chaired by elders Brian Rountree and Phil Gerk, and included elder Claudia Dickerson, Director of Women’s Discipleship Gaylia Nichols, and three members who have served on New Hanover’s Session before - Kevin Smith, Paul White, and Howard Wright.

This team has spent many months investigating the possibilities – reading documents, dialoguing with the Session, interviewing officials, holding meetings with these two groups, and also discussing these matters with representatives from other congregations in the denomination. Our pastors, elders, and members of this committee also attended meetings in South Carolina, Minnesota, and Florida as part of their discernment process. Your elders and pastors have been carefully studying these options, and everyone involved in this process has felt truly blessed to have two great options as a destination for New Hanover.

In late March, this committee made a unanimous recommendation to Session. At that point, our Presbytery’s Listening Team had just been established, and they then advised us not to share the committee’s recommendations until their work was done. Once the Listening Team presents their report to Presbytery, we were told that will be able to discuss the committee’s recommendation. We are excited about the committee’s recommendation and a bright vision of the future that the recommendation presents for New Hanover. So stay tuned!

12. What is the role of the Communications Commission? Who is on it?

Although the full Session would like to meet with the entire church to discuss matters of dismissal, it is a practical impossibility. Therefore, this group was commissioned in order to help answer your questions. As of June 2012, The Communications Commission consists of one Teaching Elder (Jeff Lee), two Ruling Elders (Read Jacob, George Walker), and four former members of session who are very familiar with the issues - Angela Drozdowski, Phil Gerk, Terry Meeks, and Kevin Smith. This group was commissioned by Session to communicate on behalf of the Session on matters of dismissal from the PC(USA).

This team would be happy to answer any of your questions or talk to you about any concerns you might have – they are best reached at Communications@NHPC.ORG, or by calling the main office at (804)730-9700.

13. Can you explain our Elder Nomination Process? How does our Nominating Team choose a slate of candidates from our congregation for a congregational vote?

Our Nominating Team is elected and voted on by the congregation to discern, select and nominate individuals to serve as elders and deacons. The Nominating Team is comprised of one representative from the Adult Discipleship, Children, Youth, and Worship ministry teams, and it includes one deacon, and one Elder at Large. The Nominating Team is chaired by a ruling Elder appointed by the Session.

Qualifications for Elder, the role of the Session, and details on the selection process are found in the Nominating Packet on our web site <http://www.nhpc.org/resources/nominating-team.html> . This packet, which was last approved by the Session in 2010, discusses the beliefs of New Hanover, the role of the Session, the role of the Elder, and the Elder selection process.



14. What are the ordination vows our ruling Elders must make? Do they make a vow to PC(USA)?

In our Book of Order, W-4.4003, the Constitutional Questions for Ordination and Installation are:

- a. Do you trust in Jesus Christ your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?
- b. Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal, and God's Word to you?
- c. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and will you be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God?
- d. Will you fulfill your ministry in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and be continually guided by our confessions?
- e. Will you be governed by our church's polity, and will you abide by its discipline? Will you be a friend among your colleagues in ministry, working with them, subject to the ordering of God's Word and Spirit?
- f. Will you in your own life seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, love your neighbors, and work for the reconciliation of the World?
- g. Do you promise to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church?
- h. Will you pray for and seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?
- i. Will you be a faithful Elder, watching over the people, providing for their worship, nurture, and service? Will you share in government and discipline, serving in councils of the church, and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?

We wholeheartedly reaffirm these ordination vows. Many of you have asked questions about whether Elders who have entered the dismissal process are violating their ordination vows (related to Question E and G). This is **not** the case.

- By choosing to go through our Presbytery's dismissal process, your Session is "*abiding by our church's polity*" (Question e, above). It is the Presbytery's process, and we have asked to enter it.
- We have been seeking the "*peace, unity, and purity*" of the church (Question g, above), by directing our denomination and our congregation to focus on God's truth, given to us in the Bible (Question b). It is important to note that "peace, purity, and unity" are together for a purpose. Ephesians 4:13 discusses that true unity is found "in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God." We don't choose to have unity or peace for peace or unity's sake. No – peace and unity revolve around purity – God's truth. We are seeking to be dismissed peacefully, and we are doing so in abiding by our Presbytery's dismissal process.

Finally, looking at Question c, it should be noted that there is no explicit list of "essential tenets of the Reformed Faith as expressed in the confessions of our church" in PC(USA). We feel this contributes to much of the theological confusion in our current denomination. We, however, continue to be guided by these confessions, fulfilling the ministry in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture (Question d).

15. Have there been conversations with the Presbytery of the James about property and assets?

Not yet. We understand that those discussions will occur later in the Presbytery's dismissal process, after an Administrative Commission is formed, and after an initial non-binding "straw vote" by the congregation.

16. Has Session retained legal counsel regarding dismissal? If so, how is this funded?

As an act of good stewardship, the Session of New Hanover chooses to retain and discuss various issues with attorneys from time to time. During New Hanover's history, we have always had discussions with legal counsel. Discussions with legal counsel regarding such matters as incorporation, donations of land, and refinancing the mortgage have been paid out of the operating fund.



It is an act of good stewardship to know good plumbers, HVAC technicians, and other subject matter experts upon whom we can call, should a situation arise that requires their expertise. Getting an opinion on the air conditioning units doesn't mean we want our air conditioning to fail, and in the same way, getting legal advice related to our dismissal process doesn't mean we want our dismissal process to fail.

During this dismissal process, we have been in contact with various attorneys providing legal advice in order to be good stewards of what God has entrusted to us. The Presbytery of the James has also retained counsel. Although they don't need to be, our discussions with attorneys regarding dismissal have been funded by private donations.

17. What can I be doing during this process?

Pray! Seek God! Do research. Search the Bible on these issues. Ask us questions!

We encourage you to research these issues for yourselves. We invite you to research the links and resources on our web site at <http://nhpc.org/denomination/>.

We believe that the searching for answers of the following questions is important, and of eternal value:

- 1. Is Jesus the way, the truth, and the life?** Do you believe what Jesus said in John 14:6 when He said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"? Do you believe, as Acts 4:12 states, that "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."?
- 2. Do you believe that the Bible is the Word of God, completely true in all that it says?** Do you believe "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?" (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

These are important questions. Most importantly ask yourself, "Do I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, Lord of All, and the only way of Salvation?" If you are not sure, pray that God will reveal this truth to you. If you haven't received Christ, receive him. And we will celebrate with you!

In Christ,

The Session of New Hanover Presbyterian Church

Ruling Elders on Session

<i>(Class of 2013)</i>	<i>Class of (2014)</i>	<i>(Class of 2015)</i>
Diane Atkinson (Clerk)	Mike Dennehy	Dan Essad
Claudia Dickerson	Colin Drozdowski	Kim Gordon
Don Guthrie	Brian Rountree	Read Jacob
George Walker (Assistant Clerk)	Cory Seiders	Paul White

Teaching Elders on Session

Rev. Dr. Louis Williams, Interim Lead Pastor (Moderator)
Rev. Billy Craig, Next Generations Pastor
Rev. Jeff Lee, Discipleship Pastor



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