

Minutes of the Special Called Meeting  
of the Presbytery of San Joaquin  
September 4, 2008  
First Presbyterian Church, Hanford, CA

Attendance:

*Pastors:* David Abdo, Terry Barnhill, Charles Castles, Vince Correll, Charles Castles, Sung Chang, Ken Crabtree, Paul De Pledge, Noel Daniels, Tom Elson, Bill Ekhardt, Greg Ehlert, Chris Erdman, Jamie Evans, John Guitierrez, Rick Irish, Carl Knoch, Tedd Lyons, Rich Latta, Ruth Musson, Kent Meads, Mgrdich Melkonian, Ramon Palafox, Ron Owens, Lou Paradise, Robert Rose, David Rose, Lana Roberts, Jim Rogers, Randy Scheer, Dan Schwan, Kathy Schwan, Chuck Shillito, Sharon Stanley, Arlin Talley, Eric Thompson, Kurt Teng, David Votaw, Tony Winterowd, Gus Wright

*Elders:* Jeff Altimus, Charles Barrett, Midge Barrett, Shirley Castles, William Cornell, Richard Crain, Teresa Daniels, Billie Dibble, John Davis, Verna Den Hartog, Terry Holland, Sandra Eaton, Bonia Ekhardt, Larry Fritz, John Lynch, George Marberry, Scott Monger, Clifford Ronk, Nancy Singer, Ruth Smith, Rodger Tiffin, Joe Wilson, Ron Wade

*General Council:* Stuart Conrad

*Visitors:* Vince Correll, Scott Kroener, Bob Line, Marie Munger, Johnett Watt

The meeting was called to order at 6:05 pm with prayer given by Moderator Stuart Conrad. Patrick Sheahan, new Associate Pastor at Northminster Presbyterian, Bakersfield, was seated as a corresponding member.

Rick Irish, Gus Wright, Jim Rogers, and Kathy Schwan led worship in the spirit of Solemn Assembly.

Jamie Evans and Chris Erdman clarified the issues that concern the Presbytery with special presentations. Following discussion, it was then ***moved, seconded, and carried*** to adopt "*To the Churches and Ministries of the Presbytery of San Joaquin: A Response to Actions of the 218th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*" as a statement expressing the convictions of this Presbytery, which was to be sent to the congregations of this Presbytery:

To the Churches and Ministries of the Presbytery of San Joaquin:  
**A Response**  
to Actions of the 218th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

1 Two months ago in San Jose, the General Assembly (the 218<sup>th</sup> GA) of the Presbyterian Church  
2 (U.S.A.) took actions that profoundly concern Presbyterians across the country. Within days pastors  
3 in our Presbytery of San Joaquin began meeting to discuss the implications. It is time for the  
4 Presbytery to speak. First some background.  
5 In 2006, 217<sup>th</sup> GA took action intended to permit the ordination of gay and lesbian persons on a case-  
6 by-case basis. At that time, our Presbytery responded with the statement, "The Challenge of Our  
7 Time." We affirmed our constitution's requirement that insists ordination candidates "live either in  
8 fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman, or chastity in singleness" (G-  
9 6.0106b). We said this is consistent with Scripture, our historical reformed traditions, our confessions,  
10 and the historic consensus of the church worldwide. The Presbytery continues to stand by this belief.  
11 Presbytery called on our congregations to resist the temptation to disengage and leave the  
12 denomination. During the past two years Presbytery took specific actions to apply the fidelity and  
13 chastity requirement when both ordaining and receiving individuals into the Presbytery. We also  
14 adopted a property covenant clarifying our response should a church choose to depart. We watched  
15 as Permanent Judicial Commissions across the denomination decided ordination cases in ways  
16 consistent with constitutional standards. Recently, we have worked toward renewal in our denomi-

17 nation, calling churches and presbyteries to hold sacred assemblies to seek the gracious face of God.  
18 Now the 218<sup>th</sup> GA in June has taken new actions that create uncertainty and unrest in many churches.  
19 Involved is not only sexuality, but also interfaith relations. These actions call for responses naming  
20 concerns for biblical authority, theological accuracy, and constitutional process.  
21 First, the Presbytery of San Joaquin believes the Bible is the Word of God. In our ordination vows  
22 presbyters receive Scripture as God's Word to us (and to our churches). In an age wracked by  
23 idolatrous values and continuing war, we seek to live all areas of our lives in an ever more rigorous  
24 obedience to Scripture. Yet the actions of the 218<sup>th</sup> GA reflect the persuasive power of culture and the  
25 appeal to human experience over against the unparalleled witness of Holy Scripture. A series of  
26 actions was taken by this GA to clear the way again for the ordination of practicing homosexuals. this  
27 GA adopted a new authoritative interpretation to secure more firmly what was intended in 2006,  
28 granting what has been called "local license." Presbyteries may choose (or not) to perform  
29 ordinations that have been previously disallowed. Another authoritative interpretation rescinded a  
30 three decades old standard that officially defined homosexual behavior as sinful. The effect will be to  
31 make arguments more plausible that homosexual behavior can meet a standard of faithfulness. A  
32 separate action sets in motion a process to "correct" the translation of the Heidelberg Catechism and  
33 remove the specific condemnation of homosexual acts. Finally, this GA has sent to the presbyteries  
34 an amendment to replace G-6.0106b with a different standard whereby ordinations will be permitted  
35 without regard to biblical standards for sexual behavior, homosexual or heterosexual. The current  
36 standard requires obedience specifically to Scripture, while the proposed amendment calls for  
37 obedience to Christ "striving to follow where he leads us through the witness of the Scriptures." Out  
38 of context, the new language may seem benign. Yet the proposed amendment also removes the  
39 mention of sexual fidelity and chastity as examples of required behavior. The intention and effect  
40 implies that requirements of ordination may be fulfilled while engaging in sexual activity outside of  
41 marriage. All these actions collectively set aside the authority of Scripture in matters of sexual  
42 behavior, gay or straight. This Presbytery strongly objects, as we did two years ago.

*Revised*

43 Second, the Presbytery of San Joaquin is concerned by the 218<sup>th</sup> GA's willingness to make  
44 theologically imprecise statements about our belief in God in the context of relations with Jews and  
45 Muslims. This GA adopted a statement that says "though we hold differing understandings of how  
46 God has been revealed to humankind, the PC(USA) affirms that as children of this loving God, we  
47 share the commandments of love for God and neighbor, the requirement to care for the poor." The  
48 natural reading of this has Presbyterians asserting that the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and Allah  
49 are the same God. But without numerous complex qualifications, we cannot say that. Through Jesus  
50 Christ our Savior and Lord of all, this Presbytery believes in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.  
51 The Assembly further encourages "congregations of these faiths to celebrate religious holidays  
52 together, setting aside time to worship during which there can be congregational suppers, and  
53 dialogue groups." Again the natural reading of this is that Presbyterians should worship together with  
54 Jews and Muslims. But apart from unacceptably diluting the convictions of all these faith traditions,  
55 we do not believe this workable. We affirm the necessity of building bridges with members of other  
56 faith communities. We acknowledge that much can be gained when through interfaith dialog we  
57 explore together how to pursue values we hold in common. We recognize that a deeper mutual  
58 understanding of our faith traditions and commitments can facilitate this. However little is to be  
59 gained by reducing any of these three faith expressions to "lowest common denominators." Indeed,  
60 true mutual understanding may be subverted when our starting place for dialogue is a theological  
61 imprecision that takes neither ourselves nor our dialogue partners seriously. This Presbytery is  
62 committed to clear theological thinking over against well-intentioned fuzziness.

63 Third, the Presbytery of San Joaquin is offended by the process used by the last two GA's of  
64 employing authoritative interpretations to legislate change in our ordination standards. Standards  
65 established by our constitution may be changed by the orderly amendment process which gives voice  
66 to all 173 presbyteries across the church. The authoritative interpretations adopted by the last two

67 GAs circumvent this process. By small vote margins presbyteries have been effectively  
68 disenfranchised. Moreover the imprecise wording of one of these authoritative interpretations creates  
69 a constitutional crisis as the action the 218<sup>th</sup> GA conflicts with the Book of Order. Authoritative  
70 interpretations are useful tools for interpreting things in the Constitution that may be unclear. But to  
71 employ them to make sweeping change risks the formulation of poorly written legislation. The net  
72 effect is conflict across the denomination, and the high cost of resulting remedial actions. This  
73 Presbytery protests this unwise abuse of authoritative interpretation.  
74 The decisions of many previous GAs through the years have met with disagreement in the churches.  
75 But the actions of the 218<sup>th</sup> GA have touched off unprecedented unrest across the denomination.  
76 Rumors fly nationwide of congregations considering departure from the PC(USA). The seriousness  
77 of the current situation was recognized by the 218<sup>th</sup> GA itself when it passed a commissioner's  
78 resolution calling for pastoral graciousness across the country toward churches that seek dismissal.  
79 The Presbytery of San Joaquin continues to encourage its member churches to resist temptation to  
80 hasty departure. This particular communication to its churches and ministries is an initial response to  
81 the 218<sup>th</sup> GA's decisions by the Presbytery. We have also begun deliberations to explore a variety of  
82 further responses directed to the denomination including statements and demonstrations of protest,  
83 constitutional amendments, and other possible actions. In addition, a number of pastors have  
84 returned again to the Scriptures for careful study and guidance. May the Holy Spirit guide our  
85 Presbytery and our churches as we seek God's wisdom for a future faithful to Jesus Christ

#### Motions:

1. A *motion* was made to affirm the San Diego Resolution. It was moved to refer this motion to Council for Council to determine the best way to consider it at the September 18<sup>th</sup> Presbytery meeting. Seconded and ***carried***.
2. It was moved, seconded and ***carried*** to adopt an affirmation to congregations who choose to withhold GA per capita that the Presbytery will not pay it in their stead.

#### Further actions proposed for consideration were:

1. Lou Paradise proposed “separating” as a presbytery, prior to divorce, from the PC(U.S.A.) to send a message to General Assembly that things must change.
2. To develop a plan whereby we as individuals, congregations and Presbytery diligently seek God for the outpouring of His Spirit upon us all.
3. To support a proposed overture to GA calling for moving from a simple majority to a two-thirds vote in the number of votes necessary to pass an Authoritative Interpretation.
4. To join with Presbyterians for Renewal’s efforts to establish non-geographic synods as a means by which the church can make official the divide that already exists. It also was announced that PFR leadership will meet with interested people on Monday, October 20<sup>th</sup>, 7 to 9 pm, at First Pres Visalia’s 210 Building.
5. To vote on the proposed changes to the Book of Order and wait to see the results before considering more radical actions.
6. To give people an opportunity to express further thoughts, both verbally, and in writing on a feedback form. The input will be utilized by Council to determine our Presbytery’s next steps.

The meeting was adjourned with prayer by Stuart Conrad at 9:02 pm.