

## The Gathering – August 25-26, Minneapolis, MN

### 1. What was The Gathering, and why did 12 members of our congregation and 2 members of our pastoral staff attend?

The Gathering was a 2 day meeting of 1900 Presbyterians representing 860 churches from 50 states and 3 countries held in Minneapolis, MN. The meeting was called to discuss what the future of ministry and congregational life could look like in Presbyterian churches. The 7 pastors from large churches in our denomination who called the meeting were motivated by a number of long term negative trends in the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. – PC(USA) for short. These negative trends have left the denomination in a “deathly ill” state (see <http://vimeo.com/21613040>), capped by the recent changes to ordination standards and broader theological issues.

### 2. What is the Fellowship of Presbyterians (Fellowship)?

The Fellowship is a structure to allow Presbyterian churches inside and outside the PC(USA) to engage in new ways of doing ministry together. It will include something like a new denomination for those who wish to leave PC(USA) and several ways to stay in the PC(USA) while connecting with other Fellowship churches. The Fellowship will specifically define a set of theological essentials or tenets that are consistent with Presbyterian/Reformed history but different from some of PC(USA)’s current stances. These tenets will be published in October of this year. Fellowship member churches will decide to embrace these tenets as part of their operating philosophy. There are currently about 1300 signees to this movement.

#### Values:

- Do not proceed from anger
- Demonstrate humility
- Local churches are of higher value than denominational structures
- Connect with PC(USA) where possible, but differentiate where necessary

#### Vision:

- Theological clarity
- Missional passion
- Connect with each other thru covenants rather than regulations (minimalist structure)
- Connect deeply with global churches (especially the 80-90 million global Presbyterians)
- Find new ways of training and deploying leaders

### 3. If our church wanted to engage more deeply with the Fellowship, what options were given?

Every way forward would require immense discernment and prayer sustained over the next several months. There are dozens of options, organized into four “tiers.” For all intents and purposes, however, the options can be broken down as follows:

- Modeling – be a missional witness within PC(USA) while embracing the theological tenets and pursuing the values and vision of the Fellowship (do the best you can where you are)
- Differentiating – stay within PC(USA), but make structural changes that give Fellowship churches control over ordination standards and more latitude in pursuing their values and vision together
- Separating – leave the PC(USA) for a “new Reformed body” (basically a new Presbyterian denomination) while still connecting with Fellowship churches within PC(USA)

### 4. Which option(s) are the founders recommending?

The pastors who called the meeting believe that, between the 7 of them, their churches will pursue each of the given options. Some will choose *Modeling*, some *Differentiating*, and some *Separation*. The Fellowship will provide a structure for churches in each of these streams to work together.

## 5. What do we know about this “new Reformed body”?

More than anything, this “new Reformed body” is a work in progress. It will officially launch at a meeting in Orlando, FL, January 12-14, 2012. Between now and then, many of the details will be worked out by the steering committee, and churches will have an opportunity to comment on the documents before that meeting. Some of the big ideas:

- Allow churches to decide their level of engagement depending on their views and circumstances
  - 100% inside PC(USA), partially inside both PC(USA) and the new body, or 100% inside the new body
- Function like an association rather than a denomination (minimalist structure)
- Possess authority for ordinations
- Use smaller local networks rather than large presbyteries
- Allow non-geographic connections (ex: East Coast church connect with West Coast church)
- Have gatherings that are equipping for ministry rather than business meetings
- Share as many services (disaster assistance, office of theology and worship, pension, etc ) with PC(USA) as makes sense

## 6. How will PC(USA) respond to these proposals?

The founding pastors have been in productive dialogue with PC(USA) leaders for about a year, but no one knows for sure how the conversations will proceed. In many cases, it will depend on each church’s presbytery. Since no single option is right for all churches, the Fellowship is bringing a large number of options to the table. It will not be an easy or clean process, but the Fellowship has every intention of working wherever possible and differentiating where necessary with the PC(USA).

## 7. Did the Fellowship have an answer to the church property issue?

No. Some presbyteries will make it easier than others, but there is no national solution for those churches who wish to leave PC(USA). The Fellowship will attempt to bring several potential solutions to this and several other issues to the 2012 General Assembly for vote.

## 8. What has our church decided?

Session voted to engage in dialogue with the Fellowship, and nothing more has been decided. Once Session has had a chance to discuss and react to The Gathering, there will be opportunities to engage in dialogue with our whole church. We need your prayers and input. Please keep in mind:

- FPCB has NOT decided to leave the PC(USA)
- FPCB has NOT decided to join the Fellowship (individuals may choose to become supporters on their own)
- Those who attended The Gathering DID have consensus on the next steps for FPCB (see #9)

## 9. What are the next steps for FPCB?

Most of our church’s representatives at The Gathering returned with a renewed sense of hope about the future. The representatives agreed that our church should keep moving forward by:

- Having Session discuss and provide feedback to documents posted by the Fellowship as they become available between now and January, 2012
- Providing opportunities for the church to discern, discuss, and pray together
- Sending a delegation to the “constitutional convention” in Orlando in January
- Staying engaged with the process, expecting the results of the 2012 General Assembly to provide clarity

If you would like to know more, go to the Fellowship’s website ([www.fellowship-pres.org](http://www.fellowship-pres.org)) or contact a pastor or elder who attended. The list of attendees: Dave Boltz, Lynnette Burns, Mary Jane Diener, Gail Farnham, Steve Follett, Alf Halvorson, Jack Jordan, Dick Luse, Bill Marsh, Jan Marsh, Cody Sandahl, Laura Savenelli, Jill Smedley, and Ann Terres.