

FAQ: Terms of Gracious Dismissal

Please note that the final details are still in process. The FAQs here reflect our best understanding as of April 23, 2018.

Q1: What has happened since the Session formally requested gracious dismissal from the PC(USA) in January 2017?

A: The Presbytery of Philadelphia formed an Administrative Commission (AC) who will make a recommendation to the Presbytery regarding our request for dismissal. The AC is composed of seven pastors and elders from churches within the Presbytery. The Administrative Commission met multiple times, individually and with NPC's Transition Team, Session, and the congregation.

Q2: What is the Administrative Commission recommending?

A: After reviewing NPC's history, relationship with the Presbytery, financial and property resources, and discussions with NPC's Transition Team and members of NPC's pastoral staff, the AC recommended the terms set forth below.

Q3: What are the Terms of Gracious Dismissal? Can I review the agreement?

A: Narberth Presbyterian Church will be transferred to ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians, which is another Presbyterian denomination. The terms allow for proper care of people and property. A copy of the full agreement will be mailed to members at least one week prior to NPC's Congregational Meeting on June 10, 2018. In summary, the terms are:

Care of People:

- NPC's Members, Elders, and Deacons will be transferred from the PC(USA) to ECO.
- Pastor Steve Weed and Pastor Debbie Watson will serve NPC as ECO Affiliate Pastors. See Q6 for more information about Affiliate Pastors.

Care for Property:

- NPC will remain the legal owner of and have clear title to all its property, real and personal, including land, buildings and bank accounts.
- A settlement amount of \$375,000 is required to be paid to the PC(USA) Presbytery of Philadelphia. This will be paid in annual installments of \$37,500 over ten years.

Q4: What has NPC's financial support of the PC(USA) been in recent years?

A: NPC's per capita and mission giving to the denomination has been approximately \$20,000 per year. Our settlement helps replace the amounts the denomination will lose upon NPC's departure. Going forward, NPC joyfully commits to give ECO 1% of our annual unrestricted income to support the structure and ministry of ECO, which, based on the 2018 budget of \$1,175,000, would equate to an annual gift of \$11,750. It is possible we may add to that in missions giving in the coming years.

Q5: How will the settlement amount be paid?

A: Funds for the settlement payments will be drawn from our investment portfolio, which at March 31, 2018, totaled approximately \$1,125,000.

Q6: What is an "Affiliate Pastor"?

A: Reflecting his 37 years of service in the PC(USA), Pastor Steve has requested approval to assume "dual citizenship" with ECO and the PC(USA). Pastor Debbie, expected soon to be ordained as a PC(USA) pastor, has requested the same approval. "Dual citizenship" would permit Steve and Debbie to serve NPC as ECO pastors while retaining their PC(USA) ordination. Both are completely supportive of NPC's move to ECO as being the right place for our church. ECO welcomes such pastors as Affiliate Pastors, and the local ECO presbytery warmly supports this. Dual citizenship will enhance our witness in the Christian community as we share common ministry in places like Presby's Inspired Life (retirement homes like Rosemont Presbyterian Village) and the Philadelphia Project. In addition, both Steve and Debbie have longstanding relationships with members of the Presbytery of Philadelphia, and their continued participation will be an encouragement to many. Our support of dual citizenship is one way we are able to bless our pastors. This aspect of our dismissal requires Presbytery approval, as do the financial terms. In the event that the Presbytery does not approve dual citizenship, Steve and Debbie will remain our pastors and transfer their ordination to ECO.

Q7: Who determined the Terms of Gracious Dismissal?

A: Following many meetings of NPC's Session and Transition Team, as well as the Presbytery's Administrative Commission, the above terms were proposed by the Administrative Commission. After evaluating this process at length and prayerfully considering all the possibilities, the NPC Session unanimously recommended that NPC agree to pay this amount so that NPC can transfer to ECO and retain its property. Although it requires that we be more generous than anticipated, NPC believes, more than ever, that it is the right thing for us to do. Funds for the settlement payment will be drawn from our investment portfolio.

Q8: Why is NPC required to pay a settlement amount to the Presbytery of Philadelphia?

A: NPC's participation in the Presbytery has been an important part of our responsibility as Presbyterians. The Presbytery is designed (among other things) to be involved in local mission efforts, starting new churches and providing support for pastors through its staff and ministries. NPC's payment to the Presbytery can be seen as a reflection of our commitment to the Presbytery's ongoing work and to cover the expenses related to NPC's dismissal.

Q9: How does NPC's settlement compare with other churches dismissed from our presbytery?

- The four prior gracious dismissal settlements from this presbytery ranged from \$440,000 (Oreland in 2007) to \$70,000 (Huntington Valley in 2014) taking into account factors such as size of the congregation, underlying assets and other attributes.

- The settlement amount expected to be paid by Langhorne Presbyterian, also departing from this presbytery at this time, is \$200,000.

Q10: What are the next steps in the process for NPC?

A: Following one worship service at 9 AM on Sunday, June 10, 2018, NPC's members will vote at a Congregational Meeting to accept the terms of the negotiated agreement. If the vote passes, the Presbytery will hold a similar vote on July 14, 2018, on whether to dismiss NPC to ECO.

Q11: What is involved with the congregational vote?

A: Our goal is for the whole church to be engaged together in prayerful discernment of this decision. For the Congregational Meeting on June 10, congregants must be members of the church and present at the meeting in order to vote. The Presbytery's policy requires at least 50% of NPC's members to be present at the June 10 Congregational Meeting. If 75% or more of those voting support the recommendation that NPC accept the Terms of Gracious Dismissal to leave the PC(USA), the matter will then be sent to the Presbytery of Philadelphia for final approval in July. Voting will be by secret written ballot. Ballots will be issued to members at the meeting. To ensure adequate seating, members holding a ballot will be seated in the Sanctuary first and space permitting, non-members may be seated in the Sanctuary.

Q12: How do I know if I am a member of the church?

A: NPC periodically holds an Explorer's class to share the church's core beliefs and discipleship path. At the end of class, everyone is invited to confess their faith in Jesus Christ and formally join the church by meeting with the Session and then being presented in front of the congregation during a regular Worship Service. If you are unsure whether or not you are a member, you can contact the church at office@narberthpres.org or call 610-664-4880.

Q13: How many people need to attend the congregational meeting on June 10, 2018, for it to be "official"?

A: At least 50% of NPC members must attend for the meeting to be official.

Q14: What percentage of votes is required for the Terms of Gracious Dismissal to be approved?

A: At least 75% of those voting by secret, written ballot, must approve.

Q15: I would like to vote, but cannot attend on June 10; can I vote by proxy?

A: Proxies are not permitted. Only members who are present at the meeting may cast a vote.

Q16: May someone make a designated donation, over and above their regular tithes and offerings, to help pay for the cash settlement?

A: Yes. Donations may be received toward the cash settlement. Please note "Dismissal Agreement" on the check or envelope.

Q17: When will the Dismissal Agreement be finalized?

A: Assuming the NPC congregation votes to accept the Terms of Gracious Dismissal on June 10, 2018, and the Presbytery of Philadelphia votes in favor on July 14, 2018, the Agreement will be final once the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery receives notice that NPC has been received into ECO and other related administrative matters are completed, expected to occur no later than July 31, 2018.

Q18: Will the Presbytery of Philadelphia approve the Agreement?

A: The Administrative Commission has unanimously approved the Terms of Gracious Dismissal.. The NPC Session has voted unanimously to recommend approval. We are all hopeful that the congregation and the Presbytery will do the same.

Q19: I'm a new member. Can you give me a brief history of NPC's decision?

A: NPC has always sought to be a Christ-centered and Bible-based church. Historically one of the strengths of the PC(USA) was that it reflected a broad range of understandings of the Christian faith, while remaining true to Presbyterian hallmarks of being "confessional" in belief and "connectional" in relationship across our differences. Over time, however, the outer boundaries of our denomination broadened, theologically and practically, in ways that NPC found distracting, and our church had less in common with the denomination and its direction. In June 2015, the Session determined to actively explore ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians as a possible denomination with which to affiliate. ECO is a Presbyterian denomination with the laser focus of building flourishing churches that make disciples of Jesus Christ. That fits NPC. Following a time of examination, study, prayer, and congregational engagement, on May 31, 2016, the Session resolved to seek gracious dismissal, with property, from the PC(USA) to ECO, if the way was clear. A copy of that resolution is found on page 6. During the Fall 2016, we held a series of Town Hall meetings to share our journey, vision and answer questions from the congregation, and in November of that year, received input from the congregation by means of a straw poll administered by an independent survey company. The results showed a very high degree of congregational support for Session's recommendation to request dismissal. In January 2017, the Session formally requested of the Presbytery of Philadelphia that we be dismissed to ECO.

Q20: Can you provide a brief snapshot of ECO?

A: ECO is a Presbyterian denomination founded in January 2012 that embraces solid Presbyterian values and theological beliefs, the latter summarized in a set of "Essential Tenets & Confessional Standards". ECO is committed to: (1) the proclamation and spread of the Gospel and (2) a Presbyterian, Reformed confessional heritage. ECO supports the theology of NPC, and will help further our mission. As of April 2018, there were over 370 churches in ECO. ECO states its mission as being "to build flourishing churches that make disciples of Jesus Christ." In short, we finally have a place to go, a very positive denominational alternative that "fits" NPC. We

believe it is very important not only to have a “call out of” the PC(USA), but a “call into” a positive, life-giving body. We believe that ECO, now over six years old, is such an option. More information is available at ECO’s website, www.eco-pres.org.

Q21: How will life at NPC change?

A: Our worship, ministries and programs will continue as we know them. We will continue to offer the Good News of Jesus Christ from the corner of Windsor and Grayling Avenues! Ministries to children and youth will continue. To the extent that changes occur, we anticipate they will be good. We expect to continue to learn and grow, taking advantage of the excellent educational and leadership resources ECO offers, and as we further engage ministry along the lines of ECO’s emphasis on an unleashed laity who take risks and expand ministry, because they are well-prepared to bear witness in word and deed in a post-Christian culture: inviting both conversation about the Lord Jesus, and participation in the life of his people, the Church, so that the family of faith here at NPC might always be growing , numerically and spiritually.

Q22: What is ECO *for*?

A: ECO is *for* churches to be devoted more to mission, ministry, and connectionalism instead of internal denominational dynamics. One of our great hopes is that the substantial time devoted by our leadership to denominational matters can be re-engaged in effective and life-giving ministry. ECO as a movement is *for* ministry that promotes evangelism and justice, *for* church planting and multiplication, *for* creative, innovative, nimble, entrepreneurial, risk-taking ministry, *for* deeper relational connection, and *for* theological essentials that provide a foundational theological understanding. That is a compelling vision.

Q23: How can I pray for NPC during this time?

A: Please pray that God will be glorified in the remaining process and ultimate outcome of our dismissal, that all final details will be resolved easily and quickly, that we will have an excellent turnout and vote at our meeting on June 10th, that we will find favor at the Presbytery meeting on July 14th, and that through our new ECO affiliation, many will come to know the love, grace, and truth of Jesus Christ.

If you have additional questions, please contact any member of NPC’s Transition Team: Elders Dave Bellamy, Diane Chen, Jack Comstock, Sam DiLullo, Meg McKinley, and Emma Shaw. You may also email questions to denomination@narberthpres.org or speak with any elder, Pastor Debbie, or Pastor Steve.

Appreciation is expressed to Carmel Presbyterian Church, Carmel, CA for permission to adapt for our use materials created by their church.

Narberth Presbyterian Church

Session Resolution

Whereas the Elders “are chosen by the congregation to discern and measure its fidelity to the Word of God, and to strengthen and nurture its faith and life”, and to “exercise leadership, government, spiritual discernment, and discipline” (G-2.03), and

Whereas Session has the duty and responsibility for guiding the faith and witness of the congregation, and is responsible for NPC’s witness to Jesus Christ in the community where we serve, and

Whereas Session has carefully and prayerfully considered the level of the PC(USA)’s commitment in practice to the integrity of the Gospel as upholding the sole saving grace of Jesus Christ as the only means to salvation, its commitment to the authority and interpretation of scripture, including what constitutes personal holiness before God and others, and the PC(USA)’s degree of missional effectiveness,

Session, therefore, has examined the impact of the church’s relationship with the PC(USA) and its effect upon the spiritual welfare of the congregation and the witness to our community, and believes that it is within our moral, spiritual, and fiduciary obligations to the congregation to reconsider our denominational affiliation with the PC(USA) and to pursue, in good faith, other options and alternatives. We, the Session, further believe this to be a faithful act of stewardship for the congregation and the resources with which we are entrusted, and a necessary act in fulfillment of our duties.

Therefore, following a time of examination, study, prayer, and congregational engagement, Session has **RESOLVED** to seek gracious dismissal, with property, from the PC(USA) to ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians, if the way be clear.

Adopted May 31, 2016