



EASTMINSTER PRESBYTERY

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Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Eastminster Presbytery is again faced with a congregation that has voted to leave the Presbytery and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The Struthers Presbyterian Church, founded in 1804, declared at a meeting of the congregation on January 10, 2010, by a vote of 124 to 4 that they no longer wish to be affiliated with us. Why? Representatives of the Committee on Ministry and I do not have clarity on this matter. We do know that the Session, without the presence of their Moderator, acted secretly and deceptively. There was never an opportunity for the Presbytery to dialogue about their concerns that led to the decision to propose to the congregation withdrawal from the denomination.

What we do know is that Attorney Forrest Norman, who also represented the Hudson and Stow Churches that withdrew from the PC(USA) and Eastminster Presbytery, is representing the Struthers Church. Who is Forrest Norman? He is an attorney of the legal firm of Gallagher Sharp in Cleveland. He is also a member of the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors of the Presbyterian Lay Committee. Attorney Norman has been working with PC(USA) congregations across the country assisting them to leave the denomination in possession of their property. Unfortunately, I have found that when the focus of a session or congregation becomes property, any open and substantive conversations between the church and the presbytery about theological issues or possible reconciliation cease. I am also deeply concerned that the rhetoric often heard in these disputes and played out in the media includes such unsubstantiated claims as that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) doesn't believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ. The declaration of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) through its creeds, statements, and worship, is clear and unequivocal--Jesus Christ is truly God and truly human.

We are the church, the Body of Christ, and we dishonor Christ when we act like adversaries, one to the other. Dragging our differences into the courts and into the media undermine the witness of the church and the effectiveness of the gospel in ways that no enemy of the church could accomplish. Acting in deceptive and immoral ways to accomplish what is claimed to be a moral cause calls into question the very integrity of the Body of Christ. I am grieved for Eastminster Presbytery, the Struthers Presbyterian Church, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and the cause of Jesus Christ in the world.

It is time that we resume acting like the Body of Christ. In case there are any doubts, allow me to state categorically that no member, session, or congregation of Eastminster Presbytery should hesitate to communicate any concern to the presbytery. If a session or a congregation of Eastminster Presbytery is exploring the possibility of departing from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), speak to the presbytery about it before speaking with an attorney. There are numerous warnings in the Bible that the people of God should not drag one another into court, and there are good reasons for it. I can assure you that Eastminster Presbytery and I are trustworthy and will treat you with the love and respect that sisters and brothers in Christ expect of one another.

Unfortunately, given the lawsuit filed against Eastminster Presbytery, matters are far from settled in relationship to the Struthers Presbyterian Church. We seek your prayers for those representing Eastminster Presbytery and the Struthers Presbyterian Church, that a resolution of this matter may be found that will do no further harm to the Body of Christ.

In Christ's service together,

Dan Schomer