

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



New Albany
Presbyterian Church

By now we trust that you have read and began your consideration of the Denominational Vision and Recommendations document. The elders hope it provided valuable information so as to help you make these decisions about the future of NAPC. That said, we understand it likely raised other, perhaps more specific questions to which you now seek answers.

In this resource, we have aggregated what we believe will be some of the most common questions regarding the potential denominational transition for NAPC and have provided answers to each of them. Certainly, this resource will not address every possible question, so we ask that you please raise any other questions you have at a town hall meeting or directly to an elder or deacon or your small group leader.

This resource is separated into two sections. The first addresses questions relating to dismissal from the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA). The second addresses questions on affiliating with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC).

PCUSA Dismissal:

NAPC is a local congregation of the PCUSA. What does it mean to be Presbyterian and part of the PCUSA?

Being a Presbyterian generally involves three attributes: (1) Being Reformed in doctrine; (2) Being governed by elected elders; and (3) Being connected with a larger corporate body of confessing Reformed believers.

In the PCUSA in particular, this means that elders are elected by the local congregation to govern and guide it. Each local congregation belongs to a regional body called a presbytery. NAPC is part of the Presbytery of Scioto Valley. Appointed representatives from each Presbytery, called commissioners, come together every other year at the General Assembly, a denomination-wide meeting of the PCUSA. Votes are taken and interpretations given on numerous topics at each General Assembly, some of which must then be ratified by the presbyteries.

What is the PCUSA and how did NAPC come to be affiliated with it?

The PCUSA is the largest Presbyterian denomination in the nation, but there are many others. It was born of a merger between two Presbyterian denominations in 1983. The PCUSA and its congregations are to be governed by its constitution, which consists of The Book of Confessions (11 historic confessional statements) and The Book of Order (polity regarding church government, worship and discipline). NAPC was started as a PCUSA congregation by a group of families who wanted a Presbyterian church in the New Albany area, and its denominational affiliation has never changed.

What is the main reason we are considering a request of dismissal from the PCUSA?

When churches go through this type of a discernment process, everyone wants to know the single reason for it, and often assume that it must be something very recent. For NAPC, it is not. This is about the authority of the Bible.

Nearly 100 years ago, the PCUSA lowered its commitment to the authority of Scripture—placing the individual’s “Spirit-led conscience” in its place. At the time, this change had almost imperceptible effects. As time has gone on, however, numerous troubling incidents have occurred and decisions have been made by the PCUSA. Each incident is merely another symptom of this underlying illness. Without the ability to appeal to Scripture as the sole foundation for theology and mission, the PCUSA has increasingly elected not to discipline or correct its pastors and leaders for espousing views that are expressly at odds with Scripture and the Book of Confessions. Instead, the PCUSA has continued to ignore such challenges to the faith and often amended its Book of Order in an effort to appease those with conflicting views.

We believe the authority of the Bible and Jesus’s Great Commission make up the identity of the church. The PCUSA no longer shares these views, at least in practice. As a result, the PCUSA is no longer the most effective path to further NAPC’s mission to glorify God through lives changed by Jesus Christ.

Why can’t we just ignore the denomination and do what we have been doing? Why do this now?

We could—at least for a while—but we shouldn’t, for both Biblical and practical reasons.

First, the disconnect between NAPC and the PCUSA as to theology and mission create a conflicted witness to the world. Churches like ours must continually explain how we are different than most of the PCUSA and the actions they take. This makes outreach difficult and also prevents committed believers from joining our fellowship. The theological and missional divide between NAPC and the PCUSA continues to widen and this will only accelerate. Ordinations of pastors, deacons and elders are valid throughout the denomination and all churches share in the identity of and provide financial support to the denomination. Further, the nature of Presbyterianism is to be connectional. Operating in isolation from a larger denomination is being less than fully Presbyterian.

Second, the leadership of the Presbytery of Scioto Valley has been fair to us in the past and we are truly grateful for that. They have in place a gracious dismissal policy, which will allow NAPC to reach fair and equitable terms of separation. All this could swiftly change. Many congregations attempt to leave and find themselves in acrimony with their presbytery. If this policy or Presbytery leadership changes, we may find it far more difficult to depart in the future. We believe that leaving at this time and under this process preserves the unity of the church, honors Christ and respects those with whom we differ.

Will we still be Presbyterian?

Absolutely, yes. We are a Presbyterian church and we will remain one. In fact, making this change will in many ways allow us to function more as a truly connectional, Presbyterian church than we have in quite some time.

Who owns the property and other assets used by NAPC?

Under what is known as the “trust clause” in the Book of Order, each local congregation is considered to hold and manage all property and assets for the benefit of the denomination. This means that the PCUSA considers itself to own the property, no matter how it is titled and no matter who pays for it.

What is the financial cost of leaving the PCUSA? How will we pay for it?

This is almost impossible to approximate until the discussions and negotiations with the Presbytery are under way. Some churches have paid thousands while some have paid millions. Under the Presbytery of Scioto Valley’s gracious dismissal policy, one of the following guidelines are to be used to calculate any financial settlement:

- 5 times current year’s assessed per capita
- 5% of total assets (cash, investments, property and equipment)
- 20% of prior year’s actual offerings
- consideration of any outstanding denominational loans

NAPC owes no loans to the denomination, but only to a financial institution in connection with the building. The Presbytery did pay for a portion of the land prior to the land swap in the total amount of about \$500,000. While this was not a loan and NAPC has no obligation to repay the Presbytery for this, we acknowledge that doing so will weigh heavily in negotiating a final settlement.

Whatever the agreed upon calculation, we will then work out the terms and timing of repayment. Depending upon the final agreed upon amount, this may be paid over time or else paid immediately out of cash and potentially a refinancing of the property.

What process did the elders go through to come to this decision?

The elders have spent significant time clarifying the mission of NAPC and establishing a plan for our future as a congregation. Clearly defining who we are as a church was the first, and possibly most significant, step that led us to this point. Through the work of a Denominational Research Committee and then on its own, the elders reviewed research and information about the PCUSA as well as other Presbyterian denominations—specifically as to theology and mission. Most importantly, the elders spent time in prayer, both personally and collectively as a group, seeking God’s will for the future of NAPC and asking Him to make his will clear to all. We feel that our Father has answered us.

Are all elders of NAPC in agreement with this change?

Yes, the elders serving at the time voted unanimously to seek dismissal from the PCUSA. All elders who have been elected since that date also agree with the decision.

What role has our Pastor played in this process? Is he supportive of the recommendation?

Almost none. Because the elected elders (who are members of NAPC) are required to lead the process, they have done so. Our pastor is an ordained PCUSA minister and is, therefore, a member of the Presbytery and not a member of NAPC. For that reason, the elders created the Denominational Research Committee (DRC) and chose its members, walked through the discernment process, prayed and voted—all without Pastor David's involvement.

When it came time to consider possible new denominations, Pastor David was certainly involved as he will have to be ordained in that denomination and become a member of its Presbytery.

Pastor David completely supports and trusts the elders in this decision. He agrees with it. He believes that acting in obedience to the Lord requires that we align NAPC with its denomination as to theology and mission. Failing to do so hinders NAPC's fulfilling of its own mission.

Who is eligible to vote?

Every active member of NAPC in attendance can vote at the congregational meeting on November 6th after the Acoustic service. Under PCUSA and NAPC polity, absentee and proxy voting are not permitted. Please make every effort to be present to vote.

For a vote in favor of dismissal to carry, what percentage is necessary?

To carry, at least a 2/3 supermajority of those members present at the vote will be necessary.

What happens to any members who do not support the change?

If the congregation of NAPC votes in favor of dismissal from the PCUSA our sincere hope is that regardless of how individual members have voted that they will remain active members of NAPC. We pray that they will and we welcome them to do so. If a member determines that is not an option, he or she can remain in the PCUSA by transferring membership to another PCUSA congregation.

What is involved in the dismissal process? How long will it take?

Assuming the Presbytery follows their own gracious dismissal policy as they should, the Presbytery will appoint a Response Team consisting of a few Presbytery officials. The Response Team will meet with the current elders and certain other leaders of NAPC. After that, if deemed necessary, the Presbytery may appoint an Administrative Commission. The Administrative Commission will take a much deeper dive into our church to determine whether dismissal is the best option. It is

during that time that any financial settlement and all other terms of dismissal would be negotiated and agreed upon. Lastly, the voting members of Presbytery would have to vote to grant the request for dismissal. This entire process can take from a few months to in excess of a year.

EPC Affiliation:

What are the EPC's core beliefs and mission?

Unlike the PCUSA, which has a Book of Confessions (11 in total), the EPC has one confessional statement: The Westminster Confession of Faith, together with its longer and shorter catechisms. For centuries, this was the sole confessional statement of Presbyterianism and Reformed theology, and so it remains for the EPC. As part of our selection of the EPC, the elders studied the Westminster Confession and are confident it will serve NAPC well.

In addition to the Westminster Confession, the EPC has a document called "The Essentials". Very similar in content to the NAPC Belief Statement, "The Essentials" begins with the authority of Scripture and then sets forth the other crucial tenets of the faith. The elders were more than pleased to find a Presbyterian denomination willing to stand on the foundation of the Bible and state with clarity that the core tenets of Reformed, orthodox Christianity are essential and non-negotiable.

As to mission, the EPC "exists to carry out the Great Commission of Jesus as a denomination of Presbyterian, Reformed, Evangelical and Missional congregations." The EPC actually lives this out by providing opportunities for shared evangelism efforts, missionary training, church planting and more.

What is it mean to be "evangelical"?

In our culture today, the term "evangelical" carries different meanings for different people and is often misused. Images of street preachers or politically conservative activists often come to mind. The true meaning of the word, however, is quite simple.

"Evangelical" comes from the Greek word "euangelion", which means good news or gospel. Therefore, to be evangelical is to believe that an important part of the Christian faith is to share the good news of Christ's gospel with others. We at NAPC believe this completely and it is expressed within our core values and summed up well in our mission. The EPC also provides its own description of being "evangelical", which reads as follows:

"To be evangelical is to believe that Jesus is God the Son who became flesh and lived among us and died for us. Through Jesus Christ, the Kingdom of God has been inaugurated, thereby freeing people from the guilt and power of sin through personal faith and repentance. This good news of God's love needs to be shared (ideally in relationships) with those who are alienated from God. This salvation is found in no one else. As Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, no one comes to the Father but by Me" (John 14.6). We express this priority on evangelism by stating it in our governing documents as the first "duty" of the church. This priority is evidenced by our emphasis on church planting, church revitalization, and world missions."

How will moving to the EPC better support NAPC in fulfilling its mission?

This will advance NAPC's mission in several ways. First, NAPC will be affiliated with a denomination that finally aligns with who we are—theologically and missionally. When folks interested in our church research the EPC, they will in turn get a far more accurate picture of the identity of NAPC than they would right now by researching the PCUSA.

Second, greater fellowship with like-minded churches will enhance a sense of denominational unity. We will have the ability to partner with other Bible centered EPC congregations in fulfilling the Great Commission. Affiliation with the EPC would allow Bible believing Christians in our community to realize that our church is committed to the values they also share.

Third, we will be more fully Presbyterian than we are today. The elders have been planning for the next several years of NAPC's future. We want to add a third service, offer deeper discipleship programs and even plant another church. Having a denominational partner that believes in those endeavors as much as we do will only strengthen our efforts. Together, we feel that this move will make NAPC a stronger, more vibrant, congregation and provide a clearer witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Were any other denominations considered?

Yes. The DRC report described other Presbyterian denominations, but focused mostly on the EPC and another one known as the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO). For a number of mostly governance related reasons, most congregations leaving the PCUSA go to one of those two denominations. After research, meetings and discussion, the elders overwhelmingly felt that the EPC would make the best home for NAPC. For the elders, the most crucial factors in making this decision were the following: theological alignment; clarity of identity; polity and governance; and the reformed, connectional nature of the denomination. The EPC best aligns with NAPC on all these fronts.

Does the EPC allow women to serve in church leadership?

Certainly. At NAPC, we believe Scripture supports an egalitarian view of church leadership, which allows for men and women to hold all positions as ministers and officers of the church. For this reason, we did not consider affiliation with certain other denominations, including the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). We have women elders at NAPC and that will not change in the EPC.

Still, the EPC does not consider any particular position on women in church leadership to be a part of "The Essentials" of the faith. This means that congregations who read the Bible in either direction on this issue are welcome to join the EPC but are also at liberty to establish their church governance in accordance with their own reading of Scripture.

Why do we need a denomination? Can't we just be an independent church?

We believe in maintaining a denominational affiliation for both theological and practical reasons.

Theologically speaking, an “independent Presbyterian church” is a contradiction. Being part of a larger, Reformed, confessing body of churches is part of what being Presbyterian means. It is central to who we are.

Practically speaking, the Presbytery’s gracious dismissal policy applies only if NAPC is dismissed to another Reformed denomination. It is to the benefit of NAPC to have the policy apply. Having received hundreds of other former PCUSA congregations, the EPC is well situated to receive NAPC after we follow the gracious dismissal policy.

How large is the EPC? Are there other EPC churches around?

There are over 500 congregations in the EPC, with more in the process of joining right now and many church planting efforts underway. It is a growing denomination—just like we are a growing congregation. There are a number of EPC congregations in Ohio, which vary in size and are spread out across the state. NAPC would be the largest EPC congregation in central Ohio.

How is the EPC organized and governed?

As a Presbyterian denomination, the EPC has local congregations, presbyteries, and a General Assembly, much like the PCUSA. Elders are elected by the local congregation and ministers are ordained by and are members of the local presbytery. In the EPC, NAPC would be part of the Presbytery of the Alleghenies, which is based in Pittsburgh. Along with the Westminster Confession and The Essentials, the EPC has a Book of Order. It reads and is organized very similar to the PCUSA Book of Order, save for the PCUSA’s more recent amendments that change core doctrine and elevate it above the confessions.

How will joining the EPC affect our Pastor and the elders?

It will affect both in a number of positive ways. Pastor David will have to go through ordination examination for the EPC and he will start a new pension under an EPC plan (he is fully vested under his current PCUSA plan and will not forfeit it). He also will be expected to attend and participate in Presbytery meetings and will be part of a group of pastors who meet for accountability and encouragement. These are relationships and opportunities that Pastor David welcomes.

For the elders, all of the then-current elders will have to go through a study and examination process on Reformed theology and the Westminster Confession. We, too, are looking forward to this and are even considering offering the training to our broader NAPC membership as well.

Who will own our property? What financial obligation will NAPC have to the EPC?

NAPC's financial obligation to the EPC will be based on per member annual contributions and will be consistent with what we now pay annually within the PCUSA.

Unlike the PCUSA's Book of Order, the EPC Book of Order contains no "trust clause" and title to all property forever rests in the name of the local congregation. So, after the move, NAPC will irrevocably own and control its property for its own benefit and the glory of the Lord—not for any denomination—forever. This difference in ownership encourages denominational alignment based on shared theology and mission, not property ownership.