

Administrative Commission of Salem Presbytery—Dismissal of Franklin Presbyterian Church

September 9, 2023

Members of Administrative Commission:

Felicia Stewart Hoyle, HR, moderator; Joe Blankinship, HR; David Parker, Elder and attorney; John Lowe, Franklin Clerk of Session; Salem Stated Clerk David Vaughn met with the commission.

In the Fall of 2022, the Session of Franklin Presbyterian requested a meeting with a representative of the Salem Presbytery. Their pastor, John Elam, had made known his plans to retire in the summer of 2023 and they had questions regarding their future, especially related to their relationship with the PC(USA). With the Salem Presbytery dismissal policy in mind additional representatives met with the Session and members of the congregation. From this conversation it was clear that their theological differences with the denomination, concerns that they would not be able to find a new pastor within the PC(USA) who shared their beliefs, and the overwhelming view that the congregation could no longer tolerate being a part of the denomination, led to the formation of the above-named Administrative Commission.

Following Salem's dismissal policy, (available on the Presbytery web-site under Clerk's Corner/Resources), the AC quickly determined the next step was an evaluation of the church finances and assets in order to come to a legal settlement agreement. The underlying principal was that the Franklin church and Salem Presbytery both be able to continue with their mission and ministry once separated. No funds were expended in this evaluation. There were no outstanding loans and the Franklin church was current on per capita payments. After reviewing the assets and considering precedent within Salem Presbytery a legal agreement was reached. It includes \$12,500 to be paid to Salem Presbytery and provisions outlined in policy.

Further, the dismissal policy states: "Any proceeds from congregations dismissed to other Reformed bodies shall ordinarily be used in Salem Presbytery for new church development and transformational ministries within congregations---or may, with the concurrence of Presbytery at a regularly stated meeting, be used for other purposes as the Presbytery deems best to fulfill its mission." The AC proposes that the funds from this settlement be used for transformational ministry in the Rowan/Iredell county areas with the knowledge that the Commission on Ministry Task Force for Transformation, is developing ideas for such ministry. This would allow the ministry of the Franklin church to be extended and fulfill the mission of Salem Presbytery.

At the beginning of the process the AC was advised that there is a constitutional error in Salem's policy in regard to the actions of the congregation. The policy and procedure was followed as written with the vote of the congregation being advisory to the Session which made the final statement of desiring to be dismissed. (An updated policy will be presented at a future presbytery meeting with this minor but important change.)

A congregational meeting was held on Sunday, September 27. The membership roll was presented and care was taken that only members were given ballots and voted. 42 of the 45 members were present and voting. Members of the commission were present and able to speak and ample opportunity was given for discussion. Voting by secret ballot on the question of dismissal, all 42 members present voted in the affirmative. It was further shared that two who were absent were ill and it was known they would have voted in favor of dismissal. Therefore, no provisions need to be made for anyone to remain in the PC(USA).

The Franklin church has been informed that “ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians has agreed to assume ecclesiastical authority over” the congregation, pending dismissal from Salem Presbytery.

It is especially important to note that all deliberations and interactions, both within the AC and with the Session and congregation have proceeded with grace and love, from God and for each other.

As the Franklin church leaves, our presbytery will be diminished by the loss of their view and voice. However, the financial settlement will enable both Salem Presbytery and the Franklin church to minister in new and transformational ways.

The Administrative Commission therefore recommends an affirmative vote on this question:

“Shall Presbytery of Salem dismiss the Franklin Presbyterian Congregation to this Reformed body (ECO), with the terms in the legal agreement?”