

Note from the Stated Clerk: Because this motion has not come through a Council or a committee, it will be received at the January 31, 2012 presbytery meeting as 'new business' – but we still want you to know that it is coming! This is not actually a new subject matter for us, but rather a new way to seek progress on a matter that has been before us several times. After its introduction, the Presbytery has fairly wide discretion as to how to process New Business. For example, if not ready to discuss it as a whole or if we begin discussion and need more time, we could postpone it to a future meeting or refer it to Council or one of our committees. If we are ready, we may discuss it immediately, amend it if needed, and then decide how to vote on it.

Proposed Motion – NEW BUSINESS Presbytery of San Francisco Dismissal Policy

Motion:

That Presbytery approve a process of mediation as the means to developing a mutually agreeable, revised "Policy for Dismissing Churches"; that an equal number of presbyters be selected to represent those who favor the original policy adopted September 15, 2009 (now in suspension), and those who favor the proposed revised policy presented June 14, 2011; that appointment of the representatives be determined by the Moderator of Presbytery, Chair of the Leadership Council and the Stated Clerk in consultation with representatives from each of the two groups; that the representatives select and engage a mediator, develop working principles and commitments regarding the mediation process, and engage in the mediation process with the goal of presenting a mutually agreeable policy to Presbytery as soon as possible and no later than the May 8, 2012 Presbytery meeting; and that the cost of the mediation process be paid by the Presbytery.

Background to Motion:

The goal of this motion is to achieve an amicable, mutually beneficial resolution of Presbytery efforts to review and revise the Policy for Dismissing Churches through a process that strengthens the relational health and unity of the Presbytery. Mediation will further the Presbytery's efforts to create a healthier working environment that is free of the dysfunction and toxicity that has impacted Presbytery deliberations and actions. It is also possible that this process might become a model for resolution of issues where there is significant disagreement that has potential for creating division within the Presbytery.

In this mediation process, a skilled mediator will help the parties who hold strongly divergent perspectives and approaches on this policy issue focus on the common purposes that all share in ministry and mission, facilitate dialogue and understanding of differing viewpoints, encourage a broad understanding of Christian community and values, and ultimately assist the parties to create a mutually agreeable policy that all can respectfully support as the best outcome possible given the differences that exist.

This motion is in response to the very conflicted state the Presbytery finds itself in regarding the Dismissal Policy. A summary of the history of this policy discussion and debate includes:

- The 218th General Assembly (2008) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) approved Resolution 04-28 which urged in part: "... that presbyteries and synods develop and make available to lower governing bodies and local congregations a process that exercises the responsibility and power "to divide, dismiss, or dissolve churches in consultation with their members" (*Book of Order*, G-11.0103i) with consistency, pastoral responsibility, accountability, gracious witness, openness, and transparency."

- Presbytery voted to adopt as presented the Gracious Dismissal Task Force Policy For Dismissing Churches at its September 15, 2009 meeting.
- In November 2010, Presbytery by a vote of 122-95-1 suspended the Gracious Dismissal Policy approved September 15, 2009 until the policy was reviewed and studied in light of the lessons learned from its initial application.
- A revised Policy for Dismissing Churches (first reading April 12, 2011, second reading June 14, 2011) generated significant feedback and concern from a number of churches, and resulted in lengthy discussion, the defeat of two amendments, and action to table the motion and all pending matters at the June 14 meeting.
- Recognizing that the debate and actions of the Presbytery regarding revising the policy were indicative of a much deeper division of the Presbytery between presbyters who favor the original policy and presbyters who favor the revised policy proposal, Presbytery voted at the September 13, 2011 meeting that further discussion of the revised "Policy for Dismissing Churches" be postponed until early 2012.
- At the same September 13, 2011 Presbytery meeting, it was noted that significant contention and dysfunction exist within Presbytery, and as a result, the Leadership Council appointed a "Detox Team" to study and suggest remedies for the contention and dysfunction within Presbytery.

The mediation process will help presbyters who have different views know they have been heard even when disagreement remains. It will encourage all to act in grace and love by approving a shared solution instead of a personally favored solution.

A mediated resolution of dismissal policy issues will strengthen relationships and create a healthier and more mutually supportive work environment within the Presbytery.

A timely resolution of dismissal policy issues is of vital importance to churches within the Presbytery and is consistent with the approved timetable of early 2012.