



## **PRESBYTERY OF PROSPECT HILL**

### **Policy on Dismissing Congregations from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)**

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#### **Section 1 – Foundation**

*Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Foundation of the Church.* For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross (Colossians 1:19-20).

*The Church is the body of Christ.* Christ gives to the Church all the gifts necessary to be his body. The Church strives to demonstrate these gifts in its life as a community in the world (I Corinthians 12:27–28).

*Unity is God's gift to the Church in Jesus Christ.* From the ancient days of the Church, Christians have been exhorted to lead a life worthy of the calling to which we have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:1-3).

*Christ calls and equips the Church.* Christ calls the Church into being, giving it all that is necessary for its mission in the world, for its sanctification, and for its service to God. Christ is present with the Church in both Spirit and Word. Christ alone rules, calls, teaches, and uses the Church as he wills (*Book of Order*, F-1.0202).

*Christ gives the Church its life.* Christ gives to the Church its faith and life, its unity and mission, its order and discipline. Scripture teaches us of Christ's will for the Church, which is to be obeyed. In the worship and service of God and the government of the church, matters are to be ordered according to the Word by reason and sound judgment, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (*Book of Order*, F-1.0203).

In gratitude to God for the words proclaimed above, the particular churches of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), wherever they are, taken collectively, constitute one church. The union of a congregation with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is intended to be perpetual and should ordinarily end only if the denomination is dissolved without merging with another Reformed body. Bearing the wisdom of that principle mind, the Presbytery of Prospect Hill also recognizes that our denomination permits congregations to petition for dismissal to other Reformed bodies while the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) continues its mission in the world. As such situations arise, the Presbytery shall endeavor to keep before it these words from the Confession of 1967:

The institutions of the people of God change and vary as their mission requires in different times and places. The unity of the church is compatible with a wide variety of forms, but it is hidden and distorted when variant forms are allowed to harden into sectarian divisions, exclusive denominations, and rival factions.

Wherever the church exists, its members are both gathered in corporate life and dispersed in society for the sake of mission in the world.

The church gathers to praise God, to hear his word for mankind, to baptize and to join in the Lord's Supper, to pray for and present the world to him in worship, to enjoy fellowship, to receive

instruction, strength, and comfort, to order and organize its own corporate life, to be tested, renewed, and reformed, and to speak and act in the world's affairs as may be appropriate to the needs of the time.

This Policy contains the procedure that will be used by the Presbytery of Prospect Hill to respond to situations where a particular church contemplates and petitions for dismissal from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

## **Section 2 – Definitions**

As used in this policy:

“Clerk of Session” means the Clerk of Session of a particular church.

“Commission on Ministry” means the Commission on Ministry of the Presbytery of Prospect Hill.

“Council” means the Council of the Presbytery of Prospect Hill.

“Listening post” means a gathering convened by the Commission on Ministry at a particular church to hear testimony from members of the congregation about their opinions on the state of affairs in the life of the particular church and their views on specific issues.

“Membership Assessment Report” means a written report prepared by a Presbytery representative or special committee that provides findings and recommendations as to whether a sufficient number of members of a congregation desire to remain within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

“Mission Assessment Study” means a written report prepared by the Commission on Ministry regarding 1) a particular church's history, 2) current organizational structure, 3) its involvement in the life of the denomination, 4) engagement in its community and beyond as an exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world, and 5) assistance that it has received from the Presbytery and other agencies or offices of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

“Particular church” means the organization, ministry, and government of a congregation.

“Presbytery” means the Presbytery of Prospect Hill.

“Real property” means the land and buildings held by a particular church.

“Reformed body” means a denomination that is a member of the World Communion of Reformed Churches or another Reformed denomination recognized by the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

“Roll of active members” means a particular church's roll of active members as provided by the *Book of Order* (G-1.0402 and G-3.0204a).

“Session” means the Session of a particular church.

“Stated Clerk” means the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of Prospect Hill.

“Voting presbyters” means Minister Members, Ruling Elder Commissioners, and Ruling Elder Members of the Presbytery of Prospect Hill.

### **Section 3 – Discernment by the Particular Church**

1. Pursuant to the *Book of Order* (G-3.0301a, G-3.0303b, and G-4.0207), the Presbytery has authority to dismiss a particular church.
2. A particular church cannot be dismissed to be an independent church (PCUS 1974, pp. 119-121, *Anderson v. Synod of Florida*).
3. A particular church cannot act on its own to be dismissed; the authority to dismiss rests solely with the Presbytery (PCUS 1976, pp. 92-99, *Strong and Bagby v. Synod of the Mid-South*).
4. A particular church cannot be dismissed to be a nondenominational church; it may be dismissed only to another Reformed body (*Minutes of the 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly*, pp. 14-15, Item 07-13).

### **Informing the Presbytery**

5. If a Session has begun considering a request to be dismissed from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), then it shall direct the Clerk of Session to inform the Stated Clerk in writing. The Stated Clerk shall acknowledge receipt of the Session’s communication and forward it to the moderator of the Commission on Ministry, who will report the communication to the committee. The Session shall direct the Clerk of Session to invite the Commission on Ministry to send representatives to a duly called regular Session meeting to discuss the situation, or to a special Session meeting called for that purpose.
6. The Session shall inform all persons on the congregation’s roll of active members in a letter sent by U.S. mail and electronic means that representatives of the Commission on Ministry attended a Session meeting to discuss the Session’s consideration of requesting dismissal from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). This letter shall be mailed no later than seven days after the Session meeting.
7. The Session shall direct the Clerk of Session to inform the Stated Clerk in writing no later than seven days after the Session meeting if it will continue to consider requesting dismissal from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The Stated Clerk shall acknowledge receipt of the communication and forward it to the moderator of the Commission on Ministry, who will report the communication to the committee.

### **Listening Post**

8. The Commission on Ministry shall have the opportunity to conduct a listening post as defined in Section 2. The Session shall accommodate a request from the Commission on Ministry to gather the congregation for a listening post at the particular church, as well as making space available in conjunction with the listening post for prayer, a devotional, or a worship service led by the Commission on Ministry.
9. The Commission on Ministry shall compile a report of the listening post and share the report with the Session at a duly called regular Session meeting or a special Session meeting called for that purpose. At the same meeting, the Session will schedule an informational gathering for the congregation in

which the Commission on Ministry will present the listening post report. The informational gathering shall take place after the worship service on a Sunday no later than two weeks after the Session meeting.

### **First Congregational Meeting**

10. If conversations between the Session and the Commission on Ministry do not end the Session's consideration to request dismissal from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), then the Session, pursuant to a vote in the affirmative, may recommend to the congregation that it consider requesting the Presbytery to dismiss the particular church from the denomination, and call a congregational meeting to discuss the recommendation. The Session shall mail a letter and send an electronic notice to every person on the particular church's roll of active members, informing them of the date and purpose of the congregational meeting. Notice of the congregational meeting shall also be posted in the particular church's bulletin, newsletter, and on its website.

The Session shall make its recommendation and call a congregational meeting at a duly called regular Session meeting or at a special Session meeting called for that purpose, taking into consideration the requirements specified in subsection 11 below.

11. At the same Session meeting convened in subsection 10 above, the Session shall direct the Clerk of Session to inform the Stated Clerk in writing within seven days that a congregational meeting has been called to recommend to the congregation that it consider requesting the Presbytery to dismiss the particular church from the denomination, along with a signed copy of the minutes of the Session meeting. The Stated Clerk shall acknowledge receipt of the communication and forward it to the members of the Council and the Commission on Ministry.
12. The Moderator of the Presbytery shall appoint a special committee to attend the congregational meeting. The special committee will have the privilege of the floor with the right to speak. The Presbytery representative or special committee will continue to walk alongside the congregation until the question of dismissal is settled and will assist the Commission on Ministry if requested.
13. At the meeting, the Session shall present its reasons for recommending that the congregation consider requesting the Presbytery to dismiss the particular church from the denomination. The Presbytery representative or special committee shall be permitted to respond. The meeting will then enter into a period of conversation in which members of the congregation will ask questions of the Session and the Presbytery representative or special committee and offer comments.
14. When the period of conversation at the congregational meeting has ended, a written secret ballot will be taken on this question: Shall (name of particular church) continue to consider a request for dismissal from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

- a. The counting of ballots shall be supervised by the Session and the Presbytery representative or special committee.
- b. A threshold of at least three-fourths of the persons on the particular church's roll of active members that are present and voting at the congregational meeting shall be necessary for approving the motion to continue to consider a request for dismissal.

- c. If at least three-fourths of the persons on the particular church's roll of active members that are present and voting at the congregational meeting vote to continue to consider a request for dismissal, the Clerk of Session shall inform the Stated Clerk in writing within seven days of the congregation's decision, along with a signed copy of the minutes of the congregational meeting. The Stated Clerk shall acknowledge receipt of the communication and shall forward it to the Council and the Commission on Ministry. The Commission on Ministry shall then have the opportunity to conduct a mission assessment study of the particular church.
- d. If more than one-fourth of the persons on the particular church's roll of active members that are present and voting at the congregational meeting do not vote in favor of continuing to consider a request for dismissal, discernment by the particular church on considering a request to be dismissed from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is ended and the matter is closed. The Clerk of Session shall inform the Stated Clerk in writing within seven days of the congregation's decision, along with a signed copy of the minutes of the congregational meeting. The Stated Clerk shall acknowledge receipt of the communication and shall forward it to the Council and the Commission on Ministry.

### **Mission Assessment Study**

- 15. The Session shall accommodate the Commission on Ministry in its work to compile information for the purpose of a mission assessment study as defined in Section 2, including requests for copies of the particular church's articles of incorporation, bylaws, manual of operations, policies, annual reports, minutes of Session and congregational meetings, and membership directory.
- 16. The Commission on Ministry shall share the Mission Assessment Study with the Session at a duly called regular Session meeting or a special Session meeting called for that purpose no later than six weeks after the congregational meeting provided in subsections 9-14d, and shall also file a copy of the study with the Stated Clerk. At the same meeting, the Session will schedule an informational gathering for the congregation in which the Commission on Ministry will present the mission assessment study and make copies of it available. The informational gathering shall take place after the worship service on a Sunday no later than two weeks after the Session meeting.

### **Second Congregational Meeting**

- 17. If conversations between the Session and the Commission on Ministry after the mission assessment study do not end the Session's consideration to request dismissal from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), then the Session, pursuant to a vote in the affirmative, may recommend to the congregation that it request the Presbytery to dismiss the particular church from the denomination, and call a special congregational meeting for that purpose. The special congregational meeting shall be held no sooner than three months and no later than nine months from the date of the 1<sup>st</sup> congregational meeting. Notice of the special congregational meeting must be posted at least thirty days before the date of the meeting. The notice must also include the name of the Reformed body to which the Session is recommending that the particular church be dismissed. The Session shall mail a letter at least thirty days before the date of the meeting to every person on the particular church's roll of active members, informing them of the date and purpose of the special congregational meeting. Notice of the special congregational meeting shall also be posted in the particular church's bulletin, newsletter, and on its website.

The Session may take the action described above at a duly called regular Session meeting or at a special Session meeting called for that purpose, taking into consideration the requirements specified below.

18. At the same meeting provided in subsection 16 above, the Session shall direct the Clerk of Session to inform the Stated Clerk in writing within seven days that a special congregational meeting has been called to act on the Session's recommendation to the congregation that it request the Presbytery to dismiss the particular church from the denomination. The Stated Clerk shall acknowledge receipt of the communication and forward it to the members of the Council and the Commission on Ministry.
19. The Presbytery representative or special committee shall be present at the special congregational meeting and have the privilege of the floor with the right to speak.
20. At the special congregational meeting, the Session shall present its reasons for recommending that the congregation request the Presbytery to dismiss the particular church from the denomination. In addition, the Session shall present its reasons for requesting dismissal to the Reformed body identified in the notice for the special congregational meeting. The Presbytery representative or special committee shall be permitted to respond. The meeting will then enter into a period of discussion among the members of the congregation.
21. After discussion, a written secret ballot will be taken on the categorical question: Shall (name of particular church) request dismissal from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to (name of denomination), another Reformed body?

Request dismissal \_\_\_\_\_ Do not request dismissal \_\_\_\_\_

- a. The counting of ballots shall be supervised by the Session and the Presbytery representative or special committee.
- b. A threshold of at least three-fourths of the persons on the particular church's roll of active members that are present and voting at the special congregational meeting shall be necessary for approving the motion to request dismissal.
- c. If at least three-fourths of the persons on the particular church's roll of active members that are present and voting at the special congregational meeting vote to request dismissal, the Clerk of Session shall inform the Stated Clerk in writing within seven days of the congregation's decision, along with a signed copy of the minutes of the special congregational meeting. The Stated Clerk shall acknowledge receipt of the communication and shall forward it to the Council and the Commission on Ministry.
- d. If more than one-fourth of the persons on the particular church's roll of active members that are present and voting at the special congregational meeting do not vote in favor of requesting dismissal, discernment by the particular church on a request to be dismissed from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is ended and the matter is closed. The Clerk of Session shall inform the Stated Clerk in writing within seven days of the congregation's decision, along with a signed copy of the minutes of the special congregational meeting. The Stated Clerk shall acknowledge receipt of the communication and shall forward it to the Council and the Commission on Ministry.

## **Section 4 – Discernment by the Presbytery**

1. As provided in Section 3, subsections 1 and 3, the authority to dismiss a particular church rests with the Presbytery. Therefore, a request from a particular church to be dismissed to another Reformed body shall be advisory.

### **Membership Assessment Report**

2. The Moderator of the Presbytery shall direct the Presbytery representative or special committee to determine if a sufficient number of members of the congregation desire to remain within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The Session shall accommodate the Presbytery representative or special committee's requests relating to the particular church's membership rolls, registers, directories, mailing lists, e-mail addresses of members of the congregation, and minutes of Session and congregational meetings.
3. The Presbytery representative or special committee's findings shall be written as a Membership Assessment Report, as defined by Section 2. The report will be filed with Stated Clerk no later than six weeks of the date of the special congregational meeting. The Stated Clerk will then file the Membership Assessment Report with the Council.

### **First Council Meeting**

4. Upon receipt of the communication described above, the Stated Clerk shall inform the Session in writing within seven days of the date of the next duly called regular Council meeting, or the date of a special Council meeting being called to discuss the request for dismissal to another Reformed body. The written communication shall also include an invitation for the Session to send representatives to the Council meeting to elaborate on the particular church's request for dismissal.
5. The Stated Clerk shall place the request by the particular church for dismissal and the Membership Assessment Report on proposed docket for the next duly called regular meeting of the Council, or for a special meeting called for that purpose.
6. At the Council meeting, representatives of the particular church and the Presbytery representative or special committee shall have the privilege of the floor with the right to speak.
7. During the Council meeting, representatives of the Session shall present reasons for why the request to be dismissed from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) should be approved. Furthermore, the representatives shall present reasons for why the Presbytery should dismiss the particular church to the other Reformed body. The Presbytery representative or special committee shall then respond and also present the Membership Assessment Report. The meeting will then enter into a period of discussion among the members of the Council.
  - a. The Council will take action to place the request to be dismissed from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) on the proposed docket for the next Presbytery Stated Meeting, or the Council may request the Moderator of the Presbytery to call a special Presbytery meeting for the purpose of considering the request for dismissal and to take action.
  - b. The Council may make recommendations to the Presbytery concerning the request for dismissal, including a recommendation on whether or not the Presbytery should approve the request. The

Council shall place the recommendations on the docket for the same Presbytery meeting in which the request for dismissal will be considered.

### **First Presbytery Meeting**

8. The Presbytery Committee shall provide the Stated Clerk with a complete mailing list of all persons on the particular church's roll of active members. The Stated Clerk will prepare a letter to members of the particular church, informing them of the date, time, and location of the next Presbytery Stated Meeting or the special Presbytery meeting called for the purpose of considering the request for dismissal and to take action, and inviting them to attend. The Stated Clerk will mail the letters to all persons on the particular church's roll of active members no later than two weeks before the Presbytery meeting.
9. At the Presbytery meeting, members of the particular church shall have the privilege of the floor with the right to speak.
10. During the Presbytery meeting, the Session shall present reasons for why the request to be dismissed from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) should be granted. Furthermore, the representatives shall present reasons for why the Presbytery should dismiss the particular church to the other Reformed body.
11. The moderator of the Commission on Ministry and the moderator of the Council shall be recognized for reports from their respective bodies concerning the request for dismissal from the particular church, including information from the Presbytery representative or special committee.
12. Discussion shall then enter into a period of hearing from members of the congregation who support dismissal and members who oppose dismissal.
13. After hearing from members of the congregation, the meeting will then enter into a period of discussion among the members of the Presbytery. Recommendations made by the Council concerning the request for dismissal shall be considered.
14. After discussion at the Presbytery meeting, a written secret ballot will be taken on this question: Shall the Presbytery dismiss (name of particular church) to (name of denomination), another Reformed body?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

- a. A threshold of at least two-thirds of the voting presbyters present and voting at the Presbytery meeting shall be necessary for approving the request for dismissal. The Moderator of the Presbytery shall appoint voting presbyters and members of the particular church to serve as tellers.
- b. If at least two-thirds of the voting presbyters present and voting at the Presbytery meeting vote to approve the request for dismissal, the Stated Clerk shall inform the Clerk of Session in writing within seven days of the Presbytery's decision, along with a signed copy of the minutes of the Presbytery meeting. In the communication, the Stated Clerk shall also make reference to the next step to be followed in this Policy, as provided in Section 5.



- c. If more than one-third of the voting presbyters present and voting at the Presbytery meeting do not vote in favor of approving the request for dismissal, then discernment by the particular church and the Presbytery on the request to be dismissed from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is ended and the matter is closed. The Stated Clerk shall inform the Clerk of Session in writing within seven days of the Presbytery's decision, along with a signed copy of the minutes of the Presbytery meeting. The particular church and the Presbytery shall embark upon a path for restoration of fellowship and re-commitment to the relationship between the congregation and the Presbytery.

## **Section 5 – Discerning Grace**

1. If the particular church's request for dismissal is approved, then the Presbytery shall appoint an administrative commission to work in conjunction with the Session to make provision for the particular church to be dismissed from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The Session may appoint a special committee composed of members of the particular church to represent it in its work with the administrative commission.
2. If the particular church is seeking to be dismissed with its real property, two market appraisals of all of the land and buildings held by the particular church shall be undertaken. The cost of these appraisals, prepared by independent appraisers satisfactory to both the Session and the administrative commission, will be paid by the particular church. Fair market value will ordinarily be obtained by averaging the two appraisal amounts.

### **Plan of Dismissal**

3. The administrative commission and the Session or special committee shall establish a Plan of Dismissal to address the following:
  - a. The new name of the particular church.
  - b. The effective date of dismissal to another Reformed body.
  - c. The particular church shall remit to the Presbytery a sum equal to two years of the amount of the Presbytery portion of per capita. This figure shall be based on the Presbytery portion amount of per capita at the time the request for dismissal was approved by the Presbytery.
  - d. If the particular church is seeking to be dismissed with real property, then compensation to the Presbytery for loss of the real property will be a percentage of the appraised market value of the land and buildings, as negotiated by the administrative commission and the Session or Session special committee.
    - 1) In some cases, such as where the Presbytery has invested significant financial resources in the congregation, a higher payment is more appropriate, as negotiated between the administrative commission and the Session or Session special committee.
    - 2) The settlement terms will include a date by which the final payment must be made and will specify whether payments are interest-free or include interest calculated at a specified rate, as negotiated by the administrative commission and the Session or Session special committee.

- 3) Title to the property will not be released by the Presbytery until all compensation for the property has been received.
  - 4) In some circumstances, the value of the property in relation to the size of the departing congregation may dictate consideration of other terms for compensation. These may include, but are not limited to a long-term lease of the property, under which the departing congregation retains full use of the buildings, but the title remains with the Presbytery; or sale of the property to a third party and allocation of the proceeds between the particular church and the Presbytery.
- e. A particular church shall pay off any loans outstanding to any entity of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Any bequests or endowments naming the Presbytery or the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as the beneficiary shall be transferred to the Presbytery. Matters of loans held by non-Presbyterian entities are the responsibility of the particular church, and the Presbytery shall be legally relieved of any responsibility related to such loans.
  - f. The particular church shall close out its financial books and church registers as of the effective date of dismissal. Such records shall be submitted to the Presbyterian Historical Society to be copied, with any cost for copying paid by the particular church.
  - g. A particular church dismissed from the denomination is no longer included in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s "group revenue ruling" by which a Presbyterian congregation is granted 501(c)(3) non-profit tax-exempt status. Such status is required not only for exemption from tax payments to state and federal authorities and the filing of certain forms, but is required also for real estate tax exemption, U.S. Postal Service bulk mailing permits, grant-making foundations, and the receipt of many forms of grants and bequests. Gifts to a particular church which does not have valid tax-exempt status may not be claimed as charitable donations. Legal and other services will be needed to secure new 501(c)(3) status, and any costs incurred shall be paid by the particular church.
  - h. The particular church will revise its corporate status with the State of Iowa, which may require the filing of new articles of incorporation and bylaws. Costs incurred with this requirement shall be paid by the particular church.
  - i. The status of any insurance policies held by the particular church with instrumentalities of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) will be changed.
  - j. The particular church shall work with the Board of Pensions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to facilitate an efficient transition at the time of dismissal.
  - k. Ministers of the Word and Sacrament may choose to continue serving the congregation or to seek another call within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). If a minister requests to be transferred to the Reformed body to which the particular church is being dismissed, this transfer will normally be approved unless the minister is the subject of a pending judicial or investigative action pursuant to the *Book of Order* (D-10.0105). If the minister chooses to remain within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the pastoral relationship among the minister, the particular church, and the Presbytery shall be dissolved upon dismissal of the congregation. In such circumstances, severance shall be arranged for the minister in a manner consistent with Section 1 and Section 3 of the Presbytery's Conflict Intervention Policy. The minister shall also be enrolled as a Member At-Large of the Presbytery, which will allow the minister to continue to seek calls within the denomination.

- l. Each member of the particular church who is enrolled as an Inquirer, Candidate, Applicant Lay Pastor, Eligible Lay Pastor, and Commissioned Lay Pastor will be given the option of being dismissed with the congregation or transferring his or her membership to another congregation within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). If the Inquirer, Candidate, Applicant Lay Pastor, Eligible Lay Pastor, and Commissioned Lay Pastor chooses to transfer to another congregation within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Committee on Preparation for Ministry and/or the Commission on Ministry will assist the member in seeking any waivers for church membership requirements in order to maintain care status.
- m. Members of the particular church who serve on Presbytery committees and choose not to remain within the denomination will have their terms end on the effective date of dismissal.
- n. The administrative commission will prepare a letter to members of the particular church, informing them of their option to be dismissed with the congregation or to remain in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The administrative commission will mail the letters to all persons on its roll of active members and the Presbytery shall pay all costs associated with the mailing. The letter will direct that responses are to be returned to the Presbytery. The administrative commission will ensure that contact is made with those members wishing to remain in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

### **Session Meeting**

4. The Session shall consider approval of the Plan of Dismissal at a duly called regular Session meeting or at a special meeting called for that purpose. Members of the administrative commission, as well as the members of the Session special committee if one was appointed, shall be invited to the meeting to discuss the Plan of Dismissal.
5. If three-fourths of the members of the Session present and voting at the meeting vote to recommend that Presbytery approve the Plan of Dismissal, then the Clerk of Session shall inform the administrative commission in writing within seven days of the Session's decision, along with a signed copy of the minutes of the Session meeting.

### **Administrative Commission Meeting**

6. The administrative commission shall consider recommending approval of the Plan of Dismissal by the Presbytery at a duly called meeting of the commission. Members of the Session, or the members of the Session special committee if one was appointed, shall be invited to the meeting to discuss the Plan of Dismissal.
7. If two-thirds of the members of the administrative commission present and voting at the meeting vote to recommend that the Presbytery approve the Plan of Dismissal, then the commission shall inform the Stated Clerk in writing within seven days of the commission's decision and provide a signed copy of the minutes of the administrative commission meeting, as well as a copy of the Plan of Dismissal. In the same communication, the administrative commission shall also state that the Session has recommended that the Presbytery approve the Plan of Dismissal and provide a signed copy of the minutes of the Session meeting in which the Session made its recommendation.

## **Second Council Meeting**

8. Upon receipt of the communication described in subsection 7 above, the Stated Clerk shall inform the Session in writing within seven days of the date of the next duly called regular Council meeting, or the date of a special Council meeting being called to consider the Plan of Dismissal. The written communication shall also include an invitation for the Session to send representatives, or to send the special committee if one represented the Session in its work with the administrative commission, to the Council meeting to discuss the Plan of Dismissal.
9. The Stated Clerk shall place the Plan of Dismissal on the proposed docket for the next duly called regular meeting of the Council, or for a special meeting called for that purpose.
10. At the Council meeting, members of the administrative commission and the Session (or the Session special committee) shall have the privilege of the floor with the right to speak.
11. During the Council meeting, the administrative commission and members of the Session (or the Session special committee) shall present the Plan of Dismissal. The meeting will then enter into a period of discussion among members of the Council.
  - a. The Council may recommend that the Presbytery approve the Plan of Dismissal, or it may recommend that the Presbytery not approve the Plan of Dismissal.
  - b. In addition to the actions provided in subsection 11a above, the Council may also suggest substantive amendments to the Plan of Dismissal. If the Council does so, it shall refer the document back to the administrative commission for consultation with the Session or the Session special committee. The administrative commission and the Session will then follow the steps provided subsections 4-7 above, and submit the amended Plan of Dismissal to the Stated Clerk, who will follow the steps outlined subsections 8 and 9 above.
  - c. The Council will take action to place approval of the Plan of Dismissal on the proposed docket for the next Presbytery Stated Meeting, or it may request the Moderator of the Presbytery to call a special meeting for the purpose of considering approval of the Plan of Dismissal.

## **Second Presbytery Meeting**

12. At the Presbytery meeting, members of the administrative commission and members of the Session (or the Session special committee) shall have the privilege of the floor with the right to speak.
13. The moderator will entertain a motion to limit debate in which amendments to the Plan of Dismissal may not be offered from the floor. In entertaining this motion, the moderator will emphasize to the body that the Plan of Dismissal has reached the point in the legislative process in which it is being presented in a manner similar to how presbyteries are required to consider amendments to the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) that are referred to them by the General Assembly.
14. The administrative commission and the Session (or the Session special committee) will be recognized to present the Plan of Dismissal.
15. The moderator of the Council will be recognized to present a report on the Council's actions regarding the Plan of Dismissal.

16. The meeting will then enter into a period of discussion among the members of the Presbytery.
17. After discussion, a written secret ballot will be taken on this question: Shall the Presbytery approve the Plan of Dismissal for (name of particular church)?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

- a. A threshold of at least two-thirds of the voting presbyters present at the Presbytery meeting shall be necessary for approving the Plan of Dismissal. The Moderator of the Presbytery shall appoint voting presbyters and members of the particular church to serve as tellers.
- b. If at least two-thirds of the voting presbyters present and voting at the Presbytery meeting vote to approve the Plan of Dismissal, the Stated Clerk shall inform the Clerk of Session in writing within seven days of the Presbytery's decision, along with a signed copy of the minutes of the Presbytery meeting. The particular church shall be dismissed to a Reformed body upon the date specified in the Plan of Dismissal, and each of the document's provisions shall take effect accordingly.
- c. If more than one-third of the voting presbyters present and voting at the Presbytery meeting do not vote in favor of approving the Plan of Dismissal, the Stated Clerk shall inform the Clerk of Session in writing within seven days of the Presbytery's decision, along with a signed copy of the minutes of the Presbytery meeting. The Presbytery shall direct the administrative commission to consult with the Session or Session special committee in formulating another Plan of Dismissal that will be subject to the same approval process provided in subsections 4-17.
- d. If an amended Plan of Dismissal is not approved by the Presbytery within six months of the date of the Presbytery meeting where the initial Plan of Dismissal was considered, or at the next Presbytery Stated Meeting, whichever is later, then discernment by the particular church and the Presbytery on the request to be dismissed from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is ended and the matter is closed. The particular church and the Presbytery shall embark upon a path for restoration of fellowship and re-commitment to the relationship between the congregation and the Presbytery.

## **Section 6 – Gracious Reunion**

1. If a particular church that has been dismissed from the denomination discerns that by the grace of God it should begin considering a request to be reunited with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Presbytery shall welcome conversation on that topic.
2. The procedure for reuniting a particular church with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) shall be addressed in a separate policy by the Presbytery.

## **Section 7 - Implementation**

1. This Policy is set forth by the Presbytery of Prospect Hill's Commission on Ministry.
2. This Policy shall be distributed to the Presbytery by the Stated Clerk and shall be available upon request.