



## **EASTMINSTER PRESBYTERY**

Synod of the Covenant-Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)  
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Dear Moderators and Clerks of Session:

You may have recently received a letter from the Presbyterian Lay Committee accusing the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), presbyteries, and synods of a plot that seeks to “defrock your pastor, remove your session, seize your property and even deny your congregation the right to hold a meeting.” In light of what it reports, the Lay Committee asks sessions to redirect that per capita payments from the presbytery to the Lay Committee and redirect unrestricted mission giving to projects of your choosing.

These distortions of the truth are intended to evoke fear and anger. It appears that the Presbyterian Lay Committee has decided that the only way to bring their version of “raising the standard” is to destroy the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Let’s consider what we as a Presbytery have experienced. The Presbyterian Lay Committee held a series of meetings at the Hudson Presbyterian Church in early 2006. In October, 2006, the Hudson congregation announced that a congregational meeting had been called to vote to “disaffiliate” with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), an act that is clearly contrary to our form of government. When Eastminster Presbytery called a special meeting to discuss the situation, Eastminster Presbytery was slapped with a temporary restraining order by the Hudson Session. It was soon discovered that the Hudson Session had already begun legal action to lay claim to the church property even though the Book of Order clearly states that church property is held in trust for the mission of the whole church. Frequent phone calls from distraught members of the Hudson congregation alerted me to the fact that not all congregants at Hudson supported their Session’s actions. The vote at the November congregational meeting of 166 in favor, 61 against, made clear that a schism existed in Hudson. Many of the loyal minority were among those who helped Eastminster Presbytery establish the Hudson New Church Development in 1982. This group of loyal Presbyterians has been forced to worship in rented space for the past two years. Since November, 2006, Eastminster Presbytery has incurred legal fees approaching \$100,000. Most of these fees have been covered by grants from the Synod of the Covenant and the General Assembly. Eastminster Presbytery’s experience is not the exception! Can you understand why the 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly established a fund to help presbyteries withstand the legal barrage they are facing?

Consider what Eastminster Presbytery did in relationship to the Stow Presbyterian Church. The Stow Church also voted to withdraw from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The presbytery discovered that there was no viable minority of loyal PC(USA) members in the congregation. A commission formed by Eastminster Presbytery and the Session of the Stow Church discussed the situation over many months. An agreement was reach and endorsed by the Presbytery that released the Stow Church with its property and provided mission support to Eastminster Presbytery over a five-year-period. Eastminster Presbytery at no time considered “suing” the Stow Church, even though the Book of Order clearly states that all property is held in trust for the whole church. Does this sound like what the Presbyterian Lay Committee wants you to believe?

In fact, what is happening is that the Presbyterian Lay Committee is promoting actions that use the civil courts to interfere in church affairs. They are promoting actions that would have civil courts nullify portion of the Presbyterian Church’s Constitution. There is a way to change the church’s constitution. The church, not the

courts, take action through the General Assembly to make these changes and the presbyteries vote to concur or not to concur with the action. The actions of the Presbyterian Lay Committee have effectively undermined the church and invites civil courts to redefine the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

What happens to your congregation's per capita dollars? In 2009 per capita is set at \$27 per member. \$6.15 is forwarded to General Assembly and \$3.19 is forwarded to the Synod of the Covenant to cover administrative costs and the cost of meetings such as General Assembly and Synod Assembly. The remaining \$17.66 remains with Eastminster Presbytery. How does Eastminster Presbytery use these per capita dollars? They are used to provide a Presbytery Office and Presbytery staff. The salaries and benefits for the Stated Clerk Ross Jackson, Financial and Clerical Assistant Arlene McCowin, and Treasurer Colin Miller will come from 2009 per capita dollars. 55% of salary and benefits for Administrative Assistant Marianne Lidstone and 45% of salary and benefits for General Presbyter Dan Schomer come from per capita. Expenses for meetings of Presbytery and most of the budget of the Committee on Ministry are provided by per capita dollars. If you want a detailed accounting of Eastminster Presbytery's per capita budget, please refer to the November 11, 2008 Presbytery packet.

What happens to your undesignated mission dollars? 25% goes to General Assembly to support national and international mission projects, 7% is used by the Synod of the Covenant to support regional missions, and 68% stays with Eastminster Presbytery to support a wide variety of ministries that support our congregations and witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ within our bounds. Eastminster Presbytery uses mission dollars to provide staff that partner with congregations (Marianne Lidstone and Dan Schomer), provide leadership for Joseph Badger Meadows Camp and Conference Center (Gary Hoskins and our new Camp Director), and coordinate the Resource Center (Lorraine Jones). Training workshops for congregational leadership, retreats for pastors, a presbytery website, and financial support of a dozen vital community mission projects are all ways that your unrestricted mission dollars are transforming our communities with the good news of Jesus Christ.

Please understand that, if congregations were to follow the recommendations of the Presbyterian Lay Committee, our mission and ministry together would stop. How tragic it would be for well meaning churches to take a stand based upon false and mean spirited information.

I am pleased and thankful to God for our shared witness as Eastminster Presbytery in partnership with the Synod of the Covenant and the General Assembly. If your Session has any concerns about actions by Eastminster Presbytery or by how your per capita and mission dollars are used, please call. I stand ready to meet with Sessions to discuss your concerns and welcome the opportunity to share with you more details about our ministry together.

In Christ's service together,

Dan Schomer