



Dear FPC Family,

Sixty years ago, a group of faithful, dedicated individuals banded together to begin what would eventually become First Presbyterian Church North Shore. Four short years later, November 16, 1960 witnessed the next historic moment in the life of First Presbyterian Church. It was the day FPC became a particular church in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC). Since then, the Lord has faithfully blessed and guided us through many changes as we have sought to serve Him. While the last six decades have been fruitful ones as part of the OPC, we now come upon another historic moment in the life of the church. For reasons outlined below, Session has decided to call a meeting of the congregation for the purpose of dissolving our relationship with the OPC and to pursue ecclesiastical ties with the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA).

### The Short Story

Numerous events in our history led us to this decision. Most recently, some of our practices have been called into question by members of our presbytery, the Presbytery of New York and New England, primarily concerning the role of non-ordained people and especially women in the life of the church. In particular, the concerns revolve around non-ordained people reading the Scriptures in Lord's Day worship services and women teaching adult education in the presence of men, two practices that we have encouraged for many years, that we believe have been a vital part of our ministry and that we hold are consistent with Scripture.

The story is a much longer one (see below), but in short, after having deliberated on our affiliation with the OPC on and off for almost 30 years, the Session, at our most recent retreat, March 12, 2016, through much prayer and discussion, passed the following motion.

**MOVED. The Session of First Presbyterian Church North Shore, having given long and due consideration of the matters with which we as a local church disagree with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as a whole, and, in particular, (a) concerning the role of non-ordained persons in participating in corporate worship including the public reading of Scripture and in light of**

**our unsuccessful history of petitioning the New York -New England Presbytery to allow non-ordained persons to participate in corporate worship including the public reading of Scripture, and in light of the General Assembly's adoption of the 2011 Directory of Public Worship which prohibits such participation of non-ordained persons in public worship and by so doing binds our conscience; (b) given the general disapproval of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church with regard to the role of women teaching adult Christian Education where men are in attendance, though subject to the oversight of Session, (c) given the Orthodox Presbyterian Church's prohibition against women acting in the role of deacon among the local church; and (d) given the substantive differences in approaches to local and foreign missions, now, with gratefulness for the six decades of mutual laboring in the fields with our brothers and sisters in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, but with appropriate humility and sadness, hereby informs the Presbytery of New York and New England of our intention to call a meeting of the Congregation of First Presbyterian Church North Shore in order to dissolve our ties with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in accordance with FOG XVI.7.a. Passed**

A long and slightly confusing history

These issues were first raised when a pastor in our presbytery visited FPC on a Sunday morning, and noticed some of our practices and informed our presbytery. Unbeknownst to us as elders, back in 1987, the presbytery decided that non-ordained people should not participate in reading of the Bible during Lord's Day services and that the matter should be referred to the General Assembly. In fact, the ruling was made as the result of a request by our own session for a decision on this very issue. Back then, the Session considered leaving the OPC but decided instead to remain. We possess a letter from Pastor Jim Kern explaining the circumstances.

Somehow, though, our knowledge of this decision was lost in subsequent years, hence the reason we have permitted this practice at times. In the fall of 2015, when this issue was brought to our attention, being under the authority of the presbytery, we began to abide by the 1987 decision. Perhaps you have noticed the changes since then.

This matter had actually been brewing in the OPC for many years. At the 1991 General Assembly, a report emerged and interestingly the majority report of the committee favored allowing non-ordained people to read the Bible in public worship but the denomination as a whole was leaning in the other direction. Later, realizing that the OPC was in the midst of re-writing the Directory of Public Worship (DPW) to address this concern and several others, in 2005 the Session of our church petitioned our presbytery to suggest language to the General Assembly to include wording that would allow this practice. We lost by one vote. Discussion continued denomination wide and in 2011 a new DPW was published and made it clearer that non-ordained folk should not participate in the public reading of Scripture in

worship.

Concurrently, in the fall of 2015, the presbytery also requested an answer as to why the Session at FPC allows women to teach the Bible in presence of men, a practice that is widely discouraged in the OPC. Add to these issues three more matters stated in the motion. First, it has long been our biblical conviction that women should play an equal role in the diaconate, something the OPC has never allowed. Second, we have experienced a long-term frustration with our denomination over the paucity of church planting efforts nation wide including New England. Urban areas have been largely overlooked and efforts are driven almost exclusively by requests of small groups of people in a location who desire an OPC church rather than strategically planting churches in specific geographic areas. Third, our denomination's Committee on Foreign Missions has allowed little encouragement for local churches to be involved in the new missions endeavors, something we have been pursuing for many years and is part of our DNA.

All of these matters weighed into our decision to call a meeting of the congregation to withdraw from the OPC.

#### On the positive side

One of our deep convictions as a church is to be connected to the body of Christ for the purposes of the advancement of the Kingdom of God, ministerial support and theological accountability. Knowing that we are committed to the Bible as the authoritative Word of God as expressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith and driven by the Great Commission, we set out to find a denomination that would best serve those purposes. We believe we found it in the PCA.

After extensive dialogue over the years and a recent conversation with a representative of the PCA, we learned that we can continue to practice public worship as we have been for several years, allow women to play the vital roles we have been accustomed, and we can be part of a denomination that is committed to reaching people for Christ both in North America and around the world. The thought of joining a denomination filled with men and women from whom we can learn and with whom we can grow is very exciting, all within the biblical values to which we so dearly ascribe. For its part, we have been encouraged to hear from PCA leaders that they would be delighted if we, as a body, join the PCA.

#### The next steps

Our first step was resolving to leave the OPC as a Session. According to our Book of Church Order (FOG XVI.7), we informed the Presbytery of our intentions at our regularly stated meeting Monday, April 25, 2016. The Presbytery has three weeks to send representatives to speak to the Session about our decision, after which we intend to call the first of two meetings of the congregation on Sunday, May 22, 2016. Provided the congregation concurs with this direction we will call a second meeting in June 2016 for a final vote. At that point we will have dissolved our relationship with the OPC and will be able to proceed with joining the PCA.

On the one hand, we realize this is a lot of information to digest in a short period of time. On the other hand, our leadership has contemplated this move for three decades and we believe the time is right. Please pray that we would honor the Lord Jesus Christ in all of our endeavors and may the Lord bless this congregation as we seek our part in advancing His Kingdom.

An informal Q&A session will be held following the 11:15 am service in Ipswich and the 10:15 am service in Danvers this Sunday, May 1 for anyone who would like to attend.

In Christ,

Pastor Greg Hills on behalf of the Session

Jeff Azadian, Derek Baker, Russ Camp, Jon Evans, Rob Joss, Rich Mulley, Dan Oh, George Papanicolaou, Greg Smith, John Truschel, Meirwyn Walters, Jeff Whiteacre, Dick Wright

[Follow on Twitter](#) [Friend on Facebook](#) [Forward to Friend](#)

**First Presbyterian Church Northshore**

**Our mailing address is:**

179 County Road (1A)  
Ipswich, MA 01938

[www.fpcnorthshore.com](http://www.fpcnorthshore.com)

[unsubscribe from this list](#) [update subscription preferences](#)

