

MDPC and Denominational Discernment

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Part Two, April 30, 2016

Introduction

MDPC has completed the first and second phases of its Denominational Discernment process, by conducting two Round Table events on April 14 and April 16, 2016, and two Informational Meetings on April 26 & 30, 2016. These conversations and presentations have been honest, respectful and gave all who attended a chance to have their voices heard, and receive information on the important considerations of Denominational Discernment.

One of the most often asked questions in the Round Table Discussions was, “If MDPC disaffiliated from the PCUSA, with which denomination would we affiliate?” Other related questions included, “What is the theology and polity of ECO (A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians)” and “If MDPC affiliated with ECO, what will it cost MDPC?” In this FAQ#2, we will seek to answer those and other key questions, in order to help inform MDPC on the issues related to Denominational Discernment.

The information which follows is intended to present the basic facts, and be free from bias either in favor or against MDPC remaining affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (USA). The Q&As included here have been written and approved by MDPC’s pastors.

If MDPC disaffiliated from the PCUSA, with which denomination would we affiliate?

MDPC’s Session voted unanimously on April 25, 2016 to seek affiliation in ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians in the event MDPC’s Session votes to disaffiliate from the Presbyterian Church USA.

This decision was made only after conducting thorough research of other major and minor Presbyterian denominations, which included the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC), the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, and even the idea of MDPC becoming an independent congregation, without denominational affiliation. For more information on the options Session considered, please find those documents at discernment.mdpc.org, under the tab “Frequently Asked Questions, Part II”.

The rationale for ECO included:

1. ECO is a denomination made up of former PCUSA congregations, including Grace Presbyterian Church Houston, Highland Park Presbyterian Church Dallas, St. Andrews Presbyterian Church Newport Beach, First Presbyterian Church Colorado Springs, First Presbyterian Church San Antonio, etc.;
2. ECO is the only Presbyterian denomination (besides the Cumberland Presbyterian Church) which universally affirms the ordination of women;
3. ECO theology and polity are very similar to the PCUSA;
4. ECO’s essential theological tenets are the same as the Fellowship of Presbyterians, an affinity group of which MDPC is currently a member congregation; and
5. ECO has an entrepreneurial and missional approach, which is very similar to MDPC’s.

If MDPC affiliated with ECO, what would it cost MDPC?

The financial requirement for churches affiliated with ECO is one percent (1%) of the church’s annual operating budget, not including outreach or mission giving. For MDPC’s current budget in 2016, the anticipated cost if MDPC affiliated with ECO would be approximately \$70,000 annually.

What is the theology and polity of ECO?

Rather than offering a narrative on ECO’s theology and polity, we encourage you to visit ECO’s [website](#). To compare with the PCUSA’s polity and theology, visit their [website](#).

If MDPC disaffiliated from the PCUSA, what would ECO expect of our members and participants?

The membership requirements in ECO are the same as the PCUSA: A personal and public profession that Jesus Christ is Savior and Lord. All other expectations are left to the individual congregation to determine and implement. If MDPC were to affiliate with ECO, no changes to MDPC's ministries or foundational principles are envisioned.

If MDPC disaffiliated from the PCUSA, would Dollar for Dollar be affected?

No. MDPC's culture of generosity is something that was part of the original vision for MDPC 60 years ago, when we were still in the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS). This did not change when we became part of the PCUSA in 1983, and it continues to be a foundational principle for us today. There is no reason to believe or anticipate that MDPC would abandon our goal of Dollar for Dollar generosity.

If MDPC disaffiliated from the PCUSA, would Fuente continue to exist?

Yes. Fuente de Esperanza, MDPC's Hispanic Ministry, is a vital and growing part of MDPC's ministry, and is not inextricably tied to the PCUSA. If MDPC affiliated with ECO, Fuente would remain part of MDPC's ministries. The racial-ethnic make-up of ECO is nearly identical to the PCUSA. The Pew Research group [findings](#) showed that the PCUSA is 88% Caucasian. Current ECO figures show they are 88% Caucasian, 5% Asian, 3% African-American, 3% Hispanic, and 1% other.

What are the pros and cons to disaffiliating from the PCUSA?

MDPC's Discernment Team is preparing information on this question that will be distributed to the congregation in the near future.

Where can I get information on MDPC's Denominational Discernment issues?

All of the documents and videos MDPC has produced during the Denominational Discernment process are available on [MDPC's Discernment page](#).

What are the key issues on the agenda for the 2016 PCUSA General Assembly?

We encourage you to visit the PCUSA [website](#) regarding upcoming Overtures to the 222nd General Assembly in Portland, OR. Because you have asked specifically about certain topics, there are several Overtures before the General Assembly regarding: divestment from fossil fuel companies (or creating a greener planet); divestment from companies doing business in Israel's West Bank; apologizing to the LGBT/Q community for the previous stances of the PCUSA on ordination and marriage; and changing the way the PCUSA conducts business and amends the Constitution.

How will MDPC communicate Denominational Discernment information to MDPC's congregation?

Both electronic and print forms of Denominational Discernment information have been and will continue to be, made available to MDPC's congregation. This is necessary because we have a diverse congregation, and must ensure everyone has access to information, regardless of their technological interest or skill. Electronic versions of documents and videos are available at [mdpc.org](#).

How will the Session ensure that the congregation is heard?

MDPC's Session has the final Constitutional responsibility to decide with which denomination MDPC is affiliated. The Session, however, is also committed to a fair and open process, where people can express their views on Denominational Discernment. To gather input from MDPC's congregation, the Discernment Team has developed a plan, which includes a series of Round Table discussions, Informational meetings, and a final Congregational Survey/Poll. Every member will be offered the chance to express their recommendation. The Session has access to the raw data of each input tool, and will receive these advisory results. Then Session will make its decision on MDPC's denominational affiliation, but only after additional prayer and listening for God's will.

Where can I find out what the Informational Meeting speakers said?

MDPC held two informational Meetings on April 26 & 30. Responses to pre-determined questions were answered by Dr. Jim Davis of First Presbyterian Church of Kingwood, TX, President. Ted Wardlaw of Austin

Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Mrs. Jody Harrington, MDPC member/elder and former Moderator of the Presbytery of New Covenant and Commissioner to the 221st PCUSA General Assembly, and Dr. Blair Monie, Professor of Pastoral Ministry and Leadership at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary. These Informational Meetings were videotaped and will be viewable at mdpc.org under the “Informational Meeting” tab.

How can we heal the division within MDPC that our Discernment process may have caused?

When people hold strong convictions about religious and church matters, it is understandable that there will likely be both diversity of opinion and conflict. The challenge is to understand that conflict is a normal part of any healthy organization, but not to allow that conflict to become personal. Rather, healthy conflict focuses on the foundational principles and issues of the organization. We debate ideas instead of damaging relationships and demonizing those who differ from us. MDPC is committed to a robust discussion of ideas, while preserving the unique unity and community we enjoy. That has occurred thus far in our Round Table Talks and Informational Events. It is likely, however, that some will be disappointed by this process and possible outcomes. It is impossible to please everyone. Our Goal is to please God first and then seek to continue to be the church together. MDPC will take intentional steps to provide opportunities for healing and reconciliation within this community of faith. Those steps are being determined, and will be communicated near the end of our process.

Need Help?

If you are viewing this pdf, you should have online access to all of the referenced documents; however, if printed copies are needed, please contact Gena Kooken at gkooken@mdpc.org.