Third Report of the Administrative Commission for Pan American Presbyterian Church (PAPC)

Administrative Commission
Pan American Presbyterian Church
May 21, 2015

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We on the Administrative Commission for Pan American Presbyterian Church wish to thank the Presbytery for this opportunity to be of service to you, the Presbytery of Tropical Florida, and to the congregation of PAPC.

A BRIEF HISTORY

In the spring and summer of 2014 the Presbytery office received communications indicating the possibility of difficulties at PAPC. The Executive Committee of the Presbytery appointed a commission with the following charges.

1. inquiry into the functioning of the Pan Americana Session,
2. the management of the church and the school
3. financial matters for the church and the school
4. to recommend action pertaining to these matters to the Session, and if needed, to the Presbytery, and
5. to come back to the Presbytery to ask for any additional authority it needs.

The members of the Commission are John Stewart (TE), moderator, Elizabeth Torres (RE), clerk, Cruz Juarez (RE), Gisela Prieto (RE), and John Vaughn (TE).

At the December meeting of the Presbytery we made two recommendations. Both of which were approved by the Presbytery. The second recommendation was the revision of the charter of the Commission. The revised charter now reads as follows:

1. inquiry into the functioning of the Pan Americana Session,
2. the management of the church and the school
3. financial matters for the church and the school
4. to recommend action pertaining to these matters to the Session, and if needed, to the Presbytery, and
5. to conduct a thorough investigation and if necessary to give the Session a full opportunity to be heard, in compliance with G-3.0303e, and if necessary to make a recommendation to the Presbytery concerning the willingness and ability of the session to manage wisely its affairs and consequently the advisability of appointing an administrative commission to assume original jurisdiction with full power of session.
6. to come back to the Presbytery to ask for any additional authority it needs.

At the same meeting, the Presbytery approved the appointment of Rev. Heidi Arencibia as moderator of the session for PAPC.

On January 23 the Session held a called meeting. Rev. Ms. Arencibia moderated and the Commission was present. COM was represented by Rev. Dr. Eve Tolley. The moderator did a very good job of explaining Reformed processes in church government and in keeping the session members focused. We
also observed the Session’s functioning at their February meeting. Minimal and insufficient improvements were seen as compared to the January meeting. We did not note any appreciable change from the issues we reported to the Presbytery in February.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

The Session did not schedule a meeting in March, and cancelled their April meeting when it became clear a quorum would not be present. The moderator made repeated attempts to schedule a session meeting in early May, not later than May 5th. The Session declined to do so and did not offer a subsequent date.

The Administrative Commission met on May 6th. After careful deliberation and prayer we decided to recommend to the Presbytery that it assume original jurisdiction. Pursuant to that decision we notified the Session in writing of our decision and offered them a full opportunity to be heard. The letter was translated most carefully into Spanish by Commission members whose first language is Spanish. This notice went by email and certified mail with return receipt. The clerk of session acknowledged receipt of the email and signed the receipt of USPS certified mail. Please see the attached letter in both English and Spanish.

On May 20, 2015 the Administrative Commission convened at the Pan Americana campus at 10:05. A quorum was declared and the meeting was opened with prayer. Two elders, including the clerk of session, and one church member who is the director of the school as well as the vice treasurer, attended the meeting.

We learned that two elders have decided to resign from the Session. The clerk had their resignation letters, which were unsigned. One other elder was unable to attend.

The elders and school director spoke openly and freely. After discussion about the work of the school and opportunities for mission as well as education, the Commission explained that the future of the school was up to the school. Assumption of jurisdiction would have no impact on their operations, other than that we would search for resources to support the school's need for a chaplain. We further explained that our recommendation would not be based on apportioning blame. Rather, we simply made a determination that whether due to declining numbers, health of the elders, or any other contributing factors, the Session at present is not able to manage the church. All the members of Panamericana PC who were present were completely cooperative and forthcoming with information and documentation. The meeting was completely amicable, collegial, and filled with hope for the future. The elders and the school director expressed their full support for the Presbytery assuming original jurisdiction. They acknowledged that they have many problems and that they know that they do not know how to solve them on their own. The power of the Holy Spirit was evident in the atmosphere of true fellowship.

CONCLUSIONS AS OF MAY 20, 2015

We confirmed during the hearing that the Session is not meeting in accordance with the Book of Order, and that the congregation is not meeting regularly for worship. While we received monthly income statements through April, it was clear that the remaining session members do not understand how to manage the finances. We believe that they want to do so. But at present they do not have the necessary skills.
Nonetheless, we believe that by going through the process in a patient, orderly manner, the peace of the church is restored, and trust in the Presbytery is increasing.

RECOMMENDATION

The Administrative Commission, with the concurrence of the elders who attended the hearing, moves the following:

In accordance with G-3.0303e, having conducted a thorough investigation, and having given written notice of the intent to recommend that the Presbytery assume original jurisdiction, and having given the Session a full opportunity to be heard on this matter, the Administrative Commission for Pan American Presbyterian Church, officially Iglesia Presbiteriana Panamericana, moves that the Presbytery of Tropical Florida assume original jurisdiction and that it appoint an administrative commission with the full power of session.