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This statement has been prepared at the request of the Stated Clerk (Pete Scribner) and the Assistant Stated Clerk (Andy Warner) of the Midwest Presbytery (MWP). It sets forth the brief speaking points presented by certain Elders of First Presbyterian Church Trenton (FPT) at a congregational meeting held on March 11, 2024, at which both Pete and Andy were in attendance. It is not an additional statement to the Presbytery, and it should not be read that way. We trust that the details to follow will provide Pete and Andy with the information they heard but were unable to document in notes from the meeting.

For the last several years FPT has become a more confessionally-minded church. Concurrently, FPT has observed the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) moving in the opposite direction. Moreover, FPT has sensed a change in the presbyterial structure of the EPC, specifically becoming a more top down, leadership driven organization. The latter has made it more difficult to address specific theological concerns. Our differences with the EPC make it more difficult to serve alongside other churches in the MWP, and our continued affiliation weakens our Biblical witness to the world around us.

Accordingly, the Session of FPT and its constituted Denominational Discernment Task Force, believe it to be in our best interests to dissolve our affiliation with the EPC and seek an affiliation with a denomination whose theological views are more in alignment with ours.

In taking this step, we wish to emphasize that our decision is not an indictment against our Presbytery or the EPC. We are not seeking to change the EPC or accuse it of any breach of trust. We have valued the decades-long relationship with the EPC and will continue to pray for and with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

At the March 11th meeting, certain Elders outlined details of our concerns regarding the emerging positions of the EPC relating to reformed convictions/subscriptions, transgenderism, specific use of pronouns and social justice/ critical race theory (CRT). The specifics are as follows:

Notes concerning Conviction/Subscription

“consistent weakening of reformed convictions/subscriptions which has been made evident in the ordination process and a continual, unbalanced burden placed upon defending complementarian views”

- We recognize that the ordination of women has been practiced among some churches from the founding of the EPC; since 2010, however, female ordination has seemed to increasingly become the predominant view.

- During his floor examination, a male ordinate was questioned on his conviction of a biblically accurate complementarian view. There was an unbalanced burden placed upon him to prove the accuracy of his conviction.
- During a panel discussion, in which our Teaching Elder was asked to take part, it was stated on the floor by a fellow presbyter that the seminaries which our church uses in training candidates for our church planting pipeline, made her feel “unsafe”. It is the belief of our Elders that as the egalitarian view becomes even more dominant within the EPC, there will be more and more pressure placed on those who hold to the opposing complementarian view.
- FPT finds itself increasingly out of alignment with the MWP and the EPC on this issue. The Elders of FPT believe they are serving against their conscience when attending the MWP and General Assembly. We are able to function as complementarians within our church, but we can only function as egalitarians at the higher courts.

Notes concerning the 2023 General Assembly breakout session, “Navigating the letters (LGBTQ+) with a family member”

“under the current emphasis of evangelism, an apparent tendency to downplay repentance in sinful desires, such as those related to homosexuality and transgenderism”

- This session’s recording can be found at: <https://podcast.epc.org/e/navigating-the-letters-lgbtq-with-a-family-member/>
- During this hour-long session, the main focus was on the church “being better” and more “safe” for those that are LGBTQ+ and being winsome in order to keep relationships open.
- All panelists were proponents of using pronouns while talking with a friend or family member in order to “make the church more appealing” in order that they “may someday be interested in learning more about Jesus.”
- A statement was made that (i) “Churches must be safe spaces and must be filled with safe people” and (ii) “pastors must repent over how the church has treated LGBTQ+ individuals and preach more sermons on healthy sexuality.”
- Another statement was made that “People do not trust God until they experience Him relationally, and they do not experience Him relationally until they have been loved by and connected to His spiritually people.”
- Additionally, a statement was made urging listeners “to not push a Christian version of flourishing on a person who has not found God to be good, loving, trustworthy, or present through His people.”
- According to the leader of the panel, “You are God’s answer to whatever the ills are in the world.”

Theologically speaking, the blood of Christ does not create an “ally” with the sin it crushes on the cross, because that stands in opposition to gospel hope. The world, the flesh, and the devil are not Christ’s friends. Transgender identity and Jesus are not conterminous. It’s one or the other. Christians need to learn how to love their enemies, not pretend their enemies are their friends.

Complying with a transgender person’s request might appear to be a minor change in one's behavior, but it’s not. We’re not merely being asked to speak different words, we’re being asked to abandon *our* worldview position on this topic and adopt *their* worldview. The belief that pronouns can refer to gender identity, or that a biological man can be a woman, is not a minor matter. It’s embedded in a worldview that bifurcates biology and gender identity. Our worldview is embedded in Christ.

Notes concerning social justice/CRT and the Revelation 7:9 task force

“a pursuit of cultural relevance by prioritizing social justice over the gospel.”

The Elders of FPT agree that racism and injustice in all forms is sinful and should be taught and preached as such. We also agree that racial reconciliation is needed in our current polarized society. In the words of Kevin DeYoung, “Scripture is clear that social justice, when biblically defined, is part and parcel of loving our neighbor as ourselves. It’s part of keeping the second tablet of the Decalogue. It’s part of doing the good works that God has prepared in advance for us to walk in.”

Micah 6:8 states, “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

Two points at issue for us are 1) the pursuit of cultural relevance and 2) recommending and using resources which promote Critical Race Theory, which, at its core, is antithetical to the Gospel.

- In a June 2020 webcast titled “Leading EPC Sessions and Congregations in Issues of Race & Justice”, when asked how the EPC would be different in both 10 years and 50 years if the suggestions of the Revelation 7:9 task force worked, a co-chair of the task force stated; “The EPC will have a better ear of the generation that sometimes sees the church a step behind, and it gives us the moral authority, if, indeed, we look like the Revelation 7:9 church. And not just look like it on the weekend, but live it during the weekday. It all of a sudden gives us another authority that perhaps we have not enjoyed, and we won’t be viewed as irrelevant and out of touch by those that are unchurched.”
- Rev. 7:9 task force appears to be recommending and using material and resources that strongly parallel and use CRT.
- On the same webcast, when members of the task force were asked about “Be the Bridge”, the response was “we plan to use it”, “It’s a good curriculum.”
- The “Be the Bridge” statement paper says “We do not intend to argue for or against the process and goals of CRT. Instead, we find the concepts and tools of CRT useful in working towards our biblical process of racial justice as reflective of the kingdom.”
- In Romans 1:6 Paul writes “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”

- Don Carson writes “because it (the Gospel) is powerful, it not only reconciles us to God, but transforms us, and that necessarily shapes our behavior, priorities, values, relationships with people, and much more.”
- While claiming to be built on a ‘Biblical framework’, at the core of CRT is the belief that we still live in a society that is built on and continues to practice structural or systemic racism. This divides us into two groups, the oppressed and the oppressor, and social justice is man’s attempt to bring equity or equal outcomes. The goal is liberation of the oppressed from the oppressor. While we know that the sin of oppression still exists, the scriptures are clear that man’s main problem is his own sinful heart. “Man’s estrangement from God splinters all other human relationships, so our only hope of achieving peace and justice among men is first to have our estrangement from God solved through faith in Christ.” R.C. Sproul.