

“big tent”: a church wherein a diversity of beliefs and faith expressions are not only tolerated, but welcomed. Those members wishing to remain within the PC(USA) are generally more open to progressive/liberal theology. They either wish to remain within PC(USA) no matter what, or do not understand why differences in theology cannot be worked out, or at least tolerated. And then there are those members “in the middle.” These members just want to come to church without turmoil and conflict. “The Middle” may well be the majority of the membership at Fountain Hills. While the divisions are significant, members on all sides of the dismissal question have expressed a passionate desire to keep the “Church family” together. All seem to genuinely love their church family.

Fountain Hills Presbyterian Church has experienced considerable turmoil over the past 10-or-so years. A pastor resigned approximately 10 years ago, and a music director resigned several years ago. Both of these events in the life of the church are still relatively fresh in the minds of members, and remain points of conflict. More recently the discussion over whether to leave the PC(USA) has added to the older conflicts. Many folks have expressed “conflict fatigue.” They just want the turmoil to pass and for the church to return to a place of peace and comfort.

There is a high level of concern over what it might cost for Fountain Hills to leave the PC(USA). The cost issue was raised by attendees at every small-group meeting, and the AC was clear that it was (and still is) premature to discuss possible property and other costs. That the AC would not discuss cost matters in the small-group meetings angered some in attendance. Some members have expressed that there should not be any financial settlement required to leave the PC(USA). Other members have stated that if the costs to leave are too high, then the church will just remain within the PC(USA). A recent appraisal valued the Fountain Hills Presbyterian Church physical property at \$2.1 million dollars. Clearly there may come a time when real cost issues must be negotiated, but that time is not yet upon us.

Some members at Fountain Hills have expressed significant issues with the Session. Several members have told the AC that Session has not been transparent in its deliberations over whether to leave the PC(USA), and that Session has not done a good job of answering questions regarding its reasons to leave the PC(USA). Much more troubling, several members have expressed that they have been intimidated and felt bullied by the Session (their words). The AC firmly believes that Session’s attempt to control the small-group process likely was a major contributing factor to the relatively poor turnout for the small-group meetings.

### **Next Steps at Fountain Hills Presbyterian Church**

The AC has only heard from approximately 120 members of Fountain Hills. That means there is an even larger contingent of about 130 members who have not participated in the small-group process to-date. This is a major concern for the AC. The AC cannot presume to know what is in the hearts and minds of this large, silent group of members, and the AC strongly believes that hearing from this group would bring clarity and definition to the will of the Fountain Hills congregation. The AC is not convinced that either the minority group wanting to leave the