

February 7, 2011

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Regrettably, the initial email we sent out on February 2, in which we shared our concerns and invited people to an August meeting, generated significant misunderstanding (and offense) for some, particularly in regards to a lack of diversity among the signatories. As people who communicate for a living, it saddens us to have created any misunderstanding. We apologize and take full responsibility. Some of our poor communication might be cleared up in a FAQ sheet posted on our webpage at www.cpconline/fellowship_pcusa. In our minds, the letter was intended primarily as an invitation to a gathering in August, and we should have made that clearer.

We hope people can focus more on what was in the letter and less on who signed it (and who didn't). It is the content that will ultimately become important – but we learned that the lack of diversity among the signers carried an unintended power of its own. We should have known better, but we just missed it. We now recognize that because we had male, mostly white pastors of larger churches as signers, it sounded to some of you that women, racial/ethnic minorities, small churches, and ruling elders were not included in this movement. This is not the case. In a denomination where women comprise the majority of our members, we realize the key perspective and voice that female pastors and elders bring, and that we need all the gifts of the Spirit present.

We would also like to explain some background on how our proposal came about. The discussion of a new Fellowship started among a small group of friends, who all happen to be pastors of larger membership congregations, and who all happen to be white males. These seven pastors are part of a larger group of pastors who have met annually for many years for fellowship and best practices. Because that larger group comes from congregations of a certain size, it has been the case that those pastors have, with only two exceptions so far, been all male. That composition is not by our design but simply due to the actions of the congregations that called us. When the seven pastors presented their idea to the larger group, many others signed on as also interested in inviting others to an August gathering. During our meeting, we had extensive, strong discussion on the topic of diversity and share deep concern that the movement be broadened going forward.

Indeed, we discussed that it is imperative to take into account not only gender, but ethnicity, church size, age, and representations of both clergy and laity. The omission of all this variety in the original list of signatories was not meant to indicate any exclusion. So now we invite all to begin the hard work of leading towards new realities in our fractured denomination. As the invitation went out, we thought it would allow all kinds of churches, with pastors, CLPs, and elders alike, to initiate the discussion. We expect that the leadership for the August gathering will be much more representative than the signers of the invitation. Someone simply needed to get the discussion going and we were the “someones.”

We also have heard that we mischaracterized how our brothers and sisters from the Covenant Network perceive the situation in the PC(USA). They are very valuable conversation partners

with us and it grieves us that we spoke out of turn about their understanding of certain issues. We are simply trying to find a way to work together in our denomination with all our hurts and confusion. We will keep working to be better partners in these conversations, for these friends from the Covenant Network are of great importance to us.

In addition, we suspect that what we propose won't be for everyone. Our proposal represents a hope for a covenanted community that is both older and newer and will function differently than what we currently experience. If we made assessments of our current state as a church that are bleaker than what you experience, we rejoice with you. But rather than take offense at our expression, please know that we are sharing from our own genuine experience. We ask you to consider whether God might be calling you to join in our efforts, flawed as humans and redeemed by His amazing grace.

Yours in Christ,

Jim Singleton and John Crosby (on behalf of the Steering Committee)