

**CALL TO A SPECIAL MEETING OF  
THE PRESBYTERY OF GRAND CANYON**

**THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2008 AT 2:00 PM**

**Celebration of Life Presbyterian Church**

2530 S. Alma School Rd. Mesa, AZ 85210 (480-835-8550)

**TO:** Clerks of Session, Minister Members, Elder Commissioners and Other Presbyters  
**FROM:** Richard E. Coffelt, Stated Clerk  
**DATE:** January 31, 2008  
**RE:** Call to February 21, 2008 Special Meeting

**At the request of the Committee on Ministry, the Presbytery of Grand Canyon is hereby called to meet at 2:00 p.m., with registration beginning at 1:30 p.m., on Thursday, February 21, 2008 at Celebration of Life Presbyterian Church to act on the Committee's recommendation to approve an Administrative Commission to John Calvin Presbyterian Church.** The Committee on Ministry's recommendation is that the Presbytery of Grand Canyon approve in accordance with Form of Government G-9.0503a (4) an Administrative Commission, made up of seven (7) members, to John Calvin Presbyterian Church, which is reported to be affected with disorder, for the purpose of inquiring into and settling the difficulties therein. That in accordance with G-11.0103(s) the Presbytery assume original jurisdiction of the session and appoint this Administrative Commission to act as the Session of John Calvin Presbyterian Church with the full power of a session. The appointment of an Administrative Commission of this nature requires the approval of the Presbytery in session and may not be delegated.

Enclosed with this Call to the Special Meeting, which is also posted on the Presbytery Web-site at <http://www.pbygrandcanyon.org/meetings.html>, are the following:

- *“Committee on Ministry – Proposed Administrative Commission for Approval at the February 21, 2008 Special Meeting”* with background and rationale.
- (P-3) Addendum to the Consent Agenda of January 19, 2008 containing the Report of the October 6, 2007 Investigating Committee Justin Schlesinger-Devlin Request for Vindication
- Directions to Celebration of Life Presbyterian Church

As this is a Special Meeting called only for the purpose of acting on the recommendation of the Committee on Ministry for the approval of an Administrative Commission, no other business will be conducted. Please note, as reflected in last paragraph of the Background and Rationale section of the Proposed Administrative Commission paper, that the Session of John Calvin Presbyterian Church concurs with the Committee on Ministry's recommendation to form an Administrative Commission assuming original jurisdiction to work with the Session of John Calvin Presbyterian Church to resolve conflicts within the Session. Therefore it is anticipated that this will be a meeting of short duration. A quorum for this meeting is: “.....any fifteen minister members and the elder members present, provided that at least fifteen churches are represented by elders” (Presbytery of Grand Canyon Bylaws - B-2.0200).

The Committee on Ministry recognizes that this is a Special Meeting, probably of short duration, that is taking place on a weekday afternoon making it inconvenient for some presbyters to attend. **However it is important that a quorum be present; therefore we ask that presbyters who are able and planning to attend to respond positively by advising Marcia McCabe either by phone at 602-468-3820 or by email at [marciam@pbygc.org](mailto:marciam@pbygc.org) of their plan to attend, with all others who are not planning to attend requesting an excused absence.** (As is the usual practice, Honorably Retired Ministers are not required to request an excused absence).

The Special Meeting begins at 2:00 p.m. with Registration beginning at 1:30 p.m. **Please bring the Call Papers as attached (or posted on the Presbytery Web-site) with you, as there will be no packet distributed upon registration.**

***Committee on Ministry***  
***Proposed Administrative Commission for Approval at the February 21, 2008 Special Meeting***

**MOTION:** That the Presbytery of Grand Canyon approve in accordance with Form of Government G-9.0503a (4) an Administrative Commission, made up of seven (7) members, to John Calvin Presbyterian Church which is reported to be affected with disorder for the purpose of inquiring into and settling the difficulties therein. That in accordance with G-11.0103(s) the Presbytery assume original jurisdiction of the session and appoint this Administrative Commission to act as the Session of John Calvin Presbyterian Church with the full power of a session with respect to all of the session responsibilities for mission and government outlined in G-10.0102 (a) through(s). The Presbytery authorizes the Moderator of the Presbytery to appoint the Members of the Commission.

Specifically the Commission is charged with the following:

1. to serve as an instrument of the presbytery for promoting the peace and harmony of the John Calvin Presbyterian Church congregation and session, especially in the matters outlined in the Report of the October 6, 2007 Investigating Committee which vindicated the installed pastor “from the rumors or gossip that may have injured him”
2. to mediate differences and reconcile persons, to the end that difficulties may be corrected if possible, that the welfare of John Calvin Presbyterian Church may be strengthened and that the unity of the body of Christ may be made manifest
3. to work with the installed pastor in his continuing ministry to the congregation
4. to work with and include the currently serving session elders as of the date of the assumption of original jurisdiction of the session in all aspects of the mission, government and spiritual oversight of the congregation
5. to work with and include the currently serving session elders as of the date of the assumption of original jurisdiction specifically in working through all of the areas highlighted in the Report of the October 6, 2007 Investigating Committee which vindicated the installed pastor “from the rumors or gossip that may have injured him”
6. to assist the congregation and “currently serving elders” in determining the future ministry direction for John Calvin Presbyterian Church and its most effective witness to the broader community

Notwithstanding the above specific charges this commission is empowered with wide discretion as to its manner of inquiry into and approach to settling the difficulties.

In completing its work the Commission shall comply with all of the applicable provisions of the Form of Government with respect to the work of Administrative Commissions. This Commission is directed to report on its work, findings, actions taken to settling the difficulties therein and any recommendations to the Presbytery at its June 7, 2008 Stated Meeting or at an earlier specifically called meeting of the Presbytery.

***Background and Rationale***

In the Consent Agenda for the November 10, 2007 Stated Meeting, the Stated Clerk reported that the Rules of Discipline D-9.0000 provide for a request for vindication which is a request made by a member of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) who feels injured by rumor or gossip to investigate erroneous, inaccurate or inflammatory statements made about him or her in order to "clear the record." A request for vindication is a public process. The name of the person requesting vindication is reported at the time of the naming of the Investigating Committee (IC) which has the responsibility to make an inquiry into the facts and circumstances. The report of an IC formed as a result of a request for vindication includes

sufficient information to give a clear picture of facts and circumstances. On September 24, 2007 the Stated Clerk received a request for vindication from the Rev. Justin I. Schlesinger-Devlin in which he outlined that malicious and disparaging remarks about him were being made by an elder in his church who is not currently serving on the session. As a result of the request and in accordance with Presbytery of Grand Canyon Bylaw B-7.0200, the following four persons were appointed to an Investigating Committee: Rev. James Bruening (HR), Elder Amy Davis-King (Palo Cristi), Elder Carolyn McBurney (Mission del Sol) and Rev. W. Gale Watkins (Pastor – Westminster).

The report of the October 6, 2007 Investigating Committee in the matter of Rev. Schlesinger-Devlin's request for vindication was included as an Addendum to the Consent Agenda at the January 19, 2008 Stated Meeting as Paper (P-3). The report vindicated Rev. Schlesinger-Devlin from the rumors or gossip that may have injured him. The report also highlighted division that exists within the session on the matters outlined by the Investigating Committee. The Investigating Committee recommended the establishment of an administrative committee for the church.

On January 12, 2008 the Investigating Committee met with Rev. Shelly Moe, incoming Committee on Ministry (COM) Chair and the Stated Clerk to present their written report of January 8, 2008 with particular reference to their recommendation concerning an administrative committee.

As a result of the Investigating Committee's letter report and recommendations, the Committee on Ministry discussed the reported difficulties at its January 22, 2008 monthly meeting and took the following action: (1) Requested that a Special Meeting of the Presbytery of Grand Canyon be called at the earliest possible date for the purpose of the Committee on Ministry's recommending to the Presbytery the appointment of an Administrative Commission with original jurisdiction of the Session of John Calvin Presbyterian Church, and (2) Requested a Special Meeting of the Session of John Calvin PC be called for the purpose of meeting with representatives of COM to discuss the appointment of an Administrative Commission and the decision of COM in this matter.

A Special Meeting of the Session was held on Monday evening January 28, 2008 at which time Shelly Moe, COM Chair; Ken Moe, Executive Presbyter; Bud Engstrom, COM Partner / Cluster Representative and Dick Coffelt, Stated Clerk met with 8 of the 9 session members (the 9<sup>th</sup> elder who was not present sent her letter of resignation from the church and denomination with a request that the letter be read at the meeting). Following a time of questions, answers and discussion, the Session approved the following motion: "The session concurs with the Committee on Ministry recommendation to form an Administrative Commission assuming original jurisdiction to work with the Session of John Calvin Presbyterian Church to resolve conflicts within the Session."

**ADDENDUM TO THE CONSENT AGENDA  
January 19, 2008**

**Report of the Stated Clerk**

MOTION: The following letter and report of the October 6, 2007 Investigating Committee to the Stated Clerk concerning a Request for Vindication under the provisions of the Rules of Discipline (D-9.0000) be entered into the minutes of the Presbytery of Grand Canyon Stated Meeting of January 19, 2008.

**(Informational Note:** The Investigating Committee met with the Rev. Shelly Moe, incoming Committee on Ministry (COM) Chair and the Stated Clerk on January 8<sup>th</sup> to present their report letter and to advise them of their recommendations. As a result the Investigating Committee's letter report and recommendations have been included on the Agenda for the January 22, 2008 meeting of the Committee on Ministry.)

**October 6, 2007 Investigating Committee**  
**Presbytery of Grand Canyon** **Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)**

January 8, 2008

Elder Richard Coffelt  
Stated Clerk  
Presbytery of Grand Canyon  
4423 N. 24<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 200  
Phoenix, AZ 85016

Re: Report of the October 6, 2007 Investigating Committee  
Justin Schlesinger-Devlin Request for Vindication

Our investigating committee was appointed in order to respond to a "request for vindication," provided for in our Rules of Discipline, submitted to the Presbytery by Reverend Justin Schlesinger-Devlin. He stated that he has been harmed by rumors and gossip concerning him that are circulating within John Calvin Presbyterian Church.

After conducting twenty interviews with individuals, and examining documents submitted to us, we make the following observations.

The majority of church members are fully supportive of their pastor, and until quite recently, were unaware of any rumors or gossip concerning him. The rumors that have circulated concern: 1. his fidelity to the Word of God, especially in his preaching; and 2. his personal behavior. With regard to the second area, we have not been able to pinpoint the original source of the few comments reported to us. We do not believe that there is any substance to them. Our only response is to remind all members of the church of the clear Biblical admonition concerning the importance of guarding our speech.

In the first area, Justin Schlesinger-Devlin's fidelity to the Word of God, we found that there are some church members who believe that he has neglected to emphasize some important matters. While they do not accuse him of teaching false doctrine, they believe that he has not given proper attention to the call for true repentance. They claim that in his strong emphasis on the free grace of God, he has failed to call for a costly response to that grace. Those who believe that repentance is missing in his preaching have a strong

sense of the prophetic ministry of a fellow church member (a former member of Session), and believe that Justin is not sensitive to this prophetic ministry.

The majority of those we interviewed believe that Justin Schlesinger-Devlin's preaching is consistent with Reformed theology. The theological disagreement is partly a difference in emphasis between grace and repentance. But there may be a more substantive matter at stake. The question might be asked, "Is our repentance something that we offer to God, in effect meeting God halfway? Or is our repentance itself a gift of grace, made possible only through the redemptive work of the Holy Spirit?" We realize that there are diverse viewpoints within our tradition. In this matter we believe that the pastor's emphasis on grace is a faithful expression of Reformed theology.

We are concerned that those who sincerely disagree with their pastor, whether it is a mere difference of emphasis or a more substantive matter, have been quick to speak about him in a dismissive way. There is a vast difference between recognizing a sincere theological disagreement, and concluding that a pastor is not preaching the Word. We hope that they will strive, insofar as their consciences will allow them, to "go the extra mile" in support of their pastor, and to allow God to speak to them through his ministry. Should their consciences not permit them to do this, we hope that they will "further the peace, unity, and purity of the church" by keeping silence or peaceably withdrawing.

We are also concerned that the pastor, and his numerous supporters, may have made errors of judgment. In the heat of tension leading to higher levels of conflict, it is difficult to maintain healthy relationships and to refrain even from the appearance of using improper methods. Those who disagree with the church leadership continue to need pastoral care. We hope that the majority of the congregation who appreciate their pastor's ministry will reach out in compassion toward those who have been more critical, and that all of their actions will be marked by integrity.

Finally, we strongly recommend that the Presbytery continue its involvement with this congregation. We recommend the establishment of an administrative commission for this church. Since there is substantial division within the Session in the matters discussed above, we question their ability to lead the church. We hope that the Committee on Ministry will pay very close attention to this church in the next few months, and will give serious consideration to all possible ways in which the Presbytery may further its peace, unity, and purity.

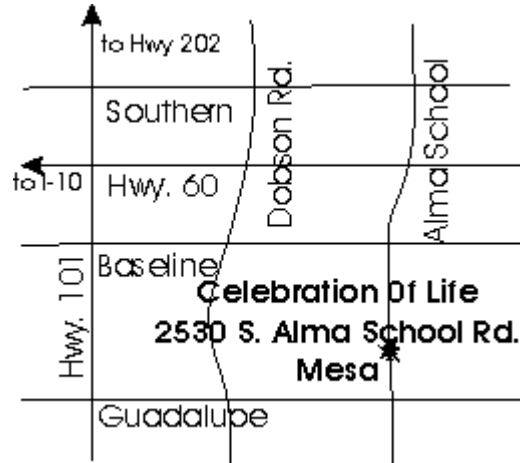
In response to the charge given to us, we report that we find no reason to file charges against Reverend Justin Schlesinger-Devlin. Rather, we vindicate him from the rumors or gossip that may have injured him.

Yours in Christ Service,

S/ Elder Amy Davis-King  
On Behalf of the Investigating Committee

Cc: Rev. James Bruening  
Elder Carolyn McBurney  
Rev. W. Gale Watkins

**February 21, 2008 Special Meeting of Presbytery  
Celebration of Life Presbyterian Church**  
2530 S. Alma School Rd. Mesa, AZ 85210 (480-835-8550)



Located in Mesa near the Tempe-Chandler border, Celebration of Life Presbyterian Church is on the corner of Alma School Road and Meseto Drive, between Baseline and Guadalupe Roads.

**Directions:**

**From 60:** Take the Alma School Road exit. Go South on Alma School Road about 1.1 miles, the church will be on your right.