

**Administrative Commission Report**  
**John Calvin Presbyterian Church, Apache Junction**  
**January 17, 2009**

**C-4**

**Background**

The Administrative Commission was formed at the direction of the Presbytery of Grand Canyon at a specially called meeting on Feb. 21, 2008. We were given the responsibility to assume the original jurisdiction of the session at John Calvin Church and to act as the Session of the church until such time as we felt the session was prepared to carry out its own business and mission. Our purpose was laid out in a 6-point charge to complete that mission as soon as possible. Our tasks were the following:

1. To serve as an instrument of the presbytery for promoting the peace and harmony of the John Calvin Presbyterian congregation and session, especially in the matters outlined in the Report of the Oct. 6, 2007 Investigating Committee which vindicated the installed pastor “from 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 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 in working through all of the areas highlighted in the Report of the Oct. 6, 2007 Investigating Committee
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.

**Steps Toward the Goals**

1. Shortly after the Commission was formed and we began our work, the pastor, Justin Schlesinger-Devlin announced that he would be leaving the church to take a new call in Indiana. His last Sunday in the pulpit was May 18. So, our first few months were spent dealing with that change, helping the session and other members deal with the loss of the pastor, and prepare the way for an interim pastor. Much of this time was spent listening to members, reviewing information that had come to us through the Investigative Commission, helping the session and members begin to sort out all of the feelings that had built up during the recent months. Numerous interviews, group meetings and consultations were held to listen and absorb the impact of what had happened to this church.
2. In June, we were fortunate to secure the services of the Rev. Doug Baer as the interim pastor. He had just finished another interim, so he began work on July 7. We are blessed that Doug comes with much skill in conflict management, collaboration, pastoral care, leadership training, and worship skills that are much needed in this church. He has led seminars at the church on Presbyterian beliefs/sacraments and will be leading a Bible study on Philippians and Galatians this winter. At the same time, members of the commission were serving as leaders and resource persons to the various committees of session and doing the session business, with the John Calvin session walking by our side. Each meeting of the session has included training, specifically using the “Guidelines for Presbyterians During Times of Disagreement”. We have walked them through the manual for this conflict

management guide and assisted them in learning some of the skills needed to be more effective leaders. While we know that they have not “mastered” the skills, they are much better listeners, they have new leadership skills and gifts to help them in dealing with conflict in the church, and they have skills in discipline as well.

3. One of our goals was to bring the differing parties in the conflict together to help them understand each other and to learn to live with each other in a more unifying manner to build the body of Christ. With the Commission’s leadership and collaborative style shown by the interim pastor, session members and congregation members are learning how to talk about their differences, how to be sure that they are talking about the same issues, and are learning how to respect each other’s differences. Only a few people have left the church, some due to relocations to other parts of the country, and a few due to the conflict itself. However, the church has been growing, has been rebuilding its program and mission and is working to build a new future together.
4. New Church officers have been training and are ready to begin their work again. One of the things we learned was that many of the current officers had received little or no training in preparation for taking office. The interim pastor has worked with all the officers to train them and help them fully understand their responsibilities as leaders. He will continue to provide training and support as the new officers lead the church in 2009 and beyond.

### **Recommendations**

1. **That the Session of John Calvin Presbyterian Church be reconstituted as the governing body of that church, effective January 17, 2009. Also, that as soon as possible, the session and other new officers be ordained and installed.**
2. **That since John Calvin Presbyterian Church no longer has an installed pastor, the Committee on Ministry work diligently and closely with the session to begin doing a complete mission study to determine the church’s future ministry and eventually work toward the formation of a Pastor Nominating Committee.**
3. **That the Administrative Commission remain in place at John Calvin Presbyterian Church in an advisory capacity. The purpose would be to attend session meetings (with at least two commission members at each session meeting), to observe the operations and interpersonal dynamics of the church, its committees and organizations so that further assessment can be made of their full ability to move forward alone.**