

Policy #23
CONGREGATIONAL ENGRAFTING

COM approval: August 2, 2018

PGA approval: N/A

POLICY ON CONGREGATIONAL ENGRAFTING
PRESBYTERY OF GREATER ATLANTA

Engraft:

1. to graft (a shoot, bud, etc.) onto a stock
2. to incorporate in a firm or permanent way; implant

"Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing."

John 15:4-5

When members of a congregation discern that they can live into God's mission more fully by giving up their own building and identity and joining with a larger, more vibrant congregation, they may pursue the process of engrafting into that congregation. Engrafting is distinguished from merger in that in a merger, ordinarily two or more congregations of comparable size choose to dissolve, sell their properties, move to a new site together with a new name and a new sense of mission. In engrafting, the receiving congregation is not expected to sell its building, change its name or change pastoral leadership. The engrafting congregation will agree to dissolve and their members will be welcomed into the receiving church's existing location, program, and mission. There will be intentionality on the part of the receiving church to acknowledge the many gifts and blessings that come with the addition of the engrafted members and to honor and celebrate the history and heritage of the engrafting congregation.

Requirements for Engrafting:

- A congregation must have at least 25 members on their active roll in order to consider entering the engrafting process.
- At least 2/3 of the active members must commit to move their membership to the receiving church in order to be considered an Engrafting.
- The receiving congregation must be financially viable, emotionally and spiritually healthy, with a clear sense of identity lived out in program and mission. The receiving congregation will ordinarily have an installed Head of Staff pastor in place at the time of the engrafting.

ENGRAFTING PROCESS

Initial Phase: Discernment and Exploration

1. When a session discerns a need to consider options for their future they will contact their Congregational Consultant. He or she will meet with the session to help them assess possible options, for example engrafting, merger, shared pastor, selling their property and relocating, dissolution, etc.
2. The session may create a plan for researching the local PCUSA congregations that would be feasible candidates for engrafting, considering theology, worship style, etc.
3. If the session is able to discern a clear choice for a church that “fits,” the Congregational Consultant(s) will meet informally with pastors and leaders of both churches to explore if there are reasons to believe this would be a good fit for both parties.
4. Members of the engrafting congregation are informed of the proposed engrafting process and plan and are polled to discern whether at least 2/3 will commit to join the designated receiving congregation. Polling may be done by survey and/or petition.

Phase 2: Getting Started

5. If the leaders of both churches agree there is good reason to pursue engrafting, the Congregational Consultant will seek approval from the Committee on Ministry (COM) for the churches to begin the process. COM will appoint a team of 3-4 people to work with the team from the churches. The role of this team will be to give guidance to the process, act as full, voting members of the Engrafting Committee (see below), and to communicate their progress to COM. The chair and secretary of the Engrafting Committee will be chosen from among the COM representatives.
6. A joint meeting of the sessions of the two churches will be held, with the Congregational Consultant(s) and COM representatives in attendance. After an explanation of the process that has led to this point and an explanation of the process of engrafting, each session will vote to enter the engrafting process. Each session will select 3 members of their church to become part of the Engrafting Committee, along with the COM representatives.
7. The Engrafting Committee will meet to create a Plan for Engrafting with a timeline for implementation. The timeline for engrafting will ordinarily be no less than 2 and no greater than 6 months. The Engrafting Committee will submit the Plan for Engrafting to the session of each church. After both sessions have approved it, the Plan for Engrafting will be submitted to COM for their approval. Following COM approval, each session will inform their congregation of the details of the approved plan.

Phase 3: The Plan for Engrafting:

8. The members of the Engrafting Committee will create and oversee a plan that includes:
 - a. Dissolution of the engrafting congregation (See attached document: PGA Guidelines: When A Church Closes.)
 - b. Plans for the property of the engrafting congregation. Does the receiving church have a desire to acquire and utilize the real asset or will the property be sold? If the property is to be sold, arrange for the transfer of ownership of the property to the Presbytery. The Operations Committee of the Presbytery will oversee the sale of the property. (See Distribution of Proceeds below.)
 - c. A plan for how the funds received from the sale of the property will be used, if the property is to be sold. The plan will include ministries to be supported and new

initiatives to be funded, with attention to how this plan will honor the legacy of the engrafted congregation.

- d. A plan for dealing pastorally with grief among members of the engrafting congregation, and ways to celebrate and preserve the legacy of their ministry.
- e. A calendar of social events and worship experiences, jointly planned and conducted by the two churches during the period leading up to engrafting.
- f. Consideration of the staff from the engrafting church, whether they will be incorporated into the staff of the receiving congregation or whether there will be severance proposed.
- g. Plans for ways in which members of the engrafting congregation will be incorporated into the full life of the existing congregation.
- h. Plan for the closing worship of the engrafting congregation.
- i. Plan for the receiving worship celebration.

9. Financial matters:

a. After all the engrafting church's outstanding bills have been paid (including any severance, if applicable) and all accounts reconciled and combined, the balance will be transferred to the account of the receiving congregation.

b. If the engrafting church has outstanding debt, this shall become the responsibility of the receiving congregation.

c. If the property is to be sold: The engrafting congregation transfers ownership of the property to the Presbytery. Operations Committee oversees the sale of the property. Prior to the building's sale, the presbytery is responsible for the upkeep and security of the property. Insurance for the site will come under the Presbytery's insurance policy. Costs for upkeep, security and insurance will be paid by the Presbytery and reimbursed from the proceeds of the sale of the property.

d. Distribution of Proceeds. After the sale of the property, and after the Presbytery has been reimbursed for all related expenses incurred during the time between dissolution and the sale, the proceeds of the sale shall be distributed as follows:

- 10% Administrative Fee to the Presbytery
- 15% Presbytery New Church Development Commission
- 15% Presbytery Revitalization Fund
- 60% Receiving Congregation.

e. If the property is not to be sold, the engrafting congregation will transfer ownership of the property to the receiving congregation. The receiving congregation will take responsibility for the upkeep, security, and insurance of the property. The building will be used for new ministries and mission of the receiving congregation.

- I. If the property received through engrafting is sold within three years of the date of the receiving worship celebration, the proceeds from the sale will be distributed according to the formula outlined in (d.) above.
- II. If either or both of the congregations involved in the engrafting have taken the exemption in G-4.0208 of the Book of Order of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), any property received in the engrafting process shall not be subject to that exemption.

f. Items in the building will be distributed according to the guidelines in PGA Guidelines: When A Church Closes.