Shepherd of the Hills Presbyterian Church
Austin, Texas

Shepherd of the Hills Congregational Vote

(Everything You Need To Know)

On Sunday, November 8th, after worship, we will hold a Congregational Meeting to vote on two very important issues that require some unpacking.

We will vote on disaffiliating from the Cumberland Presbyterian Church denomination and officially merging with Faith Presbyterian Church.

The following pages address both issues and share what you, as members of Shepherd of the Hills, need to know to vote.

In this packet you will find:

- Information about the Merger, where we are in the process, and why we are voting now to finalize it.
- What it means that, after the merger, we will have a co-pastor model with Pastor Amy and Pastor Leon serving in those roles.
- Information about our longstanding relationship with the Cumberland Presbyterian Church denomination and why it is time for us to disaffiliate.

We Are Ready to Become One Church

On **Sunday, November 8**, we will gather for an historic congregational meeting in the life of Shepherd of the Hills.

At that meeting, we will vote on officially merging **Shepherd of the Hills Presbyterian Church and Faith Presbyterian Church into one congregation.**

There are legal, financial, denominational, and organizational pieces involved in a church merger. But this merger has never really been about paperwork.

It is about two communities of faith becoming one.

And the wonderful thing is that, in so many ways, **we already have.**

We Have Already Begun Becoming One

Several months ago, our congregation voted on our **intent to merge** with Faith Presbyterian, provided that the necessary due diligence could be successfully completed.

Since then, a tremendous amount of work has happened behind the scenes.

Our leaders have reviewed finances, assets, liabilities, property, insurance, ministry structures, staffing, and the many other details necessary to bring two congregations together responsibly. **We have now completed that due diligence and are ready to move forward.**

Our Joint Task Force, made up of elders from both Faith and Shepherd of the Hills, has worked together throughout this process, helping ensure that we have remained faithful to the Memorandum of Understanding that has guided us during this interim period.

Our financial staff has begun managing Faith's finances as we prepare to integrate our financial systems completely.

Pastors Amy and Leon have been working together in shared pastoral leadership, preparing for the co-pastor model that will become our permanent leadership structure following the merger.

But perhaps most importantly, **our congregations have simply begun being the church together.**

We have worshiped together.

We have learned together.

We have served together.

We have built relationships, shared ministry, welcomed new faces, and discovered that what once felt like two congregations increasingly feels like **one church family**.

What Will We Be Voting On?

The vote on November 8 makes that new reality official.

The congregation will be asked to approve the merger of Shepherd of the Hills Presbyterian Church and Faith Presbyterian Church. **A two-thirds majority vote will be required for approval.**

The merger will bring together not only our congregations and ministries but also the assets of both churches, including property.

That means we will inherit both tremendous opportunities and important responsibilities—and we intend to approach both with care.

What Happens to the Faith Property?

One of the significant opportunities ahead of us involves discerning the future of Faith's property.

Following the merger, a new **Joint Task Force** will be formed that includes leaders from Shepherd of the Hills and Faith, representatives from Mission Presbytery, and others whose expertise can help us develop a thoughtful and faithful plan for the property.

Pastor Rob has already been an invaluable guide and resource in this process, and he will continue helping this team as we begin this important work.

We don't need to have every answer about the property before approving the merger. What we need is a good process for finding those answers together—and that is what this new team will provide.

Our goal will be to ask a larger question than simply, *"What should we do with this property?"*

We want to ask:

"How can we faithfully steward this gift for the mission God is calling our new congregation to accomplish?"

Shared Leadership for Our New Church

Approval of the merger will also move us into a new model of pastoral leadership.

Pastor Amy Myhand and Pastor Leon Bloder will serve together as co-pastors of the merged congregation.

Over these past months, Amy and Leon have already been living into this relationship—sharing pastoral leadership, dividing primary responsibility for different areas of ministry, sharing preaching and pastoral care, and working together with our staff and church leaders.

Following the merger, both will be installed as co-pastors of our new congregation.

This shared leadership model gives us greater pastoral capacity and allows us to build on the gifts, experience, relationships, and leadership that both pastors bring to our life together.

The Final Step Is Ours

Months ago, we said that we **intended** to become one church.

Since then, our leaders have done the necessary work. Our due diligence has been completed. Our ministries have begun coming together. Our pastors and staff are working together. And our congregations have been discovering what it means to share life, worship, mission, and ministry.

Now the congregation gets to take the final step.

On November 8, we have the opportunity to say together:

We are ready to become one church.

This is an historic moment in the life of Shepherd of the Hills—and in the life of Faith Presbyterian. Years from now, we will look back on this season as the moment when two congregations chose to trust that God could create something new through us together.

So please make every effort to be present.

Sunday, November 8
Following Worship

Come and be part of this important decision. Come and celebrate what God has already been doing among us. And come help us take the next faithful step into our future together.

Two congregations. One church. One shared mission: Love God and Love Everybody.

Two Pastors. One Shared Ministry.

As Shepherd of the Hills and Faith Presbyterian move closer to completing our merger, we want to share one exciting change in our new life together: **Rev. Amy Myhand and Rev. Dr. Leon Bloder will serve as co-pastors of our congregation.**

In many ways, we have already been living into this model. Over the past several months, Amy and Leon have worked alongside one another, sharing pastoral leadership while dividing responsibility for different areas of our church's ministry. As we move toward completing the merger, we want you to know what that looks like—and, more importantly, why we believe this model will serve our congregation well.

Why Co-Pastors?

Merging two congregations is about much more than combining membership rolls, ministries, and property. We are bringing together two communities of faith and creating something new together.

Having two pastors serving side by side gives us the pastoral capacity to make that transition thoughtfully and sustainably. It also allows each pastor to give focused attention to particular areas of ministry and share responsibilities for the congregation.

This is not two separate churches with two separate pastors. It is one congregation with two pastors sharing leadership, responsibility, and ministry.

How Will It Work?

Some areas of ministry will have a primary pastor providing leadership and staff support.

Pastor Leon will provide primary pastoral oversight for:
Connect & Belong • Life Groups • Prime Time • Young Adults • Worship • Deacons and also Book Clubs, and other Connect affinity groups.

Pastor Amy will provide primary pastoral oversight for:
Faith Formation • Children & Youth Ministry • Mary Martha Circle • Mission • Preschool and also Association of Retired Christian Men, and Weekday Bible studies.

Other responsibilities will be **shared by both pastors**, including:

Pastoral Care • Administration • Support Groups, Communications • Human Resources • Finance • Generosity • Property

Amy and Leon will also **share preaching responsibilities** and will **rotate monthly as Moderator of the Session**.

These areas of oversight don't mean that one pastor is unavailable to people involved in another pastor's ministries. **Both Amy and Leon are pastors to the entire congregation.** The division simply gives our staff, elders, deacons, and ministry leaders clarity about which pastor has primary responsibility for particular areas.

More Pastors Means More Pastoral Ministry

One of the greatest benefits of this model is not simply that responsibilities can be divided. It is that **new ministry becomes possible.**

With Amy sharing pastoral leadership, Leon has been able to develop a new vision for our Deacons that expands our focus from caring for people during difficult seasons to also helping prepare and equip people for the challenges of life. He has had more opportunities to visit our homebound members and has become more involved in the wider church through Mission Presbytery, where he currently serves on a team developing policies and guidelines for grants supporting new ministries.

Amy, meanwhile, has been intentionally building relationships throughout Shepherd of the Hills. She has met individually with our staff, elders, and deacons and has created opportunities to meet one-on-one with members as she continues getting to know the congregation. In addition, Amy has helped Faith members integrate into worship and congregational life at SHPC.

Having two pastors also gives us greater capacity for **teaching, pastoral care, visitation, small groups, and support ministries**. Amy currently helps facilitate our Caregivers Support Group, while Leon helps facilitate our Grief Support Group. Both pastors will have more opportunities to teach classes, lead groups, develop new ministries, and be present for and available to people.

That additional pastoral presence is one of this model's greatest gifts.

One Church. Shared Leadership. More Possibilities.

We believe the co-pastor model gives us the best opportunity to bring Shepherd of the Hills and Faith Presbyterian together in a way that is healthy, sustainable, and faithful. It honors the leadership and gifts both pastors bring while giving our growing congregation greater pastoral capacity for the future.

We will undoubtedly learn and adjust along the way. We will continue communicating openly as this new chapter unfolds.

But underneath all of the organizational details is something much simpler:

We are becoming one church, with two pastors sharing one ministry, so that together we can more fully live our calling to Love God and Love Everybody.

An Important Step in Our Church's Story

On **Sunday, November 8**, Shepherd of the Hills will hold a congregational meeting after worship to consider an important step in our church's life: **disaffiliating from the Cumberland Presbyterian Church.**

Because this is an unusual decision—and because many of you may not even know that Shepherd of the Hills has been affiliated with two Presbyterian denominations—we want to explain how we got here, why we believe the time has come to take this step, and exactly what the congregation will be asked to decide.

How Did We Become Part of Two Denominations?

The answer goes all the way back to our beginning.

When Shepherd of the Hills was founded in the late 1970s, we were established as a **tri-union congregation**, supported by three Presbyterian denominations: the **United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (UPCUSA)**, the **Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS)**, and the **Cumberland Presbyterian Church (CPC)**.

In 1983, the UPCUSA and PCUS reunited after more than a century of separation to form the **Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)**, or PC(USA), the denomination most of us know today.

The Cumberland Presbyterian Church did not participate in that reunion, so Shepherd of the Hills continued its affiliation with both the PC(USA) and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church.

And that has remained our official status for more than forty years.

Who Are the Cumberland Presbyterians?

The Cumberland Presbyterian Church is a historic Presbyterian denomination that grew out of the Great Revival of 1800 and was formally organized in Tennessee in 1810. Its early leaders sought to adapt Presbyterian ministry to the needs of rapidly growing frontier communities, and the denomination eventually spread throughout the South and beyond. Today it includes congregations and ministries in the United States and several other countries.

We are grateful for the Cumberland Presbyterian Church's role in helping Shepherd of the Hills get started. **They are part of our story, and we want to honor that history.**

At the same time, for roughly four decades our relationship with the Cumberland Presbyterian Church has been quite limited. There has been little interaction between Shepherd of the Hills and the CPC, and our identity, leadership, ministries, and connection to the wider church have increasingly been rooted in the PC(USA) and Mission Presbytery.

Why Disaffiliate Now?

There are two primary reasons.

First, **our theological paths have increasingly diverged.**

Shepherd of the Hills has made a clear commitment to being a church where all people are welcomed into the full life and leadership of the church. Our vision to **Love God and Love Everybody** includes people of every race and ethnicity, gender and gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, socioeconomic status, political ideology, and background.

In 2024, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church's General Assembly adopted a denominational statement saying that it does not condone the ordination of people in same-sex relationships as deacons, elders, or ministers.

That position is fundamentally different from the beliefs and practices of Shepherd of the Hills regarding LGBTQ+ inclusion and ordained leadership.

We have known for some time that this difference existed, but there was never an urgent need to address our dual affiliation.

The merger with Faith Presbyterian has changed that.

As Shepherd of the Hills and Faith prepare to become one congregation, it makes sense to resolve this longstanding denominational question so that our newly merged church can move forward together as one congregation within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

What About Our Property?

This has been an important part of the conversation.

When Shepherd of the Hills purchased the land on which our current campus sits, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church contributed **$20,000 toward the purchase**. Because of that historic investment, the CPC could have pursued a financial claim connected to the present value of the property as part of our separation.

They chose not to do that.

Instead, Cumberland Presbyterian leaders have offered to graciously dismiss Shepherd of the Hills in exchange for a **$50,000 gift designated for earthquake relief efforts in Colombia**, where the denomination has missionaries and mission partners engaged in ministry.

We believe this provides a gracious way for our two churches to conclude our formal relationship.

The money will not simply enrich another denomination. **It will go toward mission and relief—values that are deeply important to Shepherd of the Hills as well.** What began decades ago with a gift that helped establish our ministry can now conclude with a gift that helps others.

Our Session has voted unanimously to accept this offer and move forward with the disaffiliation process.

What Are We Voting On?

There is one more important step.

The congregation must approve our disaffiliation from the Cumberland Presbyterian Church by a two-thirds majority vote.

That vote will take place at a called congregational meeting on:

Sunday, November 8
Following Worship

If the congregation approves the disaffiliation, we will continue working with the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, Trinity Presbytery, and Mission Presbytery to complete the necessary agreements and paperwork. Our hope is to complete this process—and subsequently the merger with Faith Presbyterian—before the end of the year.

Ending Well—and Beginning Something New

This is not a decision we make with anger or resentment.

The Cumberland Presbyterian Church helped Shepherd of the Hills get started nearly fifty years ago, and we are grateful for that part of our history. We are also grateful that our conversations about separation have resulted in a path forward that allows both churches to treat one another with generosity and respect.

At the same time, **sometimes faithfulness means recognizing when it is time for a relationship to change.**

We believe this is that time.

As we prepare to become one congregation with Faith Presbyterian, we have an opportunity to bring clarity to our denominational identity, remain faithful to our commitment to full inclusion, and move into this next chapter together.

Our history matters. Our relationships matter. And so does where God is leading us next.

We hope every member will join us on November 8 as we take this important step toward the future God is creating for our church.