

Peace River Presbytery
Communications, Connection & Community Committee
July 31, 2025 Special Meeting

Motions:

WHEREAS Peace River Presbytery undertakes congregational development as one of the ways we pursue all six of the Great Ends of the Church;

WHEREAS two decades have gone by since Peace River Presbytery's youngest congregations (Peace P.C. of Lakewood Ranch and Christ Church of Longboat Key) were chartered;

WHEREAS in 2016 representatives of Peace River Presbytery began seeking God's leading regarding the possibility of congregational development in Babcock Ranch, a new planned community near Ft. Myers;

WHEREAS in 2018 representatives of Peace River Presbytery began meeting with representatives of the ELCA Florida-Bahamas Synod to seek God's leading regarding the possibility of an innovative approach to joint congregational ministry at Babcock Ranch.

WHEREAS Babcock Ranch is a particularly inviting location for church development because "the field is ripe and laborers are few" -- The development plan for Babcock Ranch made no provision for houses of worship or religious community, leaving new residents in strong need for community and spiritual services;

WHEREAS Babcock Ranch is a particularly inviting location for an innovative approach to church development because, as the first fully solar-powered community in the U.S, the community identity is rooted in innovation;

WHEREAS Babcock Ranch is a particularly inviting location for 21st century church development because the community identity places high value on respect for the earth, with accolades such as having 50% of its land devoted to greenways, parks, and lakes; and being surrounded by a 73,000 acre nature preserve;

WHEREAS in 2020, the ELCA Florida-Bahamas Synod placed (and financed) Pastor Matt Shapton, an ELCA pastor specifically trained for mission development, who began an innovative Christian mission and ministry in Babcock Ranch, keeping a simple focus on serving others, worshipping Christ, and giving witness to unity in Christ;

WHEREAS this mission development became known as The Community Church, with a stress on unity visible in its logo;

WHEREAS by the grace of God, The Community Church has flourished in worship and mission, with a congregation of all ages now averaging 150 in worship (meeting at a local school);

WHEREAS The Community Church chartered as an ELCA congregation in the summer of 2024, the stress remained upon developing Christian discipleship and witness, i.e. becoming Christians, not becoming Lutherans;

WHEREAS by the grace of God, The Community Church has gained approval from the developer to build a church, has purchased land, and is ready to break ground on what will be the first church—the first house of worship—in Babcock Ranch;

WHEREAS Pastor Shapton and ELCA representatives, even as The Community Church grew, have nevertheless persevered in the hope for a joint congregational ministry with the PCUSA, as an innovative approach to congregational development in a community where innovation energizes participation;

WHEREAS we now have a model agreement for an ELCA-PCUSA union congregation, Living Faith Church (approved in April 2025 by the Presbytery of Tropical Florida and Florida-Bahamas Synod of the ELCA) to guide the formation of a joint ministry at Babcock Ranch;

WHEREAS we have received from the congregation's board a request to be chartered as a PC(USA) congregation and enrolled as a member of Peace River Presbytery, in order to fulfill its mission to demonstrate the unity of Christ via a clear ecumenical identity:

“Siblings in Christ at Peace River Presbytery, The Leadership Board of The Community Church, Babcock Ranch, FL, requests Peace River Presbytery to charter The Community Church, Babcock Ranch, FL, as a union congregation of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. (PCUSA) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). We acknowledge that the ELCA and the PCUSA are in full communion and fully embrace the mutual recognition of baptism and orderly exchange of ministers. We covenant to actively engage with Peace River Presbytery of the PCUSA and Florida-Bahamas Synod of the ELCA. We enthusiastically seek this joint ministry to share the love of Christ as a vital witness in our community.

Signed by Linda Andrews, The Community Church Leadership Board President; Rev. Matthew Shapton, The Community Church, Lead/Founding Pastor; Rev. Melana Scruggs, Peace River Presbytery, General Presbyter; Rev. Dr. Randy Moody, Peace River Presbytery, Stated Clerk.”

THEREFORE the CCC Committee makes the following motions:

1. That Peace River Presbytery charter The Community Church, Babcock Ranch, FL as a union congregation of Peace River Presbytery (PCUSA) and Florida-Bahamas Synod (ELCA) and to empower the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery, the Rev. Dr. Randy Moody, with the authority to represent the presbytery in finalizing the agreement between the Synod of Florida-Bahamas (ELCA) and Peace River Presbytery. The Stated Clerk is also granted the authority to appoint any persons from Peace River Presbytery to assist him in this task.

2. That Peace River Presbytery grant \$750,000 to The Community Church, Babcock Ranch, FL, for capital needs from the Church Development fund and proceeds from the sale of the presbytery office.

Information Only:

Please join us for lunch and fellowship! The committee is pleased to welcome everyone to a time of lunch and fellowship at the conclusion of the meeting. The meal will be catered by “Fork in the Road” and will be a pasta bar with vegetarian and gluten-free options. This meal is our treat and is offered in pursuit of our committee’s responsibility to offer relational gatherings for the presbytery. We hope you can stay and enjoy some midsummer fellowship! **We need your reservation for the meal no later than July 25** at <https://peaceriverpresbytery.org/register-for-presbytery-meeting/>

More Information about Babcock Ranch and The Community Church:

To learn more about Babcock Ranch and about The Community Church:

<https://tccintheranch.org/>

<https://babcockranch.com/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babcock_Ranch,_Florida

To see Pastor Matt Shapton in a brief video conversation with Pastor Jaco Bester (Burnt Store P.C.):

<https://peaceriverpresbytery.us8.list-manage.com/track/click?u=1b44f95683c4b45f310b7d696&id=17905fcddf&e=c35d1a0856>

Respectfully submitted,

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