Dear Members of First Presbyterian Church,

During executive session at the stated Session meeting on November 24, 2014, the Session heard a report from the Investigating Committee of the East Central Presbytery (Presbytery IC) that is investigating the allegations raised in Dr. Pamela Cole’s emailed letter of resignation and subsequent emailed journal excerpts. The report indicated that the Presbytery IC will not file charges against Dr. Cole or Dr. Gibbons in the matter, but did not present any specific details of the investigation to Session. The report was presented in the form of a resolution to submit to the Presbytery’s Permanent Judicial Committee for approval. The Session voted to join the Presbytery IC’s resolution as a party to the agreement, which outlines specific steps to begin the healing process within our congregation, led by the Presbytery’s Ministry Assimilation Team (MAT). The IC reported that Dr. Cole exercised her prerogative not to participate as a party to this resolution. The Session remains hopeful that the continuing work of the Presbytery’s MAT will lead to reconciliation and healing with all parties and the congregation. The Presbytery IC will be forwarding its resolution to the congregation once the Permanent Judicial Committee of the Presbytery gives its approval.

Following the Presbytery IC’s report, the Session received a report from the eight FPC church officers who served on the Session’s former Investigating Committee (FPC IC). They were appointed immediately after Dr. Cole’s emailed resignation and worked for about three weeks, but the committee was dissolved when Session learned that under ECO polity, the investigation was strictly the responsibility of the Presbytery. The FPC IC’s findings were sealed for use by the Presbytery IC and no further work was done by this committee.

In order to be prepared to share information with the congregation, the Session asked the members of the former FPC IC to present a report on their work prior to disbanding. They gave this report to Session last night, in strict confidence during executive session. While their report was completely independent of the Presbytery IC’s report, their findings concurred with the Presbytery IC’s report. Therefore, the Session voted to release their signed report to the congregation, exactly as presented to the Session during the meeting.

While the information contained in the report is difficult to share, the Session is aware of the congregation’s desire to hear the results of Monday’s meeting in a transparent and timely fashion. This has been and continues to be a most difficult and painful situation for everyone within First Presbyterian family. There is much work to be done as we enter into the process of healing and reconciliation. The Session has called a service of Healing and Reconciliation on Tuesday, December 2 at 7:00pm to begin this process.

David Dixon
Clerk

Attachment: Document from FPC church officers and members of the “Special Committee”
To: The Session of First Presbyterian Church  
Greenville, S.C.  
From: FPC church officers and members of the former "Special Committee"  
Re: Allegations contained in Dr. Pam Cole's resignation documents  
Date: November 24, 2014

This document will be shared with the Session only if Session requests. This is a privileged and strictly confidential document, to be considered only by the members of Session in connection with the Session's receipt and consideration of the Presbytery Investigative Committee (IC) Report, which is anticipated at the November 24, 2014 Session meeting. If Session solicits the opinion of the members of the Special Committee, this document represents the response of the Special Committee. We, of course, recognize that the Session is entitled to give our report whatever weight, if any, it determines is appropriate.

This document represents the unanimous judgment of the members of the former Special Committee. It is emphasized that this document is provided solely for the private consideration and deliberations of Session, and it is our intent that no member of Session will retain a copy of this document and that any dissemination of this document or any of its contents shall not occur without the prior formal approval of Session. We suggest the option of having the Stated Clerk, at the direction of Session, prepare a communication for the congregation.

In the wake of the IC’s report, we thought it might be helpful for you to know our opinion regarding the charges and evidence central to IC’s report based on our work as members of the subcommittee of church officers appointed to examine the allegations raised in Dr. Pam Cole’s resignation documents.

We emphasize that these comments are restricted to the content of the two documents authored by Pam, specifically the allegations she made regarding Richard and Harry in her resignation email and the document titled “excerpts from Pam’s personal prayer journals.”

We are not speaking tonight to leadership/structure issues or unrelated issues raised by others in the course of our interviews; that is a work session for another day. Again, we restrict these comments to the two documents central to the IC investigation.
We considered two questions key to verification of Pam’s charges as we conducted our interviews:

1. Is the allegation credible?
2. Is the allegation corroborated by any evidence, such as a corroborating witness?

We interviewed all the associate pastors, several of the church staff, and every person we could determine was present or in a position to have direct knowledge of each of the allegations Pam raised. Did we interview every possible witness? The answer is "no." But our work was substantially completed and we interviewed as many individuals as possible during the intensive approximate three week period our committee was functioning. The overarching point is that each committee member is confident that she or he received sufficient information to make an informed judgment on the merits of the allegations.

These are our conclusions:

We found no evidence to corroborate that Richard or Harry lied to Session or spoke to Pam with malicious intent. Our interviews indicated Pam either (1) interpreted the situation differently from others who were there, or (2) disagreed with the outcome and assigned motives to Richard and/or Harry that others who were present did not believe were accurate.

Several of the allegations were hearsay; Pam was not actually present but based her charges on 2nd and 3rd hand reports from others. We received first-hand accounts that either directly contradicted her characterizations or provided a fuller picture that cast doubt on Pam’s interpretation of events.

We could not corroborate some of her allegations at all, either because no one else was present (creating a “he said, she said” situation), or those who were present said they were untrue.

Pam’s credibility was damaged in our view by the first version of her journal in which she admitted not telling the truth to Richard and Harry for a year in order to get a good review. While she later edited that statement out of the version she submitted to our committee, she never denied the authenticity of the first publication.

Pam also damaged her credibility in our view by the way she resigned. As an ordained pastor, Pam knew that only the congregation or Presbytery could dissolve her call; neither Harry nor Richard could fire her. She did not give Session (as a
body) the chance to act on her allegations because she never presented them to Session as a whole. (In this regard, Pam remains highly regarded by Session, including the members of this committee who are grateful for her service to our Lord and our Church. There can be no serious claim that the Session would have ignored her complaints.) Neither did she present her allegations to Presbytery - the failsafe for any pastor who feels threatened or believes Session will not give her a fair hearing.

Our interviews led us to believe Pam had problems setting personal boundaries and working within boundaries set by others. The 30-hour workweek was a condition of her call, which she signed and agreed to follow. Implying that her overtime was forced on her by others was a misrepresentation of her choices and the actions of those charged with protecting her health. The agreed-upon 30-hour workweek limitation was the result of health challenges from her previous service. We have decided not to share information which can only be found in Pam's personnel file, other than to observe that nothing in her personnel file is in any manner at odds with our conclusions.

While we all believe that Pam rendered long and faithful service to FPC, we do not find her allegations credible and believe they have done considerable harm to our congregation and the persons she accused. We are deeply saddened that Pam refused to acknowledge that her manner of resignation ignored ECO polity and caused deep pain, turmoil and confusion for FPC.

Do not take from this report that we believe all is well at FPC; we believe there are some operational and internal issues that should be dealt with, both in the church’s leadership structure and on Session. With the help of TAG and ECO, there is much work to be done to determine what changes are needed and how they would best be implemented.

This has been a painful and arduous process. We acknowledge we are sinners, saved by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have done our best to be fair and impartial. While we understand that there will be those with a contrary view whose minds were made up long ago, we remain steadfast in our hope that through this difficult process will come reconciliation, forgiveness, restoration and peace, all to the glory of God. We claim the promise of Romans 8:28-29: “And we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be firstborn among many brothers and sisters.”
Agreed to by:

Nancy Caudel

Steve Finch

John Kittredge

Don Nickell

Angie Orfaneides

Ross Plyer

Susan Simmons

Rick Sturgis