

Breakaway PCUSA church buys title from presbytery: Kirk of the Hills

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Ending a long legal battle, the largest congregation to break its ties with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in the past two years has voted narrowly to pay \$1.75 million for the land and buildings it occupies in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Members of the Kirk of the Hills, which includes a 100,000-square-foot church building on nearly ten acres of prime real estate, approved by a 508 to 483 vote on October 19 to accept the price offered by the Eastern Oklahoma Presbytery.

The Kirk of the Hills congregation, which has 2,600 members, voted nearly unanimously in August 2006 to leave the denomination over biblical and theological differences. The congregation quickly filed suit in Tulsa County District Court to seek outright ownership, contending that it had paid for and held title to the property.

But the court ruled this September that the regional presbytery is the legal owner, affirming a clause in the PCUSA constitution which says that all property is held in trust for the denomination.

In interviews with the *Tulsa World*, the church's pastors said they were satisfied with the court ruling and the congregation's decision in order to "move on."

Tom Gray, one of the church's copastors, said that there was too little time to raise the \$1.75 million before the November 15 deadline, so the church will borrow the money from a bank and repay the purchase price over time.

Wayne Hardy, the other copastor, told the Tulsa newspaper that at the heart of the congregation's dispute with the denomination was the authority of scripture on issues related to homosexuality. "We want to be a Bible-centered church," he said.

Several dozen Presbyterian churches have voted to leave the 2.3-million-member PCUSA over the past two years, and a number of them have been in court in efforts to retain their property.