Susman Godfrey Wins Pro Bono Case for First Presbyterian Church of Houston

HOUSTON (February 26th, 2015) — With representation from Susman Godfrey partner Tom Paterson and co-counsel, First Presbyterian Church of Houston (FPC) secured a significant win this past week in the case *First Presbyterian Church of Houston v. Presbytery of the New Covenant, Inc*., No. 2014-30354 (234th Dist. Ct., Harris County, Tex.).

Founded in 1839, FPC is one of the oldest congregations in Houston. Since 1983, FPC has been a member of the Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) denomination. During that time, the PCUSA has claimed that it has trust and other property interests in FPC's property at 5300 Main in the Museum District of Houston, Texas.

FPC's leadership steadfastly disagreed. Last May the Church filed suit, asking a state district court judge in Harris County to declare its property rights pursuant to the Texas Supreme Court's decision in *Masterson v. Diocese of Nw Texas*, *422 S.W.3d 594* (Tex. 2013). Additionally, FPC requested a temporary restraining order to keep the Presbytery of the New Covenant, the administrative unit through which PCUSA works, from forming an administrative commission to take over control of the Church. The Court granted the TRO.

In September 2014, the Court granted FPC's application for a temporary injunction. Four months later, FPC filed for summary judgment. On February 20, the Court ruled in FPC's favor, entering final summary against the Presbytery of the New Covenant and finding that the PCUSA has no interest in FPC's property. The Court entered a permanent injunction against the Presbytery of the New Covenant forbidding it from taking any action against FPC related to its property or its conduct in seeking to preserve its property rights. See attached for a copy of the order. On February 25, the Presbytery of the New Covenant, Inc. filed a notice of appeal. Susman Godfrey is pleased to continue to participate pro bono in this proceeding on behalf of First Presbyterian Church of Houston.