

**Report of the Administrative Commission for
Covenant Presbyterian Church
Southfield, Michigan**

The Administrative Commission of Covenant Presbyterian Church (AC) moves the Presbytery:

- a. Dissolve the Covenant Presbyterian Church effective Sunday, March 20, 2022, and hold a final worship of praise and thanksgiving for Covenant's long history on that date;
- b. Dismiss the members of Covenant Church to Berkley Greenfield Presbyterian, Farmington First Presbyterian or other church, as requested by each member;
- c. Appoint the Session of Covenant Presbyterian Church to provide all data required for the AC to complete administrative and financial tasks associated with dissolving the congregation and corporation;
- d. Report final plans for distribution of funds at a subsequent meeting of Presbytery, after determining net amount in escrow;
- e. Authorize the AC to plan a celebration of the legacy of Covenant Presbyterian Church during the May 2022 Presbytery meeting, and that docket time be provided for the celebration.
- f. Develop a thorough equipping and training curriculum for ACs, including both Presbytery Stated Clerk and Presbytery executive.

Rationale

At the January 2021 meeting, the Presbytery approved an AC to work with Covenant Presbyterian Church, Southfield, with the following function, powers, and responsibilities:

Function: The commission shall visit Covenant Presbyterian Church Southfield which has been reported to be affected with disorder and inquire into and settle the difficulties therein.

(G-3.0109b(5))

Powers: The commission shall assume original jurisdiction if it determines that the Session is unable or unwilling to exercise its authority and manage its affairs wisely (G-3.0303e). The commission shall report its action to assume original jurisdiction to the next stated meeting of the Presbytery of Detroit.

Purpose: To provide guidance and leadership for Covenant Church as it seeks to discern the way forward by creating and developing a written plan for the congregation's future.

Focus Items:

1. To assist in the overall financial structure of the Church. This includes budgeting, accounting, checks and balances/reporting and procedures.
2. To assist in identifying grants/1001/new church development that Covenant Church would have available.
3. To assist with identifying a good fit for transitional pastoral leadership.
4. To help Covenant Church discern the way forward as it relates to the best congregational structure (including closing, merging, yoking, nesting, etc.).

Upon motion from the Committee and by unanimous consent, the Presbytery appointed the following persons to serve as members of the Administrative Commission to work with Covenant Presbyterian Church of Southfield, Michigan. The quorum for the commission shall be a majority of its members.

Ruling Elders: Greg Sykes; Stefanie Lewis

Teaching Elders: Kent Clise, Chair; Karen Stunkel

The AC formed and was trained by the Transitional General Presbyter on March 4, 2021, and has been meeting twice monthly. The AC observed at all regular Session meetings.

When the AC formed and met with the Session of Covenant Presbyterian Church for the first time on March 15, 2021, it discovered that train had left the station. The church, along with Presbytery Trustees, was already in final negotiations to sell the church property to Kingdom Builders Christian Church. The final details of the sale were pending resolution of the requirement to remove an oil tank buried on property. The

closing date was scheduled with Presbytery Trustees and the bank to occur by March 23, 2021. Covenant Church planned to lease the chapel of the property and continue to worship as a congregation there. The Presbytery Trustees had already created an escrow account to maintain accountability for the proceeds of the sale of the property. Our AC elected to trust the process occurring between the Session and the Presbytery Trustees regarding the sale of the property.

As the AC continued its investigation into the origin, history, and current state of Covenant Church, it became apparent that there was unreadiness among the Session, a lack of transparency with the congregation on the plan for the church, and distrust of the Presbytery in past and present involvement with Covenant Church. Covenant elders *indicated* a contradiction in advice from Presbytery leadership. The AC heard the elders say that they were tired and frustrated with Presbytery. Our AC listened carefully and took these feelings seriously.

After guiding the Session to petition the Presbytery Trustees for a \$26,000 to underwrite the total cost of the removal of the underground tank and the complete restoration of the property following the tank removal, the Trustees agreed to hold in escrow all proceeds from any ultimate resolution of the Covenant Church property. Further investigation by the AC determined that there would be viability issues for the small congregation to lease the chapel at the agreed to price. The AC then assisted the Session in securing the services of a consultant to guide the Session in discerning the future of this congregation without its property. Considerations included remaining in the chapel, nesting in another facility, merging with another congregation, yoking with another congregation, and/or dissolving the congregation. The estimated time for discernment was 60-90 days, with the result being a plan to be reported to the AC. The plan would clarify congregational outcomes such that there is unity in the decision. The Session approved the proposal at their June regular Session meeting. The AC secured \$5066 monthly from the Presbytery Trustees to subsidize Covenant Church operating expenses and an additional \$2500 per month for the services of the consultant during the development and implementation of the plan. This money would come from the escrow account.

Beginning August 2021, under the guidance of the consultant, the Session researched its options for the future of the church, including surveys of the congregation, congregation town hall to improve transparency, and cancellation of 2 Sundays of December worship to attend Berkley Greenfield and Farmington First Presbyterian Churches.

On January 17, 2022, Session presented its plan to the AC, which included a recommendation that AC request of Presbytery the dissolution of Covenant Presbyterian Church. Upon receipt of the plan, AC requested from the Stated Clerk the process associated with implementation of the plan. The AC discovered that no policy, other than P-21, exists that addresses all options associated with a plan for dissolution of a congregation. While other ACs are wrestling with similar options, their considerations were shared with this AC.

At a called congregational meeting on February 13, 2022, the Session's proposal was presented to the congregation, which held an advisory vote to affirm the plan and a recommendation to the AC for Presbytery vote. The congregation unanimously supported the plan to request the AC to dissolve the congregation. Additionally, an AC consideration for the distribution of funds was presented, which initiated heated debate.

Stefanie Lewis, clerk
Administrative Commission,
Covenant Presbyterian Church