

Report of the Administrative Commission for Clifton United Presbyterian Church

July 26, 2022

Introduction:

The Administrative Commission for the Clifton United Presbyterian Church submits this report to the Moderator of the Presbytery of the Miami Valley as its complete report on the Commission's activities and both moves and recommends the attached action items be adopted by the Presbytery of the Miami Valley at its earliest practicable date.

Copies of this report and motions are also provided for informational purposes to the Chairs of the Committee on Ministry, The Leadership Council, The Executive Presbyter, and The Stated Clerk.

Formation and Mandate:

The Administrative Commission for the Clifton United Presbyterian Church was formed by the Presbytery of the Miami Valley at its meeting on May 10, 2022. The mandate of the Administrative Commission was as follows:

[T]o carry out the dissolution of the Clifton Presbyterian Church, the session and congregation of which have voted to leave the presbytery and the denomination. The authority of the Administrative Commission will be based upon the authority previously granted to the Administrative Commission on Church Separations, which no longer exists.

The Moderator of the Presbytery subsequently recruited Rev. Garth Adams, Commissioned Ruling Elder Gidget Collins, and Rev. Brian Maguire to serve on the Commission.

Background and Rationale for the Recommended Motions:

The congregation of Clifton United Presbyterian Church has expressed its clear and unambiguous desire to withdraw from membership in The Presbytery of the Miami Valley and from membership in The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). This desire was most clearly expressed in a unanimous congregational vote of May 29, 2022, requesting withdrawal.

The Administrative Commission met with the Session of Clifton United Presbyterian Church on the evening of June 16, 2022, to better understand the reasons for this desire and to seek a mutually satisfactory way forward.

The Session of Clifton United Presbyterian Church explained there were primarily two sets of reasons for their desire to withdraw. First, they explained that they have been frustrated at their inability to obtain permanent pastoral leadership after five years without a called pastor. They stated that they believed the pastoral search process was broken, that they received little or no guidance in the search process from COM and the Presbytery leadership and felt abandoned in the process. They raised concerns about the difficulty in using the PCUSA call process, forms and formats for documents that were not shared with them, and the poor quality of candidates available in the call system. They explained that they had gone through 13 matchings of potential candidates without success. Accordingly, they stated their belief that their congregational ministry would be better served and likelier to obtain pastoral leadership by affiliating with another Reformed denominational body.

The second set of reasons for their desire to withdraw arises from their feeling that, “the Miami Presbytery did not want Clifton anymore.” They said that they felt treated, “like a red headed stepchild,” because they were a more conservative and traditional congregation in an increasingly liberally minded Presbytery and denomination. They stated they had felt at home in the Miami Presbytery through the late 1990’s, but no longer felt like they belonged to the community of congregations. Accordingly, they seek to affiliate with culturally and ideologically similar congregations in other Reformed denominational bodies.

During the meeting, the Administrative Commission and the Session discussed the procedural process for dissolution, congregational history, finances, and models for gracious separation. The parties worked constructively to reach a mutual covenant of gracious separation included herein.

The following proposed motions are hereby made and recommended to The Presbytery of the Miami Valley with careful consideration of the Presbytery’s financial responsibilities and stewardship as detailed in G-4.02 et seq. as well as the Permanent Judicial Commission of the General Assembly’s instructions on congregational departures provided in *Tom v. Presbytery of San Francisco*, GA PJC Remedial Case 221-03.

Respectfully Submitted this 26th day of July 2022,

Rev. Garth Adams

Elder Gidget Collins

Rev. Brian Maguire

The Administrative Commission for Clifton United Presbyterian Church hereby moves and recommends to the Presbytery to adopt the following actions:

Motion 1: The Presbytery of the Miami Valley makes the following findings of fact regarding its mission and ministry and that of the Clifton United Presbyterian Church:

1. The Presbytery of the Miami Valley finds that the congregation of the Clifton United Presbyterian Church of Clifton, Ohio has clearly and repeatedly expressed its desire and intention to withdraw from its association with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and to withdraw from membership within the Presbytery of the Miami Valley most recently in a unanimous congregational vote on May 29, 2022, to withdraw from the Presbytery of the Miami Valley and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).
2. The Presbytery of the Miami Valley recognizes that all property held by or for a congregation is held in trust for the use and benefit of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and further recognizes its responsibility to steward all property and resources for its mission and ministry as provided in G-4.02 et seq.
3. The Presbytery of the Miami Valley in adopting the enclosed Covenant of Gracious Separation takes due consideration of the value of the property of the Clifton United Presbyterian Church; the financial needs of the Clifton United Presbyterian Church, The Presbytery of the Miami Valley, and The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.); the potential financial and relational costs of litigation; and, the spiritual needs of both the Clifton United Presbyterian Church and the Presbytery of the Miami Valley.

Rationale: *These proposed findings of fact are provided to comply with the requirements for conveyance of property specified in Tom v. Presbytery of San Francisco, GA PJC Remedial Case 221-03.*

**Motion 2: A COVENANT OF GRACIOUS SEPARATION
BETWEEN THE CLIFTON UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
AND THE PRESBYTERY OF THE MIAMI VALLEY**

In recognition of our mutual desire to further the peace, unity, and purity of the larger church, the living body of Christ, and to fulfill our respective roles and responsibilities towards our Presbytery, Church and congregation, we, the Presbytery of the Miami Valley, and The Clifton United Presbyterian Church of Clifton, Ohio enter into this Covenant of Gracious Separation, recognizing the end of our denominational affiliation and covenanting not to pursue legal action against the other.

ARTICLE I

In furtherance of this covenant, the Presbytery of the Miami Valley acknowledges that The Clifton United Presbyterian Church as a congregation has sought to remove itself from the Presbytery of the Miami Valley and to end its relationship as a congregation within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the bonds between The Clifton United Presbyterian Church and the Presbytery (and through the Presbytery, its relationship with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)). Pursuant to this understanding, the Presbytery of the Miami Valley by ratification of this agreement dissolves The Clifton United Presbyterian Church as a congregation within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and a member congregation of this Presbytery effective the date of the ratification of this Covenant by the Presbytery of the Miami Valley. The Presbytery agrees, for purposes of the civil law of Ohio, that the dissolution of The Clifton United Presbyterian Church as a congregation within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) does not dissolve The Clifton United Presbyterian Church as a not-for-profit corporation in the state of Ohio.

ARTICLE II

Further, the Presbytery, based upon its discernment of its mission, for itself and as the council of Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) relinquishes its claims upon the real and personal property held by The Clifton United Presbyterian Church and any beneficial interests therein. As The Clifton United Presbyterian Church believes that title is currently in the name of The Clifton United Presbyterian Church, and it shall be an on-going Christian church regardless of its denominational affiliation, The Clifton United Presbyterian Church, does not seek any further transfer of title to this real property other than the assurances given in this Covenant.

ARTICLE III

The Clifton United Presbyterian Church shall make no claims of membership in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and shall be entitled to no benefits of association with the Presbytery of the Miami Valley or the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

ARTICLE IV

For historical purposes, complete copies of the church records (baptism, membership, ordination verification, Session and Congregational Meeting Minutes) from the entire period of time that the Clifton United Presbyterian Church was part of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), or its predecessors shall be made available to Presbytery representatives at the time of the signing of this Covenant. Original records are understood and agreed to be owned and retained by the congregation.

ARTICLE V

Members of The Clifton United Presbyterian Church who wish to remain as members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) shall be under the care of the Presbytery of the Miami Valley.

ARTICLE VI

In further consideration of this Covenant, The Clifton United Presbyterian Church shall provide at the signing of this agreement the Presbytery of the Miami Valley the sum of Two Thousand Eight Hundred and Eighty-Six Dollars and twenty-eight cents (\$2,886.28) given to The Presbytery of the Miami. This amount fulfills the current 2021 and 2022 pledge commitments to the Presbytery of the Miami Valley, inclusive of all per capita obligations that are now or may be due.

This serves as a written covenant agreement between Miami Valley Presbytery and The Clifton United Presbyterian Church and is understood to be binding on any succeeding governing body.

We pray that each other go forth in peace, honoring Christ.

Attested:

THE CLIFTON UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

CLERK OF SESSION DATE

THE PRESBYTERY OF THE MIAMI VALLEY

MODERATOR DATE

STATED CLERK DATE