

Report from the Administrative Commission to College Hill Community Presbyterian Church

The Administrative Commission continues to work with members of College Hill Community Church. Since the last presbytery meeting, we have claimed original jurisdiction, recommended not to renew a stated supply contract, added TE Angie Schenck to our commission, provided elder training and a pathway to mediation, provided for on-going worship and pastoral care, and received a petition “to discuss and vote on leaving the Presbytery of the Miami Valley and the PCUSA.”

Based on our initial investigation into reports of unresolved, serious conflict, the following findings related to the practice of shared ministry and the commitment to Presbyterian polity were either confirmed or uncontested in our hearing on whether or not to claim original jurisdiction on May 30, 2023:

- An “us versus them” mentality that does not advance the peace and unity of the church;
- Budget and financial issues compromise the life and ministry of the congregation;
- Confusion about the role and function of committees and ministry units;
- Significant irregularities in the practice of sacraments;
- Misuse of authority by those in ordered ministry;
- Reports of regular closed session meetings;
- Frequent irregularities in session and congregational minutes.

Properly moved and seconded, the motion to assume original jurisdiction passed and should return authority when the AC deems the elders are able to govern and the congregation engages in mediation.

The AC recommended to the COM not to renew the contract with the stated supply pastor.

The Rev. Cynthia Holder-Rich led the congregation in a Saturday full of elder training on August 19 open to all members. Twenty-one elders and four AC members attended the training session. The training session, which is essential for the commission to return jurisdiction, was attended by two of the seven elected ruling elders. Dr. Okokon Udo has been contracted to provide mediation. The first step of that mediation has been scheduled for September 15.

The Rev. Dr. Charles Tinsely, III (HR, Presbytery of San Francisco) has preached about three times a month. Other preachers have included Edgar Sánchez Cruz from Camp Wakanda and the Rev. Charles B. Hardwick, Ph.D. from the Synod of the Covenant. José Jones, a former staff member and mission co-worker, preached on September 10.

A group of congregation members submitted a petition with 41 signatures to the Administrative Commission on September 6 asking the session to call a congregational meeting. The requested purpose of the meeting was “to discuss and vote on leaving the Presbytery of the Miami Valley and the PCUSA.”

The petition included a request to have “either Rev. Terry Kukuk or Dr. Merritt Worthen to moderate this meeting.” TE M. Merritt Worthen is the former stated supply pastor whose contract expired June 30, 2023. This request demonstrates the disordered and disruptive behavior that led to the AC claiming original jurisdiction and recommending to COM not to renew the stated supply contract.

Receiving this petition was heart-breaking for members of the Administrative Commission. As the commission, we have worked to ensure ongoing worship, elder training, pastoral care, and are providing a pathway to mediation. Not everyone has chosen to participate in this on-going ministry. We are grateful to God for the many efforts made by members over the summer toward reconciliation and healing, and we reaffirmed our invitation to the congregation to the holy work of reconciliation.

The petitioners’ request does not meet the criteria for business proper to congregational meetings (G-1.0504), and this has been confirmed by ecclesial judicial cases. Calling a meeting at the request of a minimum 25% of membership is the responsibility of session (G-1.0503). The Administrative Commission, acting as session, will respond to the petition at the September session meeting.

As representatives of the Presbytery of the Miami Valley, we are fully committed to this congregation’s mission as a multi-cultural, socio-economically diverse, Reformed Christian witness in West Dayton. This is what College Hill Community Presbyterian Church has done faithfully for many decades, and this ministry is an exhibition of the Kingdom of God to the world. We have urged the congregation to remain steadfast in their faith and to continue to participate actively in the life of College Hill.

AC MEMBERS:

MWS Lucinda Isaacs (acting Moderator of the AC)

RE Gene Saunders (acting clerk of session)

MWS Cynthia Holder-Rich

RE Bridget Hawkins (acting clerk of the AC)

MWS Angie Schenck

RE Donna Courtney