

Report of the Administrative Commission
For the Taneytown Presbyterian Church

On July 24, 2018, at a duly called congregational meeting, the Taneytown Presbyterian Church requested that they be dissolved. Accordingly, acting through the Steering Cabinet, the presbytery established an Administrative Commission ‘to attend to any and all matters related to the closing of the Taneytown Presbyterian Church ... to remain in place until all issues arising from the dissolution’ were satisfactorily concluded. The following were named as members of the Commission: Ministers of the Word and Sacrament Renee Mackey and Walter Peters; and Ruling Elder Ruth Ferrence, a member of the Taneytown church.

Brief History of the Taneytown Church

In 1820, a group of English-speaking Presbyterians in Taneytown covenanted with the predominantly German-speaking Reformed Church to create a “union congregation.” These two groups combined to erect a church building that they shared – though, because of the language differences, they did not worship together in it. (There is evidence that the union congregation had hoped to secure a bi-lingual minister, but that effort was unsuccessful.) The few remaining records of the time do not indicate whether this was an arrangement approved by a presbytery. Nor is it known how (or even if) the English-speaking Presbyterian pulpit was supplied with trained clergy – though there were older existing Presbyterian congregations relatively close by in both Emmitsburg and Harney, Md, whose ministers might have provided some pastoral services.

However, it is clear that the Presbyterian part of the union church was not yet an established congregation at the time of the union agreement, because in 1828, the Presbytery of Baltimore met in the union church building and officially organized the Taneytown Presbyterian Church, as well as ordaining and installing the first pastor. For the next 55 years, Taneytown Presbyterian Church continued to share worship space with the German Reformed Church.

In January 1883, the church purchased a building lot on the Hanover Pike (now MD 194). Selling their share of the union church to the German Reformed congregation for \$300, the church contracted with John A. Dempwolf, a regionally well-regarded architect from York, PA, to design a place of worship. Mr. Dempwolf’s design was accepted in late March or early April

1883, and before the year was out, the new building was completed and dedicated. For the next 75 years, the 1883 sanctuary housed the congregation without significant change. Then, in 1959, a fellowship hall, kitchen, mechanical room, and indoor restrooms were added by raising the church structure on building jacks, installing a new foundation, and then excavating a walk-out basement with the same footprint as the sanctuary building above.

Like many small churches in small towns, Taneytown Presbyterian Church was part of a yoked field for most of its life. Ministers who served the Taneytown church also served either the Emmitsburg Presbyterian Church or the Piney Creek Presbyterian Church in Harney – and sometimes all three. In the early 20th century, Piney Creek was yoked to the New Windsor Presbyterian Church, leaving the Taneytown and Emmitsburg churches as a two-church field. The last installed pastor departed the Emmitsburg/Taneytown field in 1982. Both churches were then served by the Rev. R. Benjamin Jones as a part-time stated supply for the next 26 years. Upon his retirement in 2006, each congregation then sought separate pastoral leadership.

The Taneytown pulpit was filled by a PCUSA candidate for ministry until 2009, and then by the Rev. Lloyd Fuss, a retired minister from another denomination. During this period, PCUSA ministers from nearby churches moderated the Session. When Mr. Fuss indicated his need (because of health) to cease preaching, the congregation considered its options and decided that the time had come to conclude their ministry. A unanimous congregational vote in July 2018 requested the presbytery to dissolve the congregation. The dissolution took effect at the conclusion of the final worship service on October 14, 2018.

Actions of the Administrative Commission

In keeping with the charter and instructions given it, the Administrative Commission has done the following:

- Oversaw the concluding weeks of church life and, with the session, planned the concluding worship service on October 14, 2018, and having been delegated the authority to do so, officially dissolved the congregation, making the Presbytery the “successor in interest” to the congregation.
- Provided the Stated Clerk with a roster of the remaining eleven members at the time of dissolution.
- Transmitted church records and historical items to the Stated Clerk for safe-keeping or further transmittal to the Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia.

- Secured and re-keyed the building. Throughout the Commission's work, the empty building was physically checked at least weekly.
- Did an internal audit of the financial records. At the time of dissolution, there was approximately \$10,000 in cash in the church's checking account. There were no other financial assets. These remaining funds covered continuing bills, expenses, and necessary repairs until recently. The Trustees of the Presbytery then provided additional funds, to be reimbursed upon the sale of the property.
- Transferred the bank account and responsibility for continuing bills (electricity, heating oil, mowing, snow removal, etc.) to the Commission.
- Inventoried the contents of the building itself, selling or donating some items and retaining others for the possible use of future owners.
- Secured an appraisal of the real property for purposes of sale. The appraiser's estimate of the sale value of the real property was \$200,000.
- Sought to find interest in the property by word of mouth within the Taneytown community, showing it to interested parties and meeting with several prospective buyers. When none of these possibilities bore fruit, with the approval of the Trustees, the Commission then engaged the services of a local realtor and worked with the realtor to market the property.

Sale of the Property

After viewing the property and considering several other possibilities, the congregation of St. James the Apostle Orthodox Church in Westminster made an offer of \$205,000 for the church building. After a series of stops and starts, the sale finally closed on July 25, 2019. The Administrative Commission and the handful of one-time members of the Taneytown Presbyterian Church are delighted and grateful that the building that has so long been a spiritual home for a congregation will continue to serve that role for another group of God's people.

Recommendations:

1. That the Administrative Commission be dismissed.
2. That the presbytery offer thanks to God for the 190 years of ministry of the Taneytown Presbyterian Church, its ministers, and its members.
3. That the presbytery seek God's blessing upon the St. James the Apostle Orthodox church for its on-going ministry in the place where generations of faithful Presbyterians have worshipped and served.

Closing thoughts from the past

On July 29, 1876, the Rev. William Simonton, the pastor of the three-church yoked field of the Emmitsburg, Taneytown, and Piney Creek Presbyterian Churches, offered an extended historical discourse on the history of the three congregations. This historical outline was offered in a special service at the Piney Creek church in conjunction with the Centennial celebration of the formation of the United States of America. Shortly thereafter, his speech was distributed in the form of a printed booklet. The following excerpt is taken from the closing portion of the Rev. Simonton's address:

Truly the place whereon we stand is holy ground. It has been consecrated by the myriad earnest supplications of our pious spiritual ancestors, who through faith and patience inherit the promises. The amount of divine truth here proclaimed by a succession of God's ambassadors is very great. The communion seasons enjoyed throughout the years have been numerous. Around these what tender memories cluster! They have been times of sweet, spiritual refreshment to a succession of the living followers of the Lord Jesus. Burdened hearts have been relieved by fellowship with the precious Savior. The mourning have been comforted and assured by the tokens of His love. The weary have found rest upon the bosom of the Beloved. The fearful have been encouraged, the weak have been made strong, the faint-hearted have become courageous and unflinching soldiers of the cross.

Dr. Simonton then referenced the church graveyard, reminding his listeners that churches, like church members, do not go on forever....

The truth of the poet's words: "All the tribes that tread the earth // Are but a handful to the multitudes // That slumber in its bosom" ... is here verified on a smaller scale. The dead of our congregations far outnumber the living ... (and) the outlook is by no means cheering. Our congregations today are much weaker than they were twenty-five years ago. Should this continue as heretofore – and few signs of abatement appear – the result must be, as the fathers pass away, decreasing numbers and decreasing ability to maintain the Gospel. But even in this event, untoward as it may appear, there will still be abundant occasion to bless God that He established our churches at so early a day in this part of our land and accorded to them such measures of fruitfulness and success. The numbers they have taught and trained for usefulness here, and prepared for glory hereafter, with the strength they have given to churches in other places, are such as entitle them to the lasting respect, the sincere gratitude, and the kindly recollection of all who are acquainted with their history.