

Presbytery of Great Rivers

Report of the Administrative Commission for Buffalo Hart Presbyterian Church

At the Great Rivers Assembly meeting of February 13, 2021, the recommendation of the Committee on Ministry was approved to form an Administrative Commission to discern the future ministry and mission of the Buffalo Hart Presbyterian Church in the PCUSA.

From the beginning of our work there has been a clear sense within the commission that its work would be to complete the steps needed to release the Buffalo Hart Presbyterian Church to ECO, A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians.

On a March 7, 2021, meeting of the Buffalo Hart congregation, a motion was approved to leave PCUSA “when the way is clear.” From other sources the commission has been led to believe that the church had already been accepted into membership by ECO.

The commission met on June 6, 2021, with the Board of Directors. The commission made it clear that the meeting was intended to help bring conclusion to Buffalo Hart’s separation from PCUSA, i.e., that there would be no attempt to dissuade the church from its intention to separate.

We commended Buffalo Hart’s commitment to mission, that comprises approximately 17% of its budget. The board shared a portion of the 2020 budget, which shows a mission commitment of over \$56,000.

The clerk assured the commission that they had had contact with all members of the congregation, all of whom expressed the desire to remain members of BHPC, except for two persons who wish to leave but don’t wish to be transferred to another denomination. We subsequently verified that those two persons do not wish to affiliate with a PCUSA congregation, or wish any further assistance at present.

The church will continue to be the Buffalo Hart Presbyterian Church, as they will continue to affiliate with a Presbyterian denomination.

The commission stated in the June 6 meeting that PCUSA will not pursue information on possible church assets or assert claims on any assets. We would release the lien on their church building and grounds based on completion of the release form, a draft of which was shared. We initiated conversation on the trust clause of PCUSA polity, that we believe compels consideration of some measure of financial compensation to the denomination in response to release of church property held in trust.

Buffalo Hart drafted a separation agreement with no compensation but that does include the church’s mission commitment at a total of \$18,000 spread over several agencies. The commission approved the separation agreement in a meeting held July 21, 2021, pending approval by the congregation, and the congregation approved it in a meeting held July 25, 2021.

The agreement does specify release of all claims by either party, and spells out responsibility for Buffalo Hart to send their church records to the Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia.

We celebrate the many decades of Buffalo Hart's service to its members and community. We have no doubt that its commitment to mission will continue undiminished. We wish the congregation the blessings of service to the risen Christ as it enters a new chapter in its ministry.

The members of the commission are Karen Sams Davis, Joanne Hinds, Mark Merrill, and Gary Terpstra.