

Report from the Administrative Commission of the Stony Point Presbyterian Church

The following motion is presented for a first reading and for questions. It will be formally presented as a motion for a vote at the March Presbytery meeting

MOTION: The Presbytery of Hudson River gifts the property of the former Stony Point Presbyterian Church (Church building, educational building, and manse) to the Sweetwater Cultural Center, described in the articles of incorporation and in the by-laws attached.

RATIONALE:

The Stony Point Administrative Commission was created on September 19, 2017 by a vote of the Presbytery of Hudson River and was charged, among other tasks, to dispose of the financial assets and property of the Stony Point Presbyterian Church “in a way that will honor the congregation’s legacy and commitment as a progressive, theologically grounded presence in their community.” This language, approved by the Presbytery, was requested as part stated goals of the Administrative Commission by the Session of the Stony Point Presbyterian Church in a letter to the Stated Clerk of Hudson River Presbytery, dated August 9, 2017

The charge is the guiding document for any Administrative Commission. As noted in the Book of Order G-3.0109, “A commission is empowered to consider and conclude matters referred to it by a council. The designating council shall state specifically the scope of the commission’s powers and any restrictions on those powers.” The charge, approved by a majority vote of the Presbytery of Hudson River, has provided both our designation and restrictions, and we have been bound to be faithful to that charge.

The Sweetwater Cultural Center, to whom the property is to be transferred by this action, will be incorporated as a 501 (c) (3) non profit corporation. The stated purpose of this corporation, as noted in the by-laws attached, is “to promote the education, health and welfare of indigenous or native peoples and to preserve their cultures and ceremonial practices locally, regionally, and around the world.”

The proposed transfer of property is faithful to the charge to “honor the congregation’s legacy and commitment as a progressive, theologically grounded presence in the community.” Engagement and connection with Native American communities is a part of Presbyterian theology. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in 2016 and again in 2018 adopted overtures aimed at coming to terms with, and working in some ways to amend for, the damage caused to Native American peoples through the use of the Doctrine of Discovery, claiming the land of the indigenous peoples of the Americas for European colonization. This action is faithful to that theological commitment.

Hudson River Presbytery concurred with both of these overtures as part of their process of adoption, suggesting that our Presbytery considers these actions central to our mission locally. The overture adopted by our last General Assembly directed that Mid-Councils **should** develop and implement “a beginning strategy for entering into dialogue and action with relevant local communities.”

Being faithful to that charge, we offer this action as an approach to our responsibilities of mission and stewardship that is grounded in both the request of the former Stony Point Congregation, the charge given to the Administrative Commission by the Presbytery of Hudson River, and the mandate given to all Mid-Councils by the 2018 General Assembly regarding the Doctrine of Discovery.

Of particular note in this action:

- a) The Sweetwater Cultural Center will be a registered 501 (c) (3) corporation before the transfer of property occurs.
- b) The Presbytery of Hudson River will name two members to the Board of Directors of the Sweetwater Cultural Center for at least the first ten years of its existence. Among all the options for the disposal of the property considered by the Administrative Commission, this option was the only one that allowed for a continued Presbyterian presence.
- c) The church and educational building were valued, in a May 16, 2017 appraisal, at \$1,000,000.00. The manse was valued, at the same time, at \$215,000.00. The appraisal of the church and educational building does not take into account the existence of asbestos shingles under the current slate roof, or the water damage suffered by the educational building in December of 2018.
- c) The property will revert to Hudson River Presbytery any time in the first ten years if the Sweetwater Cultural Center dissolves. As noted in the attached by-laws, "Upon dissolution of the corporation, the Board of Directors shall utilize the corporation's assets for the payment of all obligations and liabilities, with one exception. If the corporation is less than ten years old, any property that was a gift from the Hudson River Presbytery will be returned to Hudson River Presbytery for its use."
- d) Among its other uses, the property will continue to function as a worship space. Included in the purposes of the organization is the preservation of ceremonial practices of native peoples. This action guarantees that the former Stony Point Presbyterian Church will continue, at least in part, as a place of worship. Other actions, even sales to religious organizations, do not guarantee such a result. A sale would not give continuing Presbyterian presence in the decision making about the property, and could result in use of the property for purposes not envisioned by the Presbytery.

As Presbyterians, we are simultaneously connected to all the levels of our polity. We belong to individual congregations, we belong to a Presbytery and a Synod, and we make up the General Assembly. Ideally, the actions that we take at one level of our polity support decisions made at other levels of our polity. In practice, maintaining those connections is often difficult. When we are able to take actions which reflect mission co-ordination through all the levels of our polity, they are to be celebrated. The Administrative Commission is confident in recommending this action that it is faithful to the charge given to us by the Presbytery of Hudson River, through the request of the Session of the former Stony Point Presbyterian Church. We are also confident that this action is faithful to the mandate, incumbent upon all Mid-Councils through the actions of the 223rd General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), to go beyond confession regarding our complicity in the exploitation of Native American peoples and to move forward in repentance.