

To: The Presbytery of Carlisle
From: Administrative Commission, Christ Presbyterian Church, Lebanon, PA
Date: September 23, 2020

RECOMMENDATION

The Administrative Commission (AC) recommends that the Christ Presbyterian Church (CPC) structure, land and contents be donated without compensation on an “as is” basis to True Life Ministries (TLM), a well-established youth ministry operating in the greater Lebanon area.

RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

Early in our meetings with the Session, it was clear that they desired that the church structure continue to be used by a religious organization, preferably a Christian ministry, rather than maximize its value by selling it commercially. Furthermore, our counsel advised that by donating it to a religious party, we would avoid anti-discrimination issues. As we understand it, if we placed it “on the market” we would not be able to limit the buyer to a religious party.

Secondly, as described below, the church is in need of substantial repairs that could easily exceed \$300,000 which could be a deterrent in finding a qualified buyer on a timely basis. Also, of concern was the carrying costs (fuel oil, electricity, insurance, emergency repairs) if it took more than a few months to find a buyer and close. As noted below, the church has very limited funds and at some point, carrying costs might have to be borne by the Presbytery.

Finally, the Coleman family of Lebanon was the founding family of CPC with an emphasis on ministering to children and youth which CPC has continued to foster. Given TLM’s long history and focus of ministering to young people in the Lebanon area, it is appropriate that the CPC property continue to be use as it was originally intended. These are some of the key considerations that have led to the recommendation to donate the property to TLM.

GENERAL SITUATION AT CPC

Subsequent to being formed at the December 3, 2019 meeting of the Presbytery of Carlisle, the AC has been meeting weekly as a commission and regularly with the Session. During the ensuing months, the following actions have been taken. The relationship between the Rev. Dr. John Barlow and CPC was dissolved effective March 31, 2020. A severance package was negotiated between the Rev. Barlow and the Session in accordance with Presbytery guidelines which totaled \$22,500 to be paid over a six-month period. The severance has been paid in full.

An appraisal of the church structure and real estate was prepared by Benjamin Weaver, an accredited appraiser. The estimate value was \$744,000.

The church structure is in need of substantial repair: roof replacement, mold remediation in several rooms and basement, repointing stonework, repair of French drains, tree removal and asbestos removal in basement. Estimates to accomplish these repairs exceed \$300,000. All financial assets have been liquidated and cash balances as of August 31, 2020 were \$19,462. Per capita for 2020 has been paid.

At the April 7, 2020 joint meeting of the AC and Session, the AC assumed “original jurisdiction” and both the AC and the Session agreed that the congregation be dissolved (at some future date) and that the church real estate and personal property be properly disposed with the intent of having it be used to continue a Christian ministry in the greater Lebanon community. On August 2, 2020 the church conducted its final worship service in celebration of its 150 anniversary.

TRUE LIFE MINISTRIES

TLM, formerly Lebanon Valley Youth for Christ, commenced its youth ministry in the greater Lebanon Valley area in 1945 with the purpose of communicating the life changing message of Jesus Christ to young people. Over the decades it has continued to adjust programs to the changing environment in Lebanon but always with the same purpose of reaching out to Lebanon Valley youth. In 2019, the organization changed its name to True Life Ministries.

TLM contacted CPC several months ago with an interest in renting the structure. As discussions continued and the decision was made to dispose of the structure, TLM had estimates of repairs and renovations prepared which exceed \$500,000 and notified the AC that they were very interested in taking ownership of the structure. TLM is in a very solid financial condition. With no debt, as of July 31, 2020 it has over \$600,000 in liquid assets and owns real estate in the Lebanon area valued at over \$750,000. It reported total income in 2019 of \$644,229 represented largely by annual auction income of \$126,302, pledges and gifts of \$336,432 and rental income of \$93,636. Additionally, it is in the midst of planning a capital campaign of \$300,000 – \$600,000. More information regarding TLM can be found on its web site “truelifeyouth.com”.

CONCLUSION

The AC and the Session are satisfied that TLM has adequate financial footing and the motivation to assume ownership of the church structure, make required repairs and adequately maintain and use it effectively to continue its very successful and well-established ministry to the youth of Lebanon Valley. While an auction of items in the church was considered, it was concluded that there was little value to be gained and that TLM had expressed an interest in much of it. Thus, the AC offered to donate without compensation the real estate and all items in the structure on an “as is” basis to TLM with the condition that they pay all closing costs including the appraisal fee of \$900. When the congregation is finally dissolved and after TLM takes ownership of the structure, the Session recommends donating the remaining cash assets of CPC to three local ministries: 50% to LCCM (Lebanon County Christian Ministries), 25% to Coleman Park (closely associated with the Coleman family) and 25% to Church of the Living God (a Hispanic ministry that had expressed interest in the church structure). Both the AC and the Session believe that this recommendation represents the best use of the church structure for the greater glory of God and the furtherance of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the greater Lebanon area.