

Presbytery Team appointed by Leadership Cabinet: George Goodrich, Jamie Schmeling, and Dan Krebill

Motion: *That the Yellowstone Presbytery vote to close the Federated Church in Harlowton on June 28, 2020, at the request of the Federated Church and that the details be finalized and reported to the Leadership Cabinet and the Presbytery after proposed agreement has been reached with the MountainSky Conference of the United Methodist Church.*

The Methodists have taken the proper lead in this venture. The general plan that is being worked out is as follows:

- A. **The Congregation would like to give the building to the School District** (Which has shown interest) for a Head Start Program to be based in the building. The Methodist Trustees are in general agreement with this plan so as not to have to care for a decaying building. No one is likely to buy the building in Harlowton; the school district and town continue to decline. The Church would like to leave the building as a legacy to the town as a parting gift. The Food Pantry, which uses space in the downstairs of the Church, would likely continue.
 - a. **To be clarified: Will the school district take title to the church building? Hopefully, yes.**
 - b. **To be clarified: Will the MountainSky Conference retain the Manse to serve the three other UMC congregations currently served in the charge?**
- B. **The Methodist District believes that all the internal materials** may be given to Church families or to members or agencies in the community who may find value or use for them. **We agree.**
- C. **Records:** Clerk Susan Bealy indicates they have records from the Presbyterian Church of the Federation going back to about 1902, which she will send on to us for us to send on to the PCUSA Historical Society in Philadelphia. I am unclear as to how the minutes of the federated church should be handled. **We have suggested that all minutes may be forwarded to the Presbyterian Historical Society for preservation and electronic access.**
- D. **There are likely to be some funds left over from the church accounts** following closure. The Church would like to make donations to such missions and agencies as Intermountain, or a local Christian Radio Station, which we think is a great idea. **We are proposing that some of the remaining funds should rightly go to the UMC District and the Yellowstone Presbytery for on-going mission and new church development. Proportions for any distribution have not been established as yet.**
- E. **The Closing Worship Service is scheduled for June 28, 2020,** but may have to be adjusted due to Covid-19 complications and State directives. Patty Agnew, in the UMC District Office is interfacing with the church for planning that service. The presbytery has been invited and will be included in the leadership of this service

Possible Questions:

- A. If the presbytery does not enter prominently into negotiations with the Church leadership and the UMC District to secure a sizable settlement from the property, ***are we setting some precedent for other Churches that may leave the denomination?*** After consulting with Deborah, I think not...
 - a. **This is a sad closure, not an acrimonious** spilt from which an on-going church will emerge.

b. The dying wish of the church is to seed new life and mission in Harlowton.

- B. **Is the Church likely to launch a new, independent church in the building?** Not likely with any of the current congregation who are tired and exhausted. If the school district were to lease space for a new church, that would not likely involve current membership, and that would be School District business.
- C. **Would we want to use the building for a new church in Harlowton?**
- i. Very doubtful, especially in a post-Covid-19 age when church plants are likely to be in house and more virtual.
 - ii. And we have no one in the wings with a vision to lead one. Nor is such a plant part of our current thinking.
- D. **What if the school district decides not to accept the building,** or in the near future decides to sell? Should the UMC District and the Presbytery be named as beneficiaries to such a subsequent sale as the building would not being used for the intended donated use?
- E. **What if an emerging new church would like to rent or purchase the building from us,** if the gifting to the School District falls through? We think, "Yes."

Next Steps:

1. **We copy** in on all e-mails with the church and the Methodist District. **We are awaiting a response from the UMC DS on when and how to pursue negotiations.**
2. **We review and input to the proposal the District and the Church are drawing up for closure and dispersal of property.** This may not be finalized due to Covid-19 until after the proposed closure date, but will be accomplished. That this team concur with, the Leadership Cabinet concur and recommend the proposal to the presbytery for its approval.
3. **We plan for representatives from the presbytery to attend and participate in the service of closure on Sunday, June 28, 2020,** or on whatever date is finally determined.