

**The Administrative Commission for the West-Park Presbyterian Church**  
**Report to Presbytery**  
**November 16, 2010**

The AC was unable to include a written report in time for distribution through the meeting packets due to the number of variables still unresolved at the time of the deadline. We regret that this was the case, but a written report several weeks ago simply would have been only a snapshot of processes in motion that might have been misleading on their own. This report now represents a reasonable summary of what has been transpiring at West-Park Church and our projections for the next few months.

### **The Challenges**

Congregational finances have continued to be in a state of acute crisis. At the end of October 2010, the congregation only had a little less than \$25,000 left in its cash and savings account, and it continued to be running an average monthly deficit of around \$17,500 a month. Under those circumstances, the congregation would have become insolvent sometime in December, which was raising considerable concern both on the AC and on West-Park's Session about the prospects for the congregation's continued mission beyond the end of 2010.

At the same time, an interesting conversation regarding a potential redevelopment partnership for the church property was taking shape. A group of potential partners has begun a discussion with the West-Park Session regarding the idea of a "Center at West-Park," a "community of communities" that would share the church property in a covenantal relationship that would include income to stabilize the church's finances as well as to begin redeveloping the property itself for suitable use within the constrictions of the building's landmark status. While it would be inappropriate to disclose names at this point, interested parties include several well-established organizations on the Upper West Side dedicated to the arts and/or social justice and community service.

The practical and legal challenges of such a partnership are daunting. In any case, though, *the AC has made it very clear that any plan that it would advise the presbytery to approve must include, at a minimum: 1) a clear plan for stabilizing the church's finances on a long-term basis; 2) a clear plan for empowering and fulfilling an authentic and holistic congregational mission; and 3) the maintenance of clear ownership of the property by the PC(USA) in any kind of shared use arrangement.* Given the complexity of developing such a suitable partnership, the most obvious immediate challenge, is time. However, three things have transpired to make that challenge slightly less pressing.

### **The Plan**

First, the Session has raised an additional \$20,000 from its potential partners in the form of a "planning grant." The Session reported to the AC that this money is undesignated in its use, and is understood by the donors to be used for congregational operations to enable to congregation to explore the possible partnership. The only restriction on it is that it must be returned if the Presbytery decided to dissolve the congregation at this November 2010 meeting. This results in the congregation having \$45,300 for operations between the beginning of November 2010 and the end of January 2011.

Second, the Session has adopted a thrifty congregational budget that will reduce the average net monthly deficit to approximately \$15,000, for a total of \$45,100 in projected expenses. *The AC feels a responsibility to highlight to the Presbytery how extremely thin the margin of error is in this budget.* Nevertheless, the budget seems to be reasonable in its assumptions and solid in its projections and it keeps the congregation solvent until at least the next Presbytery meeting, assuming that the budget is

actually followed and there are no unforeseen expenses. It is also important to remember that the congregation retains the assets of the church property itself and a 2-bedroom manse, while maintaining only one lingering liability from the landmarking battle.

Third, the Session has developed a reasonable plan for exploring whether this potential partnership is viable and wise. The plan basically breaks down as follows:

1. Between now and January 7, 2011, the Session will raise funds sufficient to continue congregational operations until at least March 2011. The Session understands that these are to be actual funds in hand, *not* simply pledges. The Session will make clear that funds being raised are to maintain congregational operations while the partnership is explored, not for the building or for the partnership itself.
2. By January 21, 2011, the Session will have developed a "strong outline" of a partnership plan that the AC can review and potentially bring to the Presbytery for conceptual affirmation at its January meeting.
3. By March 11, 2011, the Session will have developed an actionable plan for developing the partnership that includes hard financial figures for both the partnership plan and the congregation's long-term finances, as well as a clear congregational mission plan.

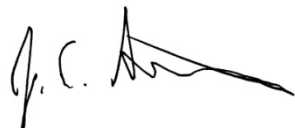
### **The Concerns**

The AC feels a responsibility to highlight several concerns in this process. Having spent considerable time with the church leadership in discussing this plan and with the church financial statements to determine the projections there, the AC has no illusions that this plan will not be extremely difficult to pull off in a way that works for all parties involved. There is also the extreme financial vulnerability of the congregation during this time; any additional expenses may be enough to push the congregation into insolvency before the Presbytery could intervene. The AC also feels that sufficient attention has not yet been paid to the holistic mission of the church; its current vision seems limited to social justice initiatives and to basic worship and fellowship activities. The AC has advised the Session that it needs to develop vigorous ministries of evangelism and spiritual formation/discipleship or the church risks not only being swallowed up by this partnership if it comes to pass, but losing its basic identity as (and responsibility to be) a missional community as envisioned in chapter III of the Form of Government.

### **The Current Advice to Presbytery**

However, the AC believes that the church has positioned itself as well as possible for pursuing this possibility, that it seems reasonable to expect the church to remain solvent until the next Presbytery meeting, and that there are no other options for solidifying the long-term prospects of the congregation on the horizon (with the possible exception of a property sale). ***Therefore, the AC advises the Presbytery to allow the congregation to pursue the first two parts of the plan described above, recognizing all its challenges***, with the words of Gamaliel in its ears: "if this plan or this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them." (Act 5:38-39, NRSV)

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Administrative Commission,



The Rev. J.C. Austin, Chair