

Administrative Commission for the Turn of River Presbyterian Church
Final Report
Andre Castillo, Armin Thies, Joan Priest

The Turn of River Church (TORCH) served as a Christian witness in Stamford, CT since 1861, becoming a Presbyterian congregation in 1955. On January 28, 2022, the moderator of the session (Rev. Joan Priest) communicated the session's request that the presbytery arrange for the dissolution of the church.

At the February 2022 Presbytery Meeting, the then Committee on Ministry recommended the establishment of an Administrative Commission to work in partnership with the Session of the TORCH, at their request, to assess that Church's continuing viability for ministry and mission. Andre Castillo (serving on Trustees), Armin Thies (then on the Committee on Ministry), and Joan Priest (Moderator of TORCH Session since September 2021) were voted onto the AC.

In March 2022 at joint meeting of the AC and the Session of TORCH, it was determined that the congregation understood it was no longer viable and had come to terms with dissolving the congregation. The AC's first priority was the spiritual and pastoral care of the members as the AC took over accounts, paying all necessary bills, and took over managing the property, keeping in close contact with their custodian, Andy Ginolfi, who rents the small house located on the property. The AC also kept in contact with those renting the space during the week which included an AA Group, an Indian Prayer Group, and a Senior Exercise Class. Preparations were made for their final Worship Service and closing celebration, including gathering pictures and historical records for the Presbytery.

At the May 2022 Presbytery Meeting a presentation was made in recognition and celebration of TORCH.

On June 26, 2022 TORCH held its final worship service and a celebration of their 161 years as a congregation. Joan Priest, representing the Presbytery, participated in the service along with their temporary supply pastor, The Rev. Robert Rodriguez, and the current Presbytery Moderator Nicole Aronson spoke at the celebration.

During the summer of 2022, thanks mainly to Armin Thies, a final clean out of the church began with disposal of some items in a rented dumpster and a catalogue of items was sent to the churches in the Presbytery. Items such as Bibles, Hymnals and materials such as furniture were distributed to interested churches, and a staging of the property began for its sale.

The original Deed Covenant specified that the church property must maintain its religious affiliation or use of the land reverts back to the original owners or their heirs. Andre Castillo commissioned an Assessment of the Property in April, 2022. The estimated value of the property was deemed to be roughly \$1.45M on the open market. In April of 2022, Andre worked with local Real Estate Legal firms to determine the viability of the Deed restriction. The AC obtained three very small offers from local churches but determined they were not appropriate stewardship of this resource for the Presbytery.

In November 2023 an offer was made by Deliverance Center World Ministries of \$850,000. It was decided by the AC that because the lawyers were having a difficult time finding an heir of the original owners in order to change the original deed and because there

wasn't a local volunteer base to make the space into something the Presbytery could use in the future, that this offer would be presented to the Trustees.

After many months of continually helping to maintain the property, utilities, and mail, Armin Thies resigned from his role with the AC, effective December 1, 2023.

In January 2024, the offer was approved by the Trustees and the Agreement was signed on January 19, 2024. Upon Presbytery approval, the TORCH Property and the Corporation will close on March 27, 2024.

In accordance with current building use agreements, the current weekday groups who use the building will be given at least 30 days notice to end their rental, with the option of contacting the new congregation to determine future use. The Custodian will also be given 30 days notice which will end his position and be asked to vacate his rental property. Reserve cash previously held by TORCH and proceeds from the sale of the property will be referred to the Trustees and Presbytery for use toward ongoing and future mission and ministry, to be determined.