

Administrative Commission for the Nueva Esperanza Presbyterian Church
Presbytery of St. Augustine

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE STATED MEETING OF PRESBYTERY
OCTOBER 3, 2017

I. Members of the Administrative Commission

David Pierce, Teaching Elder and Co-chair for the Commission
Cathy Sanders, Ruling Elder and Co-chair for the Commission
Mary Brown, Ruling Elder and Secretary for the Commission
Larry Green, Teaching Elder and Translator for the Commission

II. A Brief History and Timeline of the Administrative Commission's Work

April 25, 2017 - Organizing and planning meeting:

The AC reviewed a detailed report provided to the Committee on Ministry dated March 8, 2017, concerning the difficulties at the Nueva Esperanza Presbyterian Church. It was the final report generated by the COM's Crisis Response Team before the Presbytery of St. Augustine elected this Administrative Commission to "inquire into and settle the difficulties therein..." G-3.0109b (5).

May 9, 2017 – Orientation of AC responsibilities by Clerk of Presbytery:

After the orientation provided by Sandra Hedrick, Clerk of Presbytery, the Administrative Commission began its prayerful planning. From the beginning the Administrative Commission was determined to focus on reconciliation and wholeness as our goals for the members of the congregation; it was decided to use a personal and pastoral approach to the difficulties found within this racial-ethnic ministry setting.

June 4, 2017 (Pentecost Sunday) – The meetings with the congregation began:

The Administrative Commission began its work by arranging a fellowship meal with the entire congregation (food provided by the commission members). A worship and praise service followed the meal in the congregation's usual worship space, located in the Kirkwood Presbyterian Church sanctuary. The members of the Nueva Esperanza Presbyterian congregation conducted the worship service in the Spanish language; however, the worship meditation was provided in Spanish by Larry Green, member of the Administrative Commission. Time was provided for personal testimonies as a way to affirm our unifying faith in Jesus Christ and our joint love for the church.

It was after a fellowship meal and a joint worship that the Administrative Commission introduced itself and its mission with the congregation. Care was taken to begin our

work and our listening within the context of our common commitment to the health and well-being of Christ's church.

Members of the Administrative Commission did not discern any resistance to our presence or any sense of resentment that a commission of the presbytery had been appointed. The relationship between the AC and the members of the congregation began in trust, and a respectful atmosphere seemed to predominate throughout the entire AC / Congregational relationship.

June 8, 2017 and June 15, 2017 – Listening sessions with members of the church:

Listening sessions were arranged so that any member or visitor of the Nueva Esperanza Presbyterian Church could talk to the Administrative Commission (AC) in person, or by phone. The listening sessions were generally unstructured so that members could begin by telling the AC what they wished for the AC to know about their experiences or concerns within the congregation; follow-up questions by members of the Administrative Commission for additional information or clarification often came at the end of each listening session. Listening sessions were closed with prayer, and the persons interviewed were thanked.

The final two listening appointments were with the two ruling elders, who comprised the church session at that time. They each met with the AC by themselves. These meetings lasted longer than the others, but both elders were given all the time they wanted to help us understand their perspectives and experiences.

Furthermore, all available session minutes, congregational meeting minutes, and minutes of unofficial "leader meetings" were read by the Administrative Commission. These date back to January 9, 2015. The finances of the church have been examined and the latest bank statement was received by the Administrative Commission.

The assets of the church have been inventoried, accounted for, and their whereabouts are known by the Administrative Commission.

June 22, 2017 – General Findings of the Administrative Commission Summarized:

The Administrative Commission finds that the present membership at Nueva Esperanza Presbyterian Church is quite small but enthusiastic about their personal faith in Jesus Christ. A love for corporate worship and a desire to reach out to the local Hispanic population in the area seem evident and commendable. But there are also heart-breaking realities present within the membership making it difficult for them to function as a Presbyterian church.

The following were some of those findings by the Administrative Commission.

1. There was no functioning session. There was no present Clerk of Session, as the former clerk had resigned her office. There was no moderator of session, as

the former moderator's employment contract ended and was not renewed. The two ruling elders who remained on session had a working relationship that involved neither trust nor open communications when church matters or worship were involved.

2. Using the "levels of conflict" as proposed by Speed Leas (The Center for Congregational Health), it appeared to the Administrative Commission that the church was at "Level Five Conflict: Intractable Situations." This means there is "no longer clear understanding of the issue(s); personalities have become the focus. Conflict is now unmanageable. Energy is centered on the elimination and/or destruction of the person(s) with whom they disagree." (*Definition as given by Speed Leas*).
3. The underlying platform, on which the discouragement in the congregation stands, is most likely the devastating decline in membership. This can be traced to the loss of pastoral leadership in years past.

III. Actions Taken by the Administrative Commission

The Administrative Commission has already taken the following actions:

1. The Administrative Commission assumed original jurisdiction of the existing session. (G-3.0303e)
2. The Administrative Commission appointed the Reverend Sandra Hedrick as moderator of session. (G-1.0504) and (G-3.0104)

This appointment was unrelated to her role as Clerk of Presbytery; rather, it was deemed appropriate in light of her existing role as moderator of the session at Kirkwood Presbyterian Church (where the Nueva Esperanza congregation worships). The Reverend Sandra Hedrick has a history of being trusted and esteemed by the folks at Nueva Esperanza.

3. The Administrative Commission, as session, elected ruling elder Mary L. Brown as Clerk of Session. (G-3.0104)
4. The Administrative Commission, as session, re-elected Carmen Menendez (member of Nueva Esperanza) as the Church Treasurer. (G-3.0205)
5. The Administrative Commission, as session, designated Carmen Menendez and Cathy Sanders as signatories for the church bank account. (G-3.0205b)
6. The Administrative Commission, as session, purchased liability insurance for Nueva Esperanza Presbyterian Church as required. (G-3.0112)

7. The Administrative Commission, as session, elected ruling elder Richard Corey as Worship Coordinator to oversee weekly worship arrangements. (W-1.4004)
8. The Administrative Commission called a meeting of the congregation for July 23, 2017, to discuss its findings, decisions and potential recommendations to the October 2017 Stated Meeting of the Presbytery of St. Augustine. (G-1.0502)
9. The Administrative Commission held a session meeting on August 2, 2017, where the Nueva Esperanza session concurred with the Presbytery's Board of Trustees in their decision to list the Normandy Property with Garnett Commercial Real Estate, Inc., at the price recommended by the real estate firm. The Administrative Commission subsequently called a meeting of the congregation for August 20, 2017, for the purpose of presenting the real estate listing and price to the church members. (G-3.0205, G-1.0502 and G-1.0503d)

IV. Recommendations to the Stated Meeting of Presbytery

It is moved by the Administrative Commission that the following actions be approved by vote of the Presbytery:

1. It is moved that the Presbytery of St. Augustine direct its Committee on Ministry (or its equivalent committee / task force within the emerging presbytery structure) to establish a liaison relationship with the folks at Nueva Esperanza to guide them and oversee their application to become part of the 1001 Worshiping Communities in the Presbyterian Church (USA).
2. It is moved that the Presbytery of St. Augustine dissolve Nueva Esperanza Presbyterian Church as a congregation with the effective date of the dissolution being stipulated as the date when the Committee on Ministry (or its equivalent committee / task force within the emerging presbytery structure) affirms that the way is clear for the folks at Nueva Esperanza to become part of the 1001 Worshiping Communities in the Presbyterian Church (USA).
3. It is moved that the Presbytery of St. Augustine reaffirm the current and ongoing language (as already established by the Committee on Ministry); namely, the proceeds from the sale of the Normandy property will be designated "for the support of Hispanic Ministries of the Presbytery of St. Augustine."
4. It is moved that the Presbytery of St. Augustine provide financial assistance to the Nueva Esperanza Worshiping Community in the amount of \$1,000 per month for a period of one year so that they may have the "seed money" to develop their programs and provide for worship leadership as they grow into their new identity. This money would be paid back to the presbytery upon the sale of the Normandy property.

5. It is moved that the current Administrative Commission be dismissed by the presbytery on the same date that the Nueva Esperanza Presbyterian Church is dissolved as a congregation.