

West Fayette Presbyterian Church Administrative Commission
Final Report to the Presbytery of Geneva
January 2023

A Brief History of West Fayette Presbyterian Church

Main source: materials from the celebration of the church's 175th Anniversary (August 2000)

In 1823, several members of the Romulus First Presbyterian Church met with the goal of forming a new church in West Fayette. Trustees were elected, land was donated, and in 1824 a church building was constructed. On September 6, 1825, the new church was recognized as the West Fayette Presbyterian Church by the Presbytery of Geneva. The first pastor was the Rev. Isaac Flagler and the last was Pastor Stephen Beals who served the congregation from 2008 to 2020.

The cemetery next to the church was originally owned by the church but was deeded to the West Fayette Cemetery Association in 1864. The last burial of a church member in the cemetery was only about 3 years ago.

Land next to the church was purchased in 1865 and a house was purchased and moved to this land to serve as the parsonage. The parsonage was home to many pastors and their families over the years. Once it was no longer needed as a parsonage, the house was rented out and in 1997 it was sold to its tenants.

The church building has been added to and improved during its nearly 200 years as a house of worship. Additions included a belfry, rooms at the north end of the church, a wing with offices and Sunday School rooms, and a fellowship hall and kitchen from which many community meals have been prepared and served.

The church has joined with area churches in shared ministry throughout its history. The longest formal relationship was with the Romulus First Presbyterian Church; the two churches were yoked from 1980 through 1994.

Known as “The small church with a BIG heart,” the West Fayette Church is famous in Seneca County and beyond for its chicken and pork barbecues and its Advent Community Concert & Carol Sing. These events brought neighbors together for fellowship and provided needed funds to support the work of the church. Other mission projects of the church have included providing emergency assistance for community members, especially through the Seneca County House of Concern; providing scholarships for youth attending Camp Whitman; contributing to the Presbytery’s 2 Cents a Meal Program; and to many special offerings, including the Presbyterian Women’s Birthday Offering, Church World Service’s Blanket Offering, and special offerings of the PC(USA).

Summary of the work of the Administrative Commission (AC)

In accordance with the Charge approved at the September 22, 2020 regular meeting of the Presbytery of Geneva, the following work has been completed:

Congregational meetings

Duly called congregational meetings were held on November 8, 2020 and December 6, 2020 to discuss the future of the church, the role of the Administrative Commission (AC) and to act on the recommendations of the AC. The congregational meetings were announced at least two Sundays ahead of time and all members for whom addresses (email or USPS) could be found were informed of the meetings and their purpose.

At the congregational meeting held on November 8, 2020 after worship, options for the future of the church were discussed along with the role of the AC and the steps that would be involved in closing the church, if that was the decision of the congregation. Those present reluctantly agreed that closure would be the likely outcome and set a date to start an inventory of the contents of the church and discuss which items should be returned to families who donated them, offered to other churches, or donated to the Seneca County House of Concern. A second congregational meeting was set for December 6, 2020 to vote on dissolution.

At the December 6, 2020 congregational meeting the following recommendations of the AC were approved unanimously by the members present:

- That the West Fayette Presbyterian Church and its corporation be dissolved;
- That the last worship service be on January 3, 2021;
- Debts and other obligations of the church, if any, be satisfied;
- The contents of the church be donated, sold or disposed of as the AC determines after discussion with the congregation, giving first priority to returning items donated by members to their family;
- The church real property be transferred to the Presbytery of Geneva and offered for sale;
- The corporation be dissolved, as soon as the way is clear.

The congregation also unanimously

- Authorized the AC to take any further actions on the Congregation's behalf necessary or advisable to complete the disposition of property and the dissolution of the West Fayette Presbyterian Church and Corporation.
- Recommended to the Presbytery of Geneva that funds from the sale of the church's real estate and any other funds transferred from the West Fayette Presbyterian Church to the Presbytery of Geneva be donated in the following way: 40% to the Seneca County House of Concern, 20% to Pathway House, 20% to Safe Harbors of the Finger Lakes, and 20% to the Varick Fire Department.
- Affirmed that the reading and approval of the minutes of the December 6, 2020 meeting be deferred until the next meeting of the AC.

Note: Although the congregation voted to transfer the church property to the Presbytery of Geneva and then be sold, the property was sold before it had to be transferred to the Presbytery of Geneva.

Arrange for the pastoral care of church members

The Rev. Daniel Russell served the congregation as temporary supply pastor during the months of discussion about dissolution of the church (August 2020 – January 3, 2021). His worship services provided much needed support and compassion for members of the West Fayette congregation.

The AC approved the baptism of AvaLea Grace Saunders and she was baptized by Rev. Russell during the worship service on December 13, 2020.

Working as the session, in January 2021 the AC informed all members that the congregation had voted to dissolve the church and invited them to contact the AC if they would like their membership transferred to another church. They were informed that their membership would be held by the Presbytery of Geneva if no instructions were received about transfer. Names and contact information for individuals who were still members at the time of the dissolution have been sent to the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery.

A final worship service celebrating the life and ministry of the congregation was held at the church on Sunday January 3, 2021. The Rev. Dan Russell officiated.

A service to recognize the ministry of the West Fayette Presbyterian Church was held during the September 28, 2021 presbytery meeting.

Financial status and management of financial assets and obligations

Financial assets: At the establishment of the AC (9/2020), the church's assets included:

Generations Bank checking account	\$2,371.99
Nationwide accounts	\$28,514.18
Building and land	\$130,000.00

A financial review of the Treasurer’s books for 2020 found no issues of concern. There were no outstanding debts or obligations at that time or at the closing of accounts. There were no bequest stipulations on any accounts. Repairs to the church roof were completed in December 2020 and paid from a Nationwide account (\$17,800). The books were certified by Bonnie Saunders (balanced with bank statement) on September 30, 2021. Bonnie Saunders continued to serve as church treasurer until the property was sold, all bills paid, and the church bank account was closed.

A public notice about the upcoming closure of the church was published.

The church bank account was closed on March 24, 2022 and a bank check for the balance of \$4,525.67 was sent to the presbytery on March 26, 2022.

Securing the Session records

All church records still with the church, including Session minutes, church registers, and other financial and legal records have been organized. These have been or will be delivered to the

Presbyterian Historical Society PC(USA) archives in Philadelphia. Older records had already been sent to the Presbyterian Historical Society.

Plan for the future ownership of the property

Church inventory: An inventory of church belongings was completed and a list of available items was shared with the presbytery. Some items found a home at Camp Whitman, Ovid Federated Church, Lyons First Presbyterian Church, or Trinity Federated Church in Naples. Photographs and other historical memorabilia were offered to the Seneca County Historical Society. Items from the craft room and the rummage sale room were taken to the Seneca County House of Concern. The Lakeland Mennonite Church gladly accepted remaining items including sanctuary pews and cushions, pulpit, baby grand piano, communion table, Bibles, and hymnals.

Selling the church building and property: We contracted with a Century 21 realtor to sell the church property. The property was valued at \$156,000 and this was the asking price.

Steinbrenner Law Offices, LLC, of Rochester, NY served as our attorney for the sale of the church property.

Following approval by the Administrative Commission (August 18, 2021), the Presbytery of Geneva (August 24, 2021) and the Supreme Court of the State of New York County of Seneca (November 18, 2021), the real property of the West Fayette Presbyterian Church was sold to the Lakeland Mennonite Church for a sale price of \$130,000 (December 28, 2021 closing). Seller credits and debits brought the amount due at closing to \$122,602.71. Seller's additional disbursements, fees and credits brought the net proceeds due to the West Fayette Presbyterian Church to \$110,800.02.

The AC recommended to Presbytery that proceeds from the sale (\$110,800) be disbursed to the following organizations, as recommended by the congregation: Seneca County House of Concern (40%; \$44,320); Pathway Home (20%; \$22,160); Safe Harbors of the Finger Lakes (20%; \$22,160); Varick Fire Department (20%; \$22,160).

Dissolution of the West Fayette Presbyterian Church

Following approval by the Administrative Commission (August 18, 2021), AC representatives signed the verified petition to the Supreme Court of the State of New York, County of Seneca to dissolve the corporation of the church.

The Supreme Court of the State of New York County of Seneca dissolved the West Fayette Presbyterian Church (March 9, 2022).

On March 15, 2022 the *Finger Lakes Times* published a front page article about the closing of the church and the donations made to local organizations.

Respectfully submitted,

The Administrative Commission of the West Fayette Presbyterian Church
David Ashby TE, Catherine Foerster RE, John Milne TE (chair), Elizabeth Newell RE
(clerk), M.J. Pershing RE, and David Saunders RE