

**ON GIFTS TO UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST-RELATED CONTINUING CARE  
RETIREMENT COMMUNITIES WITHIN THE GEOGRAPHIC BOUNDARIES OF  
THE PENN WEST CONFERENCE**

**Submitted by Saint Paul's United Church of Christ, Imler Pa**

**SUMMARY**

On December 10, 1867 in Butler, PA, the Pittsburgh Synod of the German Reformed Church in the United States established a home to care for destitute orphaned children. The home was moved to Greenville PA on February 24, 1909 in new facilities constructed through contributions from the Reformed congregations of western Pennsylvania. Through the years, the community underwent numerous transformations, and its emphasis shifted over time from caring for orphans to caring for the elderly. In 1974, another related institution known as the Dorseyville Home for the Aged closed and merged its efforts with St. Paul's. Today, this amazing place is known as St. Paul's Continuing Care Community, and it remains in Greenville PA.

In 1929, George C. Pearson, an elder in Christ Reformed Church in Cavetown MD, left a bequest to the Potomac Synod of the German Reformed Church in the United States to establish an "old-folks home." Over time, this effort grew into a network of facilities in Maryland and Pennsylvania that became known as Homewood Retirement Centers. The Rev. Samuel Givler was instrumental in working to construct a 67 resident facility in Martinsburg that was dedicated on January 7, 1974. That facility has grown and expanded into the Continuing Care Retirement Community known as Homewood at Martinsburg. In 2007, Homewood constructed its sixth community, Homewood at Spring House Estates, located in Everett PA.

On July 4, 1921, the Hungarian Reformed Federation of America (HRFA) opened an orphanage to provide for the many children left without means of support following the Darr Coal Mine explosion in Smithton PA. The orphanage was located in Ligonier PA. Again, over time, the emphasis of care shifted from orphans to the elderly, and today, Bethlen Communities serves as a Continuing Care Retirement Community, having affiliations with the Hungarian Reformed Church in America and the Calvin Synod Conference of the United Church of Christ.

All four of these facilities have a relationship to the United Church of Christ and are located within the geographic boundaries of the Penn West Conference. It has been the practice of the Penn West Conference to agree that Clarion, Lake Erie, Pittsburgh, Somerset, and Westmoreland Associations would relate to and support St. Paul's, and Juniata Association would relate to and support Homewood at Martinsburg. This agreement worked for a number of years, but as a long-term mission partnering strategy, it has proven to be problematic. Intended or not, it has led to a sense of competition for mission-giving dollars among partners who have similar goals. When appeals for help to the Conference are made, the question of "turf" has had a dividing influence on people with loyalties to these different communities. The imbalance of an arrangement where five Associations relate to one Continuing Care Retirement Community and one relates to another have raised questions of fairness over time. Perhaps most importantly, these organizations are all part of our United Church of Christ family. They could be working together to share best practices and draw the best out of each other. The arrangement of the past has not encouraged this kind of sharing.

## **BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL RATIONALE**

To care for those most vulnerable in our society is one of the highest, most important mandates in scripture. James writes, “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world” (James 1:27 NRSV). Many other passages echo similar themes: “Learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow” (Isaiah 1:17 NRSV). And again, “The Lord watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow” (Psalm 146:9a NRSV). The biblical theme of compassion toward those in need is at the heart of Christian faith.

Similarly, a central theme in scripture is a call to unity in Christian life. The author of Ephesians writes, “I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). The very motto of the United Church of Christ also speaks to this theme in the Gospel of John, “I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:20-21). The very idea of covenantal life that is at the heart of the theology of the United Church of Christ is that we are better when we work together than when we try to go it alone.

## **TEXT OF THE MOTION**

Whereas, the four afore-mentioned Continuing Care Retirement Communities are all United Church of Christ related organizations within the geographic boundaries of the Penn West Conference; and

Whereas, the call to care for those who are served by these Continuing Care Retirement Communities and the call to work together for unity in Christian life are clear mandates of scripture; and

Whereas, all four of these Continuing Care Retirement Communities share a common goal of providing excellent care for their residents; and

Whereas, the past mission-giving and relational stance of Penn West Conference toward these organizations has proven to be problematic; and

Whereas, the Constitution of the United Church of Christ states, “The basic unit of the life and organization of the United Church of Christ is the Local Church” (Article V, Paragraph 9).

Therefore be it resolved, that Saint Paul’s United Church of Christ, in Imler, through the Penn West Conference encourages all four of these Continuing Care Retirement Communities to work together in unity, share best practices with each other, and learn from one another as a missional extension of our family of faith.

Be it further resolved that the Penn West Conference as a whole agrees to relate missionally and relationally with all four of these Continuing Care Retirement Communities, with the provision that in the case of Bethlen Communities, such relationship does not interfere with its relationship with the Calvin Synod Conference of the United Church of Christ.

Be it further resolved that all members of local churches and all local churches of the Penn West Conference are urged to relate to and to support with mission giving at least one of these Continuing Care Retirement Communities. This urging is rooted in Biblical mandates to care for those in need, relational ties that these organizations have to the ministry of the Penn West Conference, and is done in keeping with the polity and practice of the United Church of Christ.

### **FUNDING**

Funding for the implementation of this resolution will be made on an at-will basis by the individuals and local churches of the Penn West Conference.

### **IMPLEMENTATION**

The Penn West Conference will work with these four Continuing Care Retirement Communities to assist them in building the kind of relationship described in this resolution. It will also work with individuals and local churches in helping to nurture relationships between them and these Continuing Care Retirement Communities. It also agrees to make provisions for gifts to be directed to these Continuing Care Retirement Communities as designated by the givers.

*Presented to the full Congregation of Saint Paul's United Church of Christ, Imler PA on January 29, 2017.  
February 12, 2017, Motion entered to approve resolution and forward to Penn West Conference  
Motion ~ Mrs Michelle Buttry Motion properly seconded by Mrs Patty Koontz*

*Motion accepted, and following period of discussion, and agreement, Motion passed by **unanimous vote***

*Signed Mrs Lois K Ickes, Consistory President  
pastor James F Neatrou*