April 8, 2026

Dear Colleagues of the Pacific Northwest Conference of the United Church of Christ,

As the District Executive Team of the Pacific Northwest District Church of the Brethren, we (Debbie Roberts, Howard Ullery and Lani Wright) are writing partly to inform you of the recent sale of the Columbia Lakewood Community Church property, a dually aligned UCC/CoB congregation, and partly to invite a discussion regarding the proceeds of the sale of that property. Howard has been in touch with Conference Minister Phil Hodson regarding the formal dissolution of the congregation after membership dwindled due to death and illness. We had conflict with the congregation who had been renting the building and who later assumed ownership because the keys were given to them by the last remaining attender of the Columbia Lakewood congregation. He was willing to sign the Columbia Lakewood congregation's bank account over to the renting congregation as well. The Pacific Northwest District Church of the Brethren became involved when the son of Columbia Lakewood's former secretary expressed his concern in a call to us (as well as to PNWCUCC, he said). Our district leadership had a number of conversations with him and for the past year and a half, our CoB district (PNWD) has had several meetings with the renting congregation, Spiritual Blessings, clarifying that their congregation, who assumed ownership without legal basis to do so, indeed did not have legal ownership of the building and property. We continually emphasized that since the congregation is neither UCC nor CoB affiliated, they could not assume that because they were handed the keys, this indicated ownership.

The history of our PNWD relationship to PNWCUCC in the past 10-15 years, specifically regarding our mutual relationship with the Columbia Lakewood congregation, has been a bit unsteady. When UCC Pastor Jeff Barker was asked to resign from the Columbia Lakewood congregation around 2012, he was devastated and felt he needed support from district and regional leadership. CoB Area Minister, Carol Mason, stepped in to offer counsel from a Church of the Brethren perspective. Later she was joined by then PNWD District Executive, Colleen Michael, to invite UCC input in the process for a pastoral search. Carol's notes show that the PNWCUCC then Conference Minister, Mike Denton, did not return phone calls regarding a collaborative effort in the search. She twice spoke with an office administrator who passed along Mike's response that PNWD should simply "go ahead with whatever they want to do." Carol was especially interested in UCC policy regarding lay leadership. Carol and DE Colleen Michael subsequently organized regular pulpit supply. When lay leaders Tony Easterly and following him, Richard McPherson, became lay pastors, Carol again reached out to PNWCUCC to inquire about UCC protocol for licensing. Those attempted encounters have summed up PNWD's effort to involve PNWCUCC in collaboration with the Columbia Lakewood congregation during the final juncture of Jeff Barker's pastorate from 2012 and beyond.

In 1993, when the Lakewood Community Church of the Brethren congregation merged with the Columbia Congregational Church UCC congregation, the new dually aligned church decided to use the building housing the CoB, and sell the UCC building, with the proceeds to benefit the new UCC/CoB congregation. At that time it was also agreed between the two

bodies that if the church were ever to dissolve, assets would be split with 5/8 going to the PNWCUCC and 3/8 going to the PNWDCoB. We have come to that moment when the congregation has been dissolved and the property sold (to the very congregation who for years was renting the space and later assumed ownership of it simply because they were given the keys). We are profoundly relieved and grateful that this time-consuming and often stressful situation has come to a close. We understand that ecclesial and denominational relationships sometimes shift over time; that has certainly occurred in our relationship with PNWCUCC specifically regarding the Columbia Lakewood Community Church after Jeff Barker left as their pastor. We want to note that in other instances with congregations, PNWD and PNWCUCC have remained in close contact regarding denominational church polity, expectations, and celebration (the recent credentialing of Paster Dane Breslin of the Sunnyslope congregation in Wenatchee is an example). But in this particular case with the selling of the Columbia Lakewood CoB/UCC property, we find ourselves with some questions about the splitting of the assets given the amount of time and energy PNWD has exerted alone since 2012. So we invite your input as to what that means for the proceeds of the property sale. We trust in your prayerful discernment as to what is appropriate. If you feel you are owed the 5/8 according to the 1993 agreement, we will honor that. If you discern that a 50/50 or other split merits consideration, we would welcome conversation around that. We also want to note that, in retrospect, we could have reached out to PNWCUCC earlier in our discussions and struggles with Spiritual Blessings as they wrongfully assumed ownership. We were, perhaps mistakenly, recalling past lack of communication with former PNWCUCC conference minister and board and, after initially hearing that the son of the former secretary reached out to both denominations' leadership, simply proceeded alone until Howard's call to PNWCUCC regarding the dissolution of the congregation.

We are happy to supply you with an itemized accounting of the expenses incurred by the Pacific Northwest District Church of the Brethren in preparing for and completing the sale of the CLCC property. This includes both standard expenses of real estate sales such as agent fees, as well as items like back taxes that needed to be paid and repairs to the building before it could be listed, as well as the expenses of time and travel for the various meetings with Spiritual Blessings, with members of the preschool board that uses the building, with attending to various repairs, and with meetings with attorneys and realtors as we prepared to sell the property . After these expenses, the net revenue of the property sale was an amount of approximately $1,100,000. Our question to the PNWCUCC remains: what percentage of these net proceeds do you feel is the appropriate amount to be distributed to your Conference? We trust that your discernment will lead to a fair and just decision. Again, we are happy to provide an itemized accounting of our expenses. If we can help provide any additional information, or if you would like to arrange for conversations between our leaderships, we are more than happy to accommodate you.

We trust this post Easter season is bringing you the delight of Spring as well as the peace of the risen Christ, and we thank you for your consideration of this letter.

Debbie Roberts, Howard Ullery, Lani Wright
PNWD Church of the Brethren District Executive Team