

PLAN OF UNION

Adopted by the congregations of Meyersville Presbyterian Church and The First Presbyterian Church (of Stirling) on May 5, 2026.

I. INTRODUCTION

Meyersville Presbyterian Church (MPC) and The First Presbyterian Church of Stirling (FPCS) are both located in Long Hill Township, New Jersey, within the bounds of the Presbytery of the Highlands of NJ.

This Plan of Union provides the framework for these two congregations to faithfully merge into one new worshiping community.

Background

The merger of these two congregations aims to combine resources in light of declining membership, unsure financial realities, and the call to meet evolving ministry needs in and beyond Long Hill Township. This merger would be the first step towards a revitalized and thriving ministry.

Name

The newly formed congregation shall have a new name.

A POU Name Team with equal representation from both congregations was formed. It requested suggestions for a new name for the proposed merged congregation. Members of both congregations made contributions. A list of names was reviewed with the aim of offering final options. The primary reason for removing certain names from consideration was to avoid duplication with other churches or organizations that had either identical or nearly identical names. Together, the congregations voted on the final name, when this Plan of Union was adopted, selecting: United Presbyterian Church (UPC) of Long Hill

The incorporated name and/or the church tag line will include Long Hill Township, NJ; this will be determined by a legal incorporation process.

Denominational Affiliation: The merged congregation will remain a member of the Presbyterian Church USA, and The Presbytery of Highlands of New Jersey.

II. GUIDING VALUES AND STRATEGY

The duly elected Sessions of both MPC and FPCS congregations met and identified these values which animate and guide our response to Christ's call to come and follow him. As one body we value:

- **Authentic Community** – Genuine relationships rooted in faith and belonging.
- **Commitment to Growth** – Seeking spiritual, relational, and outreach growth.
- **Honoring Our Roots** – Celebrating heritage while embracing the future.
- **Joyful Generosity** – Open to sharing time, talents, and treasure with gratitude.
- **Love in Action** – Serving others with compassion.

Trusting in God's faithfulness, it is recommended the newly formed Church adopt the following ministry priorities:

- **Build Christlike Community:** Genuinely welcome everyone as a beloved child of God and foster an atmosphere of hospitality in worship, ministries, and mission.
- **Focus on Outreach:** Prioritize growth in every ministry, hospitality in worship, reaching out to new friends, sharing Good News, and making disciples.
- **Honor Our Roots:** Celebrate the rich histories of Meyersville Presbyterian Church and The First Presbyterian Church (Stirling) and maintain strong ties with the Long Hill Township community.
- **Lead by Generosity:** Encourage lay leaders, members, and friends of the congregation to joyfully share time, talents, and resources in response to God's generosity.
- **Share Love in Action:** Actively and compassionately serve our neighbors in need, specifically building our commitment to feeding hungry neighbors.

Church Growth Statement

Renewing our shared calling and strengthening the vitality of our common ministry are central priorities of the merger of our two churches. In addition, the newly formed congregation commits to growth in the number of disciples who join and participate in our life together. We acknowledge that a merger alone is not a solitary solution to challenges such as declining membership and limited resources. Rather, bringing our congregations together is a first step on a longer journey toward renewed ministry and mission. Guided by the Holy Spirit, we seek to serve God faithfully and to share the good news of Christ now and in the years ahead.

III. PLAN OF UNION TIMELINE

- Many years of shared fellowship and worship.
- Several years of shared staffing and shared ministry as two churches with one ministry.
- June 18, 2025: Both Sessions voted to propose merger of our two congregations.
- August: Joint Session retreat, discernment of values and introduction to Plan of Union checklist.
- September 2025: Plan of Union teams are formed and begin meeting– these teams are equally represented by both churches.
- October 2025: Presentation of Plan of Union progress by POU Teams to the congregations.
- November 2025 – Discussion of key values and adding the priority of church growth.
- December 2025 – Meeting with COM Liaison
- January 2026 - Meeting with Foundry Commercial to assist with discernment regarding buildings and properties.
- February 2026 - Buildings Values Appraised by Foundry (Broker Opinion Price)
- March 2026 - Plan of Union Team votes unanimously on site for merged congregation.
- March 21 and 23 Both Sessions construct and adopt Plan of Union.
- April 7 The Presbytery of the Highlands’s COM reviews/votes on Plan of Union
- April 19 Plan of Union Distributed to Congregations
- May 3 Congregations voted in favor of Plan of Union

May 12 The Presbytery of Highlands Meeting (potential vote on Plan of Union)

June - December 2026

___ Integrating Two Churches into One New Church

___ Incorporation of New Church

2027 Celebration of New Congregation

IV. PLAN OF UNION IMPLEMENTATION TEMPLATE

1. OFFICERS /GOVERNANCE

Session- Phase 1. Upon affirmative vote for the merging of Meyersville Presbyterian Church and The First Presbyterian Church (of Stirling) by both congregations and the Presbytery of the Highlands:

- a) An integrated Session shall be established to fulfill the constitutional responsibilities of a Session; including but not limited to allocation of funds for transition and merger costs.
- b) This integrated Session will consist of the twelve elders currently serving on the Sessions of both merging congregations.
- c) Rev. Muntzel, who is currently the moderator of both the merging churches' sessions, will moderate the integrated Session.
- d) A Clerk and treasurer shall be named by the integrated Sessions.
- e) The integrated Session shall ensure fair representation from both former churches in its committees and teams during Phase 1.
- f) The integrated Session shall construct the Manual of Operations of the newly formed congregation within 6 months.
- g) **Upon approval of the ecclesiastical merger by affirmative votes of both congregations and the Presbytery of the Highlands, this integrated Session, is authorized to act as the Board of Trustees of the corporation (cf. G-4.0101 Book of Order) to oversee and manage all aspects of the management and sale of church property so long as appropriate approval is given by the presbytery.**
- h) Session-Phase 2. Upon completion of the civil merger:
 - a. The Integrated Session will continue to serve as an interim Session for twelve month period, providing continuity of leadership during the transition.
 - b. During this period, the interim Session shall oversee an appropriate process for the nomination and election of officers for the following year, in accordance with the new congregation's bylaws, the Manual of Operations, and the requirements of the Book of Order.

Deacons Board - Before the civil merger, the deacons from MPC and the FPC will continue to carry out their assigned duties. As appropriate, some joint activities may begin between the two groups. Deacons from both congregations will take part in defining the responsibilities for the new deacon's board, and these responsibilities will be documented in the new congregation's Manual of Operations. After the new congregation is officially incorporated, a new board of deacons will be formed and governed by the new congregation's bylaws and Manual of Operations.

2. PROPERTY

The real properties owned by both FPCS and MPC congregations consist of:

The First Presbyterian Church property includes the church building, a manse (single-family home), a parking lot, and the Memorial Garden. These are all located on a single lot at: **158 Central Avenue, Stirling, NJ 07980.**

The Meyersville Presbyterian Church property consists of the church building and surrounding land, which includes the adjacent historic (inactive) cemetery, located at: **223 Hickory Tavern Road, Gillette, NJ 07933.**

Additionally, the Meyersville Presbyterian Church owns a parking lot and a manse (single-family home), which are situated together on one lot. The manse is located at **32 Gillette Road, Gillette, NJ 07933.**

New Home - The merged congregation will use a single location for all its worship services, ministry activities, and outreach programs. The recommended site for the new home is 158 Central Avenue, Stirling, NJ 07980.

Rationale: Great care and prayerful deliberation were taken in evaluating which property would give a newly merged congregation the greatest flexibility and advantages. Here are highlights of the Plan of Union Team on Property's review:

- I. Both church buildings are much beloved and have each sustained congregations in ministry for 150 and 180 years. We cannot but be thankful to God for the many hands which stewarded these properties over the years. Assessment cannot calculate or compare the ways both properties and buildings have enriched the lives of countless individuals, families, and our communities.
- II. The buildings both have beautiful sanctuaries with comparable capacities.
- III. Both congregations have sacred spaces which they have pledged to care for-- the cemetery adjacent to the Meyersville Church and the Memorial Garden at FPCS.
- IV. The buildings have comparable sewer and water systems.

EVALUATION OF PROPERTY: KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Accessibility and Layout

Accessibility at the Meyersville Presbyterian Church (MPC) remains a significant challenge, despite the presence of an elevator to the sanctuary and a chair lift down to the fellowship hall. In contrast, the majority of rooms within the First Presbyterian Church of Stirling (FPCS) building—including meeting rooms, kitchen, offices, the large fellowship hall (Pollard Hall), and the multi-stall bathrooms—are located on a single floor, making them more accessible. The bathrooms at FPCS are also more accessible, (with additional “kiddie” bathrooms available on the lower level.) While FPCS does have some accessibility issues, these can be addressed with modifications such as installing a lift outside and adding a small ramp to the sanctuary.

Location

The FPCS building is conveniently situated near the Stirling train station and is within walking distance of residential Main Street and Somerset Apartments, providing the property with good visibility on Central Ave. The parking lot is paved and located on the same lot as the church building, offering ease of access. One drawback of the FPCS location is that the manse shares the same driveway as the entire complex, which would present challenges if there were a desire to sell the manse separately from the rest of the property.

Condition of the Buildings and Anticipated Future Maintenance

The POU Team conducted a thorough review of the condition of each building and the anticipated need for future capital improvements. The FPCS building has benefited from a number of recent upgrades, including a new sanctuary roof installed in 2025, an updated boiler and hot water heater, and bathrooms with new toilets and faucets.

Income-Producing Potential

FPCS has a well-established tenant in the church building: the Long Hill Montessori School. This tenant pays rent year-round and has made substantial investments into renovating and upgrading the downstairs of the building, as well as maintaining a playground.

Mission Opportunities

The Twelve Baskets Food Pantry of Long Hill Township, an initiative that both congregations have actively supported, already relocates to the FPCS building for several months each year.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE MEYERSVILLE CHURCH PROPERTIES

Transfer of Custodianship for the Church Building

The integrated Session, with the guidance and approval of the Presbytery of the Highlands, shall seek out new caretakers for the Meyersville Presbyterian Church building. Priority will be given to selling the building to another church or non-profit organization. Until such time that the building and property is either sold or leased, the newly merger congregation shall retain full ownership and responsibility for continued maintenance.

According to advice from real estate professionals, entities interested in making the Meyersville Presbyterian Church building their home will desire parking, therefore right of first refusal for the Gillette Rd. parking lot will go to the buyer or lessee of the Meyersville Church building and property.

Subdivision and Sale of Manse

The integrated Session, under the guidance and approval of the Presbytery of the Highlands, will initiate legal action to subdivide the current Meyersville Presbyterian Church properties on Gillette Road, thereby separating the manse from the parking lot. If this subdivision can be completed in a timely and cost-effective manner, the manse at 32 Gillette Road will then be sold.

Subdivision of Church Building and Historic Cemetery Care

Additionally, the integrated Session will pursue legal action to subdivide the current Meyersville Presbyterian Church building from the adjacent historic cemetery.

If the division between the MPC church building and the cemetery can be achieved promptly and economically, the newly formed congregation (made up of MPC and FPCS) shall retain ownership of the historic cemetery. However, if the cemetery cannot be separated from the church building, the new merged congregation shall establish a dedicated fund for the ongoing care and upkeep of the historic cemetery. This fund must be properly structured to ensure that any entity who purchases the MPC building has access to the resources necessary for the perpetual maintenance of the cemetery.

Property Held in Trust

All real estate property of the newly formed congregation shall be held "in trust for the use and benefit of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)."

The Administration and Coordinating Commission of Highlands Presbytery will guide and assist with property sales according to Presbytery policy and acting as duly authorized to give the required Presbytery approval.

3. STAFFING

The staffing patterns of the two merged congregations will continue. This includes the Rev. Stefanie Muntzel in position of pastor and Linda Murphy as Office Administrator.

Pastoral leadership: Our covenant supply pastor will transition from 2 part-time positions to one full-time. Terms of call will continue through this calendar year and be negotiated for the new year and following years as per Highlands Presbytery and Book of Order requirements.

Other positions: Contracted Music Director position will continue to be filled by Justin Jaramillo and renegotiated as it has on a yearly basis.

4. FINANCIAL MATTERS

Financial Review

A full financial review (undertaken by each congregation's audit committee) will occur before the final merger.

A full financial review will occur within 60 days after the final merger.

Account and investment statements and outstanding obligations (debts) will be noted and shared with both Sessions.

Successor in Interest

The newly formed congregation is the successor in interest to both/all original churches, ensuring continuity for all trusts, bequests, endowments, and designated gifts.

Intended Use of Proceeds

The proceeds derived from the leasing or sale of any properties referenced within this Plan of Union shall be allocated to the newly merged congregation.

5. INCORPORATION AND ORGANIZATIONAL DOCUMENTS

Articles of Incorporation: The Integrated Session is empowered by the adoption of this Plan of Union to create a new corporation with Articles of Incorporation and By-laws and to register the corporation with the State of New Jersey.

Voting Rights: Voting rights for all preexisting members of both congregations will transfer to the new congregation.

Membership & Records: All members of both congregations will be incorporated into the unified congregation. Past (historic) membership records shall be archived appropriately.

Bylaws: By-laws shall be based on The Presbytery of the Highlands templates and take into consideration current practices of both churches, in accordance with constitutional requirements of the Book of Order.

Manual Of Operation: A new manual of operations shall be constructed to govern the newly formed congregation. It shall be based on Highlands Presbytery requirements and honor the current practices of both churches, in accordance with constitutional requirements of the Book of Order of the PCUSA.

It shall be formed under the guidance of the Session and adopted at the first congregational meeting of the newly incorporated congregation.

6. MOVABLE BELONGINGS

A task group of representatives of both former congregations will be created by the Integrated Session to manage movable property. All decisions relating to use, disposal, re-gifting or repurposing of items shall be made in a sensitive, respectful manner.

It shall be a priority that the designated "new" location at 158 Central Ave. reflects the character of a new congregation- integrating items from MPC and FPCS or finding new items to represent the newly formed congregation.

Whenever feasible, features from the worship space at Meyersville Presbyterian Church will be incorporated into the new church home. This may include, but is not limited to, semi-permanent fixtures like pews.

In addition, it shall be a priority to create space for displaying and preserving historical documents and artifacts of both congregations in the "new" space of the merged congregation.

V. HONORING HISTORY AND CELEBRATIONS

Marking the End of Chapter

If this document is approved, two congregations are changing their name and identity. Both FPCS and MPC are closing a chapter of their history. Therefore, care will be made to hold appropriate worship and fellowship opportunities to mark the ending to these two congregations.

If this document is approved, the Meyersville Church congregation will be leaving their building. Great care will be made to hold an appropriate closing worship to mark the transition of the congregation out of the Meyersville Church sanctuary and building.

Celebrations of New Church

A special worship service to commission the new congregation's ministry will be held on a Sunday afternoon so Presbytery partners can attend. Additionally, a Community Celebration will also take place to introduce the congregation to Long Hill Township and nearby areas. Additional steps, like unveiling a new sign will help welcome new neighbors into our blended congregation's ongoing ministry.

With the approval of this Plan of Union, no longer will two churches share one ministry; we will be one, new church with one ministry.

Ephesians 4: 1-6

... walk in a manner 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: there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.