

**The Administrative Commission for First Presbyterian Church of Allegan, MI  
Report to the Presbytery of Lake Michigan  
March 14, 2026**

**Recommendation:**

After many meetings, conversations, and research – all surrounded by prayer and thoughtful discernment we, **the Administrative Commission for the First Presbyterian Church of Allegan, Michigan, established by the Presbytery of Lake Michigan, recommend that the Presbytery of Lake Michigan dissolve the First Presbyterian Church of Allegan, Michigan, effective March 14, 2026.** The Book of Order (G-3.0303b) requires that this action be done in consultation with the church’s members. The Administrative Commission has been in ongoing consultation with members of the congregation. We have discerned that the congregation no longer has the financial vitality or leadership capacity to sustain ongoing worship, mission, or ministry within Presbyterian order.

**Rational:**

The Administrative Commission in this recommendation seeks to honor and protect the stewardship of the Presbytery’s time, energy, and the congregation’s remaining resources. The congregation has a history of strained pastoral relations going back to the 1960’s. Most pastorates have ended with a divided congregation. We are the third Administrative Commission appointed to the First Presbyterian Church of Allegan, Michigan since 2012. The most recent pastorate of Elder Sheri Harris, CRE, ended with pressure by the six or seven active members; several who are relatively new members and who have little understanding or inclination to abide by Presbyterian polity. COM liaisons and Presbytery Staff have provided Presbyterian orientation and support. Cooperation for requested information has been difficult, elaborated more fully below. A former Administrative Commission acted with the help of the Presbytery’s attorney to release endowed funds restricted for upkeep of the building for church general operations. This allowed the call of Rev. Kathy Nealand and then Elder Sheri Harris to grow the congregation. During which time it was difficult to find members willing to serve on the session, and outreach efforts were items of conflict. The congregation has been struggling with a lack of financial vitality and a lack of leadership capacity since approximately 2012. The PLM has worked with the session and congregation off and on at their request during that time period, both directly through Administrative Commissions and through the Commission on Ministry. Presbytery and COM records indicate that the Presbytery has worked regularly and diligently to strengthen the capacity and vitality of the congregation.

**Background:**

In January 2025, all members of the session of the First Presbyterian Church of Allegan, MI, resigned. This was the second time in the span of as many years that the First Presbyterian Church of Allegan, MI was unable to maintain numbers sufficient to form a session. Upon the resignation of the members of session, the Commission on Ministry (COM), which had been working with the session for many months, recommended that the Presbytery of Lake Michigan (PLM) appoint an Administrative Commission (AC) for the purposes and scope that appear below.

**Purpose:**

Therefore, the Commission on Ministry recommends to the Presbytery of Lake Michigan that an Administrative Commission of three to five members be appointed by the Moderator of the Presbytery, in consultation with the Executive Presbyter/Stated Clerk, for the following purpose:

1. To assume original jurisdiction of the session so that all PCUSA constitutional and State of Michigan corporate requirements are fulfilled.
2. To determine if the congregation has the capacity to engage in future mission and ministry or to recommend dissolution of the congregation.
3. If it is determined that the congregation has the capacity to engage in future mission and ministry, to assist the congregation in determining that engagement.

### **Scope of Authorities**

1. This Administrative Commission has the full authority of the Presbytery of Lake Michigan, except where limited by provisions of the PC(USA) Book of Order, as regards the correction of the reported disorder listed in items 1-3 under Purpose.
2. In the assumption of original jurisdiction, the Administrative Commission will act with the full power and authority of the session.
3. The First Presbyterian Church of Allegan, MI, will be responsible for all fees incurred should a consultant be required to help resolve any areas of disorder, and for all costs of dissolution and sale of the property in the event the congregation is dissolved.

### **The Work of the Administrative Commission**

The Administrative Commission has been meeting most weeks since mid-October 2025, by Zoom, joined by Rev. Dr. Fran Lane-Lawrence (Stated Clerk/Executive Presbyter), Rev. Dr. Cal Bremer (Assistant to the Executive Presbyter), and Rev. Kristin Stroble (COM Support Staff) (on occasion). Members of the AC met in person with the church's three employees, and corresponded with all congregational members listed on the membership rolls by the U.S. Postal Service on November 23, 2025. The purpose of the communication was to invite each member to meet in person with the AC to provide feedback. The AC met individually with four members who responded to the AC's invitation. The AC used the feedback in its discernment process relative to the congregation's vitality and energy for future worship, mission, and ministry.

Research of **Session Records** found that the last Session minutes to be included in the Session Minutes Book was 2022. The clerk of session for 2023-24 was in name only and knew little about the Session records. Rev. Sherri Harris took the Session minutes. Session minutes for 2023 and 2024 were later provided by Rev. Harris upon request. The Church registry had not been updated for three or four years. We found 11 members whose deaths had not been recorded. We identified 13 active members of which one has since died, four are homebound, two live elsewhere, one of whom financially gives two thirds of the church's reported contributions, one member is neurodivergent, and the remaining six are senior citizens.

**Worship:** The church averages six at worship, occasionally with pulpit supply worship leaders. At other times they tune into the streamed services of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Grand Rapids, MI, and a church in Nashville, TN, they know about and like. Their long-tenured organist resigned midyear 2025 with so few attending. A guitarist from the Folk Festival leads music when they have a worship leader.

**Mission/Building Use:** The church is used for a variety of community services. A Folk Musical Group has held concerts in the sanctuary for years, but due to funding has been less active recently. "Friends on Wednesday," a lifelong learning program utilizes the fellowship hall weekly for educational gatherings. In January 2026, the church hosted a warming center while a permanent

location was being prepared. A man experiencing homelessness is living in the manse without Administrative Commission approval.

**Finances:** 2025 Income: \$47,786, of which, \$34,115 were contributions. 2025 Expenses: \$136,585 of which \$67,387 was for steeple, roof, and manse repair, \$34,120 in payroll. Bank and Investment Balance December 31, 2025: \$207,737. Liabilities: \$6,353. Total Equity and Liability as of December 31, 2025: \$201,384.

**Administration:** One of the purposes for which the PLM appointed the AC was to assume original jurisdiction since no session exists. The PC(USA) *Book of Order* provides in G-4.0102, “*The ruling elders on the session of a congregation, who are eligible under the civil law, shall be the trustees of the corporation . . .*” The AC, acting as the session, sought to put in order State of Michigan corporate requirements to name the AC as the current officers/trustees. But in spite of multiple requests for the login username and password to the Michigan State Licensing and Regulatory Affairs website, this information has not been provided as of the date this report was written. The AC needs that information to address legal matters related to the corporation. The AC also requested keys to the church and manse, bank account information, usernames, and passwords for various online accounts. The church secretary, who is also a member, contacted members of the congregation and responded with an email of outrage with church members’ names attached. Some information has subsequently been shared, but access to office computers and keys to the manse have yet to be shared. The AC is working to gain access to bank accounts and the login to the MI Licensing and Regulatory Affairs website.

**Conversations with the Congregation:** The AC met with the congregation following worship on February 1, 2026, to discuss the AC’s findings and decision to recommend to the Presbytery to dissolve the congregation. The meeting was attended by seven members and eight friends of the church, most new within the last 2-3 weeks. The news was received with immediate pushback and a plea for one more chance with Presbytery help. We discussed next steps and what will happen with the church’s real estate and finances. After 45 minutes of discussion the conversation concluded with an appeal to reconsider.

After the February 1, 2026, meeting, the AC met and again resolved to recommend to the Presbytery that the First Presbyterian Church of Allegan, MI be dissolved. Rev. Dr. John Best and Elder Jud Ross met with the congregation on February 10, 2026, to affirm the AC’s decision. Questions were asked about the church real estate and finances. The AC continues to move toward our plan to hold a final regular worship service on March 8, 2026, and a celebratory service later in the spring.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Dr. John Best (HR)

Rev. Sheth LaRue (Benton Harbor First)

Elder Jud Ross (GR Forest Hills)