



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Eastern Pennsylvania Conference

John R. Schol, Bishop

May 28, 2024

Dear Members of the City of Philadelphia Historical Commission and Committee on Historic Designation:

I have the privilege of serving as the episcopal leader of The Eastern Pennsylvania Conference of The United Methodist Church. On behalf of the Conference, I wish to acknowledge that it is both an honor and deeply humbling to have one of our churches, Calvary United Methodist Church, nominated to be included in the City's register of historic places. However, we do not believe that it is appropriate to include Calvary UMC's property at 4740 Baltimore Avenue on the City's register.

I grew up in The United Methodist Church in Philadelphia, was the Executive Director of the Frankford Group Ministry in Philadelphia, and served as the urban executive at The United Methodist Church's General Board of Global Ministries. With this background, I am both deeply committed to preserving the legacy of Methodism in Philadelphia and uniquely familiar with the challenges faced by urban ministries, including Calvary UMC.

While the Conference and I support the goals and work of the Historical Commission, we are not the beneficial owners of the property that has been entrusted to our care; rather, such property is devoted to God and is held in trust for God's Church. Generations of Methodists willingly and selflessly gave to Calvary UMC with the understanding that the time and treasure they donated would be used for ministry and evangelism in West Philadelphia. This is a sacred trust.

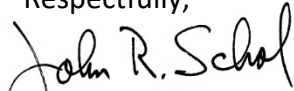
We do not believe that allowing Calvary UMC to be included on the City's Historic Register is consistent with our duties as the stewards of this trust. Funds spent complying with the recommendations of the Commission would divert resources from their sacred purpose; clergy and lay employee time spent seeking Commission approval is time not spent on Calvary UMC's important ministry work in the Community.

Simply put, inclusion of this property on the register hinders Calvary UMC's ability and flexibility to fully utilize these resources for the ministry purpose, to which they have been devoted. Interfering with our capacity to maximize our ministry's impact is an unnecessary entanglement of the City with The United Methodist Church's religious liberty. Consequently, we must respectfully oppose this nomination.

Again, it is an honor to be considered for inclusion on the register and we look forward to working with the City and with the community to preserve the Methodist Church's legacy in Philadelphia; however, our primary focus is on our ministry - on making disciples of Jesus Christ. Thus, we ask that the Historical Commission respect The United Methodist Church's autonomy to steward the resources that have been devoted to God and God's Church and that the Commission decline to include 4740 Baltimore Avenue on the City's historic register.

Thank you for your consideration and your service to the City and people of Philadelphia.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John R. Schol". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J".

John R. Schol

The United Methodists of

Greater New Jersey & Eastern Pennsylvania

South District Board of Church Location & Building
Eastern Pennsylvania Conference, The United Methodist Church
Gail Armstrong and Mary Jane Kirby, co-chairs

At its meeting on May 7, 2024, the South District Board of Church Location & Building unanimously affirmed its position that the University City Historical Society nomination is opposed by this body. The Board of Church Location & Building has responsibility within our District of the Eastern Pa. Annual Conference to support local churches in their strategies for continuing the service of the United Methodist Church in changing neighborhoods. Our Board has had an ongoing supportive conversation with the pastor and leadership of Calvary UMC regarding their vital ministry in their community and their cooperation with the Community Center that operates out of their building.

While we, too, are thankful for the beautiful architecture of this visually prominent building in the Cedar Park neighborhood of Philadelphia, our Board of Church Location and Building is interested in it's being recognized for the witness of faith, inclusivity, and community as it stands as a beacon to those in its community; not only visually but spiritually prominent. Calvary has invested care and commitment into a community arrangement with the Calvary Center for Culture and Community with the understanding that this connection will provide the needed resources to keep the church building in good condition.

If designated as an historical site, an economic hardship would be imposed upon the church and this would compromise the fulfillment of their ministry. In following directed repair of the structure as mandated by the Historical Society, funds would be diverted from ministry that stands in contradiction to the purpose and calling of the church. The church family at Calvary must be free and not restricted in making these decisions themselves in light of their response to the Gospel call to make disciples. Thank you for your understanding and consideration.