

Church Council Minutes Union Church, September 20, 2021

Present: Joan English (Recorder), Dave Kobersmith (Staff), Marty Hensley (Finance), Jennifer Melton (Worship), Carla Gilbert (church member), Kent Gilbert (Pastor), Kim Kobersmith (Nominating), Mary Lou Wiese (Nurture & Care), David Jones (Staff), Amy Schill (CL&G), Lisa Vaughn (Admin), Linda Parsons (clerk), Jean Boyce (church member), Bob Boyce (Properties), Shirley Carlberg (Bookkeeper), Betty Hibler (Mission & Service)

A quorum was present. Our devotional was read by Kent from *See No Stranger* by Valarie Kuar and the meeting opened with prayer.

Question of the Day – what was your favorite thing to do as a kid in the summer?

Introduction of David Jones as Program Coordinator.

Action Items

Approval of July Minutes. Bob moved to accept; Betty seconded. Meeting notes accepted.

Vote upon Stewart-Hindman funds. Finance Board wants to move 100% of the Stewart-Hindman bequest money out of the Bluegrass Community Foundation and use it as listed below. As a motion from Finance Board, it needs no second. The Stewart-Hindman funds are available to use as the Church wishes, with no restrictions. The plan is:

- move some money to pay off loans, bringing Union Church's indebtedness to \$0
- place \$1000 in each of our 5 standing funds: Worship & Arts, Leadership Development, Properties' Special Projects, Leadership Training, Mission & Service
- The balance to be placed into undesignated endowment fund at **Thrivent Charitable Impact & Investing.** (this change was made to update the name on 11-18.)

To permit this, there must be a 75% vote of the governing body (Church Council) now; and then an affirmative from 75% of the membership (this vote will be taken in December, at the Annual Budget Meeting). Motion passed unanimously, with 100% affirming the plan.

Discussion

Finance Report. Shirley reported. The 2021 Budget was updated after July meeting. We're currently \$17,000 to the good. August was not a great month, expenses were high, had a slight dip in income. But August is traditionally a poor month for income – this year it was a bit LESS bad.

Kent reminded Council that we are doing well - in part - because we retained \$41,000 in PPP money granted in 2020, which we are not going to have again.

Re-opening plans & benchmarks. The building has been closed, we are watching numbers closely. When/how might we reopen? We said we'd look at:

- Vaccination rate
- Positivity rate
- Transmission issues
- Won't consider reopening until we come out of red zone into orange

Unfortunately, positivity rate is as high as it has ever been. Lots of the county NOT is vaccinated, although most of the church IS. Kent suggests we stick with following CDC guidelines. Outside groups are paused, church groups over 25 paused. When we are orange, we can consider masked gatherings. Marty stated that last week was the WORST week we have had in Kentucky. The state may be plateauing, but Madison County is not.

Carla – some Stephen Ministers have needed space to meet with care receivers; and Memory Keepers members who need to be away from home for privacy, small numbers, and masked, in both cases. They've used space in the church. That is perfectly ok & Kent reminded the group that we do have room air circulators available.

Discussion. The Red Zone metric is a good idea. If you look at a declining rate comparable to the way it increased, it probably won't go down to Orange Zone til about Thanksgiving. Whatever window we DID have to keep cases low, it has long passed. We have to be flexible and nimble. Kent suspects that, if we had our worst week BEFORE the Spoonbread Festival, we're looking at a nasty next 2 weeks. We may be in a state of infection for the next several years, esp. if we see new variants. Prayers for safety of family and neighbors. Kent & David talked about outdoor activities with worship components. From Worship Board – there is some challenge to pivoting from closed to open, open-close. Kent is sensitive to how much we miss being able to gather.

In particular the hospitalizations are concerning, for those who do NOT have Covid. There's a shortage of beds.

Betty – how are the schools handling it? They are in-person at this time. Berea Community had a couple of kids w/Covid, but more in quarantine after potential exposure. Doing a good job of masking, no big outbreak, but the school did close for several days - more to other illness than Covid. Madison Southern is requiring masks. 5-11 year olds may be able to be vaccinated by end of October. UK hospital just recently had 169 Covid patients, 40 of them 20 & under.

Is there objection to us staying virtual until we get out of the red zone? Have not had push-back, but the congregation is just disappointed. We can help people get equipment and training to watch online – don't want people to feel even more disconnected. Several of us expressed feelings of isolation, missing contact with others. We can bring lunch & eat outside or in the room together. Porch talks to keep connected. Zoom is not just for meetings. Carla – might be an invitation for some small groups of 4-5 in person. Numbers of online viewers seems to be falling off at regular worship time, but we do have some who watch later on. Dave says watching on the website has gone up slightly. We don't know a trend yet. Marty – more are cord-cutting. YouTube is much more used lately. Shirley – recently realized how easy FaceTime is.

Kim – anything else we need to address? We are agreed not to come back in person; and are aware of some unmet needs. Should we have a Zoom group to talk about needs? Committee of people to throw ideas around? Educational events to help people to connect.

Is there a point where we'd have vaccinations required and have church in person? The longer we are without, the easier it is to stay away. Kent & Mary Lou will talk this week about long-range possibilities for building community. Phone check to start back up, as they'd paused while we were in church in-person, and hopeful we'd be able to gather.

David, re: planned parents meeting. He's reaching out to parents to find out what they, and their kids, need and want. Not hearing much back, but plans to go ahead with a meeting, and maybe another depending on attendance.

Carla, in support of Sean Mack's discernment process in the United Church of Christ (UCC). Sean began classes at Louisville Presbyterian Seminary this fall, seeking UCC ordination. Kent would write a letter that he is in good standing, has gifts for ministry, and we support his pursuing his goal of being a servant-leader. This letter goes to denominational discernment committee, which will walk with him on his ordination path. Same process as Joseph Jacobs; may well do so for Maria Hartz. Marty strongly supports and endorses made it a motion, Jennifer seconded. Motion passes unanimously. **Rev. Kent will write letter on the congregation's behalf, in support of Sean Mack's discernment process in pursuit of UCC ordination.**

Mary Lou shared an idea – adding a church Board for Stephen Ministry. Stephen Ministry has been under Nurture & Care, mostly for convenience. But once Mary Lou rotates off Nurture & Care in March, Stephen Ministry won't have Church Council representation. Adding a Board would mean a change to the Constitution approved by Congregation, likely at March meeting. We could also set up a Committee under Nurture & Care and call it Stephen Ministry (much like Music Committee is under Worship Board). All agreed that having Stephen Ministers a voice/vote on Council is a good idea. Let's keep this as an agenda item going forward, and percolate on it.

Updates on Cong Conversation issue of membership for remote attendants. Kent will have that conversation with 5 or 6 of our long-term, long-distance attendees Do they want to vote? Do they want to chair a Board, etc.? If there are constitutional changes, it would happen in the spring.

Transition and New Staffing Discussion: seeking nursery & communication staff.

Nursery – we have 2 or 3, still have openings. David will work on that with Faith Development.

Communication – now that David is on board as Program Coordinator, Kent is turning attention there. Reached out to Peter Hackbert, for ideas of recent grads; working on a job description for 20 hours a week, to manage church database and use it for effective targeted communication. The person would also interface w/website & tell us when it needs to be updated, if not do it themselves. The hope would be that by increasing communication, support builds, we might be able to hire an associate pastor. Question of funding that position -- coming from Transformation Funds and will not impact budget.

Board Updates or Highlights – Shirley reminded ALL Boards that it's time to look at budget needs for next year. She and/or Dave will be in touch

- Admin – will be having budget-related discussions. Staff evaluations soon. Prompted PRB to do a pastoral review for the end of the year. Every 5 years they do a comparative salary audit, which will wrap up in the next month or so.
- CL&G - looking at an October 30 fellowship event of some type. Outdoor gathering, perhaps vespers, masked, bring food, individually packaged s'mores. Marty – there's no evidence that food handling practices affect Covid transmission, so no worries there BUT keep mask on while handling food.
- Faith Development – planning Zoom group with book study. 9:30 Sunday, Sunday 6 pm, maybe Wednesdays, perhaps Berea College group, others are welcome to choose to lead a group.
- Finance
- M&S – enjoys being able to supply funding to various organizations. Donated \$1000 to Ben Groth's church in New Orleans. Jenny Bromley is in touch with CoCoDA on their water project. Always seeking suggestions for worthy causes. Carla working with Dorothy Chao to consider a trip to the border. Dorothy will join Mission Board as an ad hoc member
- Nominating – holes in Admin, CL&G, and FD. Constitution states board should have 4 (that's pretty much the minimum); occasionally larger is fine; fewer is hard to work with. Being disconnected makes it hard to know other folks' investment and potential willingness to serve on a Board.
- N&C – Kent did a wonderful job of Karen Lee picnic memorial; submissions to Harvest Booklet have come in nicely – outstanding art, poetry
- Properties
- Worship
- Carla asked about Stewardship. Kent responded that we will have some form of generosity request. It may take a different form. Can we tie that in with asking about Board membership/volunteering? Yes, or it can also be separate and done any time.

Pastor's Report Parking lot re-stripped and a couple of new spots added. Accessibility has been increased with the new sidewalk. We need to reassess the AV set-up. Have had a contractor bid, hoping for another. This will help make sound crystal clear. Hopeful about some concrete proposals coming in. We've had a variety of requests for memorial services; esp. Carol Lamm's coming up October 23. As Covid gets worse, plans are always changing. We will offer Zoom and FB possibilities. He's excited about See No Stranger. Proposing 5-minute guests on these 9 chapters, each about a particular practice. No change on his health. He's going to have pulmonary baseline testing. Encouraging news has come out that the cause may have been identified.

No funding requests,

Announcements

- News items
- Next scheduled consideration of Funding Requests – November, 2021
- Next Meeting October 18, Devotion: Betty

Rev. Kent offered prayer to end the meeting.

Meeting ended at 8:45

Joan English