

Church Council Notes Union Church, November 15, 2021

Present: Joan English (Recorder), Dave Kobersmith (Staff), Marty Hensley (Finance), Jennifer Melton (Worship), Carla Gilbert (church member), Kent Gilbert (Pastor), Kim Kobersmith (Nominating), David Jones (Staff), Amy Schill (CL&G), Shirley Carlberg (Bookkeeper), Betty Hibler (Mission & Service), Mary Lou Wiese (Nurture & Care), Greg Lakes (Treasurer), Paul Smithson (Moderator), Bob Boyce (Properties)

A quorum was present. Our devotional was read by Jennifer Melton – a prayer from Carrie Newcomer’s new book of poems *When Things Come Together*.

Question of the Night – Favorite winter comfort food or drink. Bourbon and soup – the big winners!!

Action Items

Bob moved, Greg seconded the motion that the October meeting minutes be approved with the correction of a typo, agreed by consensus.

Congregational Meeting – will be via Zoom, December 12, 3 pm. Are there other agenda items that need to be published in advance?

From October minutes -- *Motion to use the Stewart-Hindman Union Church Fund distribution from 2021 for the 2022 budget, waiving the Financial Policy requirement to pay 20% to the 5 Boards and 20% to the endowment. Marty so moved, Mary Lou second. It is understood that this use of an Undesignated Bequest is a deviation from Financial Policy. Motion passed unanimously.*

Minor change to Bylaw 6 needs to be circulated. Language needs to go in next mailing & be posted on website. Marty and/or Dave will provide that.

2022 Budget Discussion

Administration Board recommends to give 2% raise and 4% bonus to staff. Finance Board discussed and recommends that we simply put 6% COLA in the budget. Inflation for 2022 is not projected to go down so the 6% COLA is not likely to be reduced in '22 for '23. Discussed another mid-year adjustment if needed, which it will likely be. The budget we saw last month is the one in the folder and is one Finance is recommending, knowing we will need to evaluate salaries going forward. COLAs make a significant bump in the budget. Kent – to clarify: Finance is recommending 6% COLA (not 2% plus 4% bonus) – yes.

The recommendation that the Stewart-Hindman Union Church Fund disbursement from 2021 be used to apply to 2022 budget, approved at last meeting, is included. Even with that \$27,000 disbursement, 2022 is a \$41,000 deficit budget. The hope is, that as with other deficit budgets, things will work out much better.

Kim – will we have surplus this year? \$9,400 so far this year, yes. November & December are usually good months for income. That is somewhat less so now, because online giving evens out folks’ giving over the year.

Kent with a staffing comment – We have a staff member having a 10th anniversary – Dave Kobersmith, who was excused. Chris McKenzie is also celebrating his 10th anniversary at Union. Youth Group received merit increases fairly recently, Dave has not. Kent would like to honor his support and proposes adding 4% to Dave’s COLA, increasing total by \$1500, bringing him up by \$3779. Paul – to clarify – this is a permanent rise? Yes, that the proposal, a merit increase. Comments: Bob – Move that we accept Kent’s proposal. Paul second. All in favor – no opposed.

Marty – Shirley, please amend budget before we distribute. She will do so.

Kent invited Dave back and announced that the proposal to make his raise a 10% was adopted unanimously

Proposed 2022 Budget approved.

Discussion

Finance Report. Shirley reported. As stated, we have a \$9400 surplus. No outrageous bills coming in.

Working toward Giving Tuesday, Nov. 30. A letter will go out inviting our regular mailing list to consider a recurring gift. We’ll do Stewardship messaging through December.

End of year reminders to take advantage of Kroger & Amazon programs to contribute a percentages to desired nonprofits.

From Covid Task Force. Members are Kim, Marty, Jennifer, Kent

Their goal was to make sure to have clear and transparent guidelines as to what will go on, when when. The document “Layered Prevention Strategies” is based on cases per 100,000 in the county, link:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1ejF76DdWIUCTzIOMyxBruz_5qfyvZOvk

It shows 2 columns of each scenario (Color zone) – showing a More/Less restrictive approach for each color. We are invited to discuss where we think we are as a church, and how we want to proceed. Substantial risk is Orange, which is 1-10 cases per 100,000. Red is over 25 per 100,000, which is where we are now. The capacity of sanctuary at Red is 25 using the less-restrictive option. Kim invited discussion on how people are feeling about going back in person, where we are as a church. Responses ran the range from thinking we should not go back in person til we’re Yellow to staying open even if we are in the Red Zone, taking precautions.

- Big debate is what if we switch from orange-red; red-orange. Do we close every time we go into red, or figure out how to stay open? We think we’ll be looking at a winter of bouncing between red & orange.
- Question – why can’t we go back w/ masks and distancing since we’re doing that at the grocery store. Difference in church – it’s the duration of time we are together, breathing the same air.
- In Madison County – not a majority are vaccinated, but the church is almost all vaccinated - in May, over 90% were vaccinated or planned to be.
- The group found it hard to find out how the percentage of vaccinated in your individual congregations changes guidelines.
- Concern expressed about opening, closing... if we are going red-orange, how that would feel if we shut down again. It would feel really stressful during the holidays.
- We are a congregation of elderly individuals. We have had vaccinations, we’ve had boosters. Do we invite those who feel safe & comfortable? Wonders where church attendance will go in general. We’ve been open 2,3 weeks the whole year.
- Maybe we should open and those who feel comfortable will come. Those who don’t, don’t.
- Concern about being around younger people, who may have had more exposure and been around unvaccinated kids.
- We are taking a risk with peoples’ mental health by NOT being open.
- We’ve spent money and time planning to do online well, which will always be an option.
- We know Covid risk will be permanent thing - at some point, perception of the risk and willingness to live with risk will shift. Are we there?
- Question - is there another church in Madison County or Berea that has been closed as much as we have? Yes, and some have gone back & forth; some have never closed & suffered for it with illness; some reopened with singing & masks. There’s some of every example.
- We have a group of members who are deathly afraid of passing it on; and another group that is desperate to come to church.
- In the beginning we felt such a sense of responsibility to protect each other. Now, we are not unaware of the risks and can mitigate a lot of them and let people make their own choice. Several expressed being comfortable doing what they want to do, taking precautions
- Assuming we’ll dip down to orange can we go back and then have a plan to not close if we go back red?
- If we are all willing to wear masks – it’s a big sanctuary. We can post suggestions about spacing. Discussion of signage – vaxed in the middle & balcony; unvaccinated on the sides.
- We do NOT want to ask for proof of vaccination, we can make it a recommendation.
- Worship Board’s conversation – they’re at the door greeting and directing and they’re only 5 people. One is not coming at all if it’s red. EJ is concerned, he has had to quarantine 4 times and would fear bringing it from campus. Can others take on some of those duties and help to reconfigure greeting? Yes.
- Kim – can we try to sum up? We have some who are not ready, some who are very ready, is it the group consensus to stay closed now but that it makes sense to be still closed now, if we can go back if it’s orange and have a plan to stay open if we bump back to red?
- Sanctuary is set up for virtual broadcast and would need to be rearranged BUT it was expressed that nobody expects the sanctuary to look as it has at Christmases past.

- Kent & Dave figured we can fit 125-155 if we used all the socially distanced spots, depending on size of group.
- ALL agree that we should not have a community indoor Christmas Eve service. It will be online

Kent -- Worship Team/Board have a plan. He's hearing a desire for the least restrictive model. Could use some clarity on the fact that we may not come out of red before Christmas. What are the possibilities? Planning Team – if we are red for Advent – could come on Sunday mornings? It seems inadvisable to have a Christmas Eve service to which we invite community. We would plan to have a virtual but full service. Maybe outdoor candle lighting Christmas Eve; music; short scripture; singing. That would be in-person.

Is the will of Council that we open for Sundays in Advent (we are already behind in planning that if so). It would be with masks, distance, reservations. Should we open now? We had said we'd postpone opening til we are in the Orange – what if that is February?

Where are we on Sundays, if we are in red still? Kent – thinks we can be ready to receive live in-person people on the 28th. Advent is the new start to a new season. What if we agreed to have Sunday mornings masked & distanced if red; increase flexibility if we go down to orange & yellow. We can use the Community Room for overflow. Then we plan for Christmas Eve community-wide outdoors. How about that? If the 28th is a small Sunday, that might be a good ease-in.

Does anyone think this is really the wrong direction? Yes, some think it's the wrong direction, especially the idea that if it's red and we decide to stay open. What is Shirley comfortable with? Orange for 2 weeks, with the expectation that cases are not 24-24-24, but going down. We are not in orange & headed down.

Marty says the advice of the health department is NO meetings if we are in the red.

Dave – if we open 28th even in red, would we cap at 25? Yes, we would stick with that rubric. Ask for RSVPs.

Some are ok with waiting til orange. Once we start, we shouldn't stop if we dip back up slightly. There's no hope we'll be in orange on the 28th.

Kent – is more about safety, but is sensitive to concerns - we want connection and community. He will be there whatever the decision. We will make it as good as it can possibly be. We need to have a plan that we put out and share, and stick to. This year it is safer because we know more and have vaccines. Last year's "red" is different from last year's "red."

It seems inevitable that there will be an increase at Thanksgiving. If we want to make sure we open once, and not close, does it make sense to open when things are inevitably going to get worse -- in the spirit of not wanting to close again?

Could we change the equation with any kind of filtration in the sanctuary? We do have filters, ventilation. He will need to research further. But ventilation system is sized to use only the CR or sanctuary at a time. Does not move a lot of air. We could see if there is something that can turn over the air, HEPA filter. Is there something we can add to our ventilation system with Transformation Fund dollars? If this is a several-years situation, we might want to make the investment. Kent & Dave will do research and email back.

Kent – we may not be ready to make a decision tonight.

Is the Community Room is a better space to get together? Can be ventilated/purified more easily?

Kim – can Advent be a "soft opening?" Can you reserve a Sunday in Advent, but not every Sunday? 25 people, including camera crew? Can we do online reservations, like the Christmas concert?

Discussion wrapped up with Kim suggesting that we do the "soft open" - invite people to reserve spots in Advent, and open fully when in the orange; and re-visit at next CC meeting. Kent agrees, feels good about that.

Suggestions if we do this:

- a reservation system would help us contact trace.
- use the 7-day average instead of daily numbers.
- need to look more at direction of change than specific number

We did not vote, but Kim asked for affirmation if we can live with that – not a vote. Majority yea.

Kim and Kent expressed appreciation for the good thinking on this topic and the respect that everyone showed toward differing ideas, which has not always been the case in such discussion.

Coordinate advent plans? Amy – CL& G had preliminary discussion about Advent activity; not sure about that now with 25 limit. Bernardo thought we might have outdoor caroling and hot chocolate. We can use that as a test how that

would work for Christmas Eve. Kent & David working on at-home stuff with Faith Development. David will put together packets. Will not do Childrens Church til after the new year. David will need to recruit & train volunteers. Pageant plans – David will send out instructions and script and ask parents to video their kids; he will edit. Bells are playing at the Tavern on Dec. 4 and will do bell caroling at several locations. Front steps of the church are always a good option.

Board Updates or Highlights

- Admin
- CL&G
- Faith Development – David reported - we need to hire another nursery person. Childrens Church will begin after the new year. He’s been meeting with college students, several went to his house for a Thai meal
- M&S – online auction for raising funds for Kentucky Refugee Ministries. 150 items. Ford is giving us the services free. We have great items, including a silver set worth \$600
- Nominating – still have 2 holes for this year, will gear up for next year. Let Nominating know if someone is rotating off and/or if they will recommit if eligible for a second term. Dave gave Nominating Board folks permission to look at records & their attendance so they can consider our virtual members for Board positions. Joan will send the report of Board members and their terms to Board chairs.
- N&C – MaryLou, Teri & Carla made soup and froze it for distribution as needed after health concern or bereavement. They were very happy with Harvest book feedback, many thanks to Jerry Cooper for the idea. Stephen Ministry – looking for care receivers. Invited to be lookouts for those who need care
- Properties
- Worship
- Finance

Pastor’s Report Hold in prayer our folks in transition – Tom & Dorie at Kenwood; Cheryl Payne at Kenwood; those recuperating from surgeries. All will be out of office Wednesday the 24th. Paul & LaRee Jacobs have moved to 40 Crawford. ML one year old great nephew had brain cancer surgery yesterday. Please hold him in prayer - Lucas Jackson Dean Darnell

Announcements

- News items
- Next scheduled consideration of Funding Requests – February, 2022
- Next Meeting December 20, Devotion: Bob Boyce

Rev. Kent offered prayer to end the meeting.

Meeting ended at 9

Joan English