**Church Council Minutes Union Church, March 20, 2023**

**Present:** Joan English (Recorder), Dave Kobersmith (Staff), Marty Hensley (Finance), Kent Gilbert (Pastor), Kim Kobersmith (Vice Moderator), Bob Boyce (Properties), Carla Gilbert (M&S, Staff), Jean Boyce (Moderator), Steve Gowler (incoming Moderator), Shirley Carlberg (Bookkeeper), Linda Parsons (Clerk), Joan Moore (FD), David Jones (Staff), Donna Lovell (Admin), Jennifer Melton (Worship), Steve Bolster (PRB), Betsy Whaley (CL&G)

Linda offered our devotional from Appalachian Water Reflections with photos by Warren Brunner and prayers. Question of the evening: What was your first job?

**Action Items**

**Minutes:** Approval of February minutes. Steve Bolster requested that some language regarding Staff Appreciation be added, from a conversation that happened after staff was excused (it’s placed at the end of this document – JE, 2023-03-29). Carla so moved; Bob seconded, that minutes be approved with the proviso that Joan add that language when received from Steve. Passed.

**Properties Board funding discussion/request:** To start 2023, Properties Board spent $3000 OVER its $5000 yearly budget to repair HVAC on the 3rd floor, after its reduction to $5000 from $10,000 for ’23. They have three projects currently in the works – 2 pretty expensive. They are:

* Resurfacing the playground with wood material (rubber matting would require removal of all equipment; rubber mulch is very expensive and has some health concerns, wood is the best option)
* Adding/adjusting lighting in Cowan Chapel (when worship services were held in Cowan in early ’23, it was obvious that needs to be done ASAP)
* Painting Room 101 (not urgent nor terribly expensive but it’s been in the plans &needed to be done, for quite some time)

Discussion of funding sources. Properties Board Special Projects (about $4900) is an option, but $3000 of that amount would ideally cover the HVAC repair bill. The Hutchins Fund is another option – it was given by that family for building maintenance and projects. We have customarily reserved it for emergencies and vowed to replenish dollars used (by a Trustees’ internal policy, not Constitutionally required; nor in our Financial Policy). Properties Board wants Church Council to be aware of the use of the Fund and seeks Church Council’s “ok to open the purse strings.” Shirley stated that the savings from our solar panels (approx. $2000 a year) and donations from congregation members are going back into the Hutchins Fund regularly – we aren’t spending without replenishing. Question – how much of our electricity are we generating with our solar array? Approx 30%. Should we use Hutchins Fund to increase our number of solar panels and increase savings on electricity? Response – we certainly can, but the price of materials and installation has increased so much that it may not be the most responsible use of that money.

Agreed that Properties Board should prioritize the projects mentioned as they see fit. Dave noted that we can get a 25% discount on the mulch if purchased in the next 3 weeks.

**Motion to affirm Properties Board spending of the Hutchins Fund, not to exceed $10,000, made by Steve Bolster, seconded by Donna Lovell.**

**Discussion**

**Finance Report** – Shirley reported and invited all to look in the Google folder for reports [- 2023 March documents](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1I6HyHJD7uaCYN4kWzd_SfJSF5wPQwYuR). January was a pretty bad month. Lower income and 2 large expenses: $8000 on 3rd floor HVAC, which was unexpected; and $13,000 for half our liability insurance (expected by still a big expense in a tough month). Question – are we spending money unwisely or excessively? No, but income is simply not matching expenses.

**Report of Positions Filled at Annual Meeting:** Vice Moderator Kim Kobersmith reported that a full slate was elected at the Annual Meeting! Steve Gowler agreed to a one-year term as Moderator; Susie Ritchie will serve on Nurture & Care; Paul Jacobs on Worship; and Robert Rorrer on Finance.[Annual Reports here](https://union-church.org/annual-report-archive/)

**Flood Situation Update:** Dave is waiting to hear from the insurance company. It’s past the date when we should have had some communication – he is pursuing.

**Report of Pastoral Survey:** Steve Bolster summarized the report, which is in the 2023 March documents folder, linked above. Highlights:

* Received over 80 responses. Age range of responders was overwhelming over 60; most reported that they attend church regularly and in-person and have served on a Board or as Officer in the past 5 years. Wonder if we need another instrument to collect feedback from those who are younger and less frequently “in the building” – or is that, in fact, our demographic?
* Responses were overwhelming positive, with most being well over 4 out of a possible 5 rating
* Concern that we expect too much of our Pastor, how to spread out some responsibility? Suggestion of an Associate Pastor – but we cannot afford the salary. Can we change our staff structure?
* Need more integration of Music Staff in Worship Planning
* The concern Kent expressed of being less effective due to his long-Covid symptoms doesn’t seem to be borne out, as the response was that his effectiveness in ministry & leadership is 83% of what it had been before, and that may be attributable to everyone’s experience of “Covid times.”

Discussion of survey brought us to a larger question of church life/membership/staffing. Rev. Kent suggested we begin a conversation in our Boards, after church, and other settings to think about what we hang on to, what we let go of in a time of sea-change for all US churches. Betsy stated that we need to re-envision how we do church – how do we engage people in this vital work that intends to bring them closer to the love of God, and place in community?

* Do we shorten church services? Lengthen? Add?
* How do we bring the Message outside the building?
* How do we know what people need? It seems that the people we want to hear from are not telling us
* There will be fewer churches in the next 20 years. We want Union to be a place that thrives, and does not diminish. How?
* Donna stated that this is a post-Covid problem in many areas – we necessarily functioned with fewer people, drawing the bubble in – how do we expand again?
* Kent stated that we used to have a better sense of how to figure out if we are doing a good job.
* Worship services are one-way, do we need to change how we “do worship?”
* There was a time when everyone knew we were here (the building and the people), and that has changed as Berea has nearly doubled in population in the past 25 years
* Younger people need connection and community more than ever – how do we reach out with compassion to a generation who does not necessarily think of church as “the good guys?”
* Communication remains an issue

It was suggested at Annual Meeting that a Task Force regarding Membership (increasing, defining) be established. It has 3 members already – Carla Gilbert, Sue Peterson Blyth, Jenny Bromley. Kim will get them together, and more are invited to join them.

Also suggested at Annual Meeting – a Task Force to look at staff members’ duties. Dave reported that Admin Board was asked to look into that.

* Would a flowchart be helpful?
* What are job descriptions, titles?
* How do we get younger, likely less-engaged, people to know who to speak to about what?

**Coordination**

**Board Updates or Highlights**

* Ad hoc committee on Building Celebration – meeting March 21, 6 pm by Zoom, all welcome. Carla asked if a Mission Auction (live and silent) and dinner might be included. They’ll talk about it – the more events, the better!
* Admin -
* CL&G -
* FD –
* Finance -
* M&S –
* Nominating –
* N&C –
* PRB –
* Properties –
* Worship –
* Endowment -

**Pastor’s Report:** Covered earlier

**Appreciation!** 4 Church Council members are at their final meetings – Jean Boyce, Bob Boyce, Joan Moore, Betsy Whaley. Thank you SO MUCH for your service!

**Announcements**

* Next scheduled consideration of Funding Requests – May, 2023
* Next Meeting April 17. Kim will do devotional

 Meeting ended at 9 pm, with prayer by Rev. Kent.

Joan English

Discussion from timespan staff was excused:

*1)  lost vacation time for Rev, Kent, Joan English, Dave Kobersmith, and David Jones would be restored as future paid vacation days, and additional paid vacation days would be added to their contracts in thanksgiving for the extra work performed.  The Administrative Team, in consultation with Kent, will decide upon and recommend the specific number of days of restorative and additional vacation time allotted to those four employees based upon the amount of work performed, the number of vacation days lost, etc.   The Administrative Team will then submit their recommendation to the Church Council for final discussion and approval.*

*2) small gift certificates ($20-$50) will be given to other paid, part-time Union Church Staff in appreciation of their extra efforts during the past couple of years.  The staff receiving these certificates will not include the four individuals listed in #1.  The Administrative Team will determine the specific amounts to be gifted, the mechanism of providing funds for this, and then will submit their recommendations to the Church Council for final discussion and approval.*

*3) an event of celebration will be scheduled for later this spring where various church members, especially volunteer staff and others, should be verbally recognized and celebrated for helping the church community to persevere through the COVID years and the recent flooding of the sanctuary.*