**Church Council Minutes Union Church, April 17, 2023**

**Present:** Joan English (Recorder), Dave Kobersmith (Staff), Marty Hensley (Finance), Kent Gilbert (Pastor), Kim Kobersmith (Vice Moderator), Carla Gilbert (M&S, Staff), Steve Gowler (Moderator), Shirley Carlberg (church member), Linda Parsons (Clerk), David Jones (Staff), Donna Lovell (Admin), Jennifer Melton (Worship), Steve Bolster (PRB), Betty Sarafin (CL&G)

Kim offered our devotional, a meditation on the phrase “sea change,” and what does love demand? She shared a passage from Matthew 9 – *“Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.”*

As we talk sea change and new wine, what might our “fresh wineskins” look like?   Other questions or reflections invited.

* Tide change can be expressed as skepticism with government, schools, institutions in general which are struggling, becoming less prominent, shifting to web communication
* We will have to ride the waves, a number of groups that might not seem compatible will need to find commonalities.
* Who we serve - it’s different. Can we find a way to fill our building? Is 24/7 use possible? What things are correlated?
* In the past, if you had a church of young families, you had both vitality and money. That’s not the case anymore. Those we want to serve do not necessarily see this place as a good place to be.  The needles don’t point the way they used to.
* How can we serve, who, how do we use our resources in a way to be faithful and fulfilling. We serve to transform, proclaim, reduce suffering. What should we do that we are not doing; engaging in new practices and skills due to changing common understandings
* Marty reported that the US Red Cross is in a similar position – they’ve lost revenue because the US has gone from about 300 charities to over 3000, which focus specifically on one cause. People seem to be narrowing their giving. We have to engage in practices & skills we had not before. Difficult for a church like us (elevating diversity, inclusion), to be niche-based
* David reported that his Connexions students’ connections are to each other, and David himself & Betsy, not to the church. Concerns are related to - does everything have to be Christian? For them - they want more flexibility to be seekers and searchers, not a “brand” of spirituality. The strength and support they seek may be here. Seeking healing, finding a sense of joy; don’t want to feel abandoned in their search for spirituality.
* Steve G’s classes engage in the space They enter the building with little history –neither good or bad history, and, after their class, it’s not unknown territory to them anymore.

Question of the evening: one word on why you are grateful for Union - community, compassion, openness, justice, encouragement, fellowship, inclusion, challenge, empathy, awesome!

**Action Items**

**Minutes:** Approval of March minutes. Carla moved, Linda seconded. Passed.

**Conflict of Interest Policy:** Council need all to be aware of this simple doc, which just says that if the church is doing any kind of financial business, there is a duty to disclose any connection with it to limit any undue influence. It actually lowers our insurance rates to have this policy. Dave will send it out & ask people to respond that they’ve read it.

**Discussion**

**Finance Report** – Marty reported. Reports are in the Google drive. Bottom line - Budget vs, Actual 28,000 in the red. In 2023, that number has been worse every month. In late June, early July we will get $40,000 or so from Lambert Fund, which will bring us to break-even, but then the rest of the year – we’ll lurch back into deficit. Finances are, honestly, looking bad. We are OK as far as cash reserves but they are shrinking every year. We need to save money. We don’t know where the money is to hire, buy, etc., is to come from. We cannot keep continually spending. Admin Board referred a question about 12 weeks of paid family leave from a church member to Finance Board. That is not done nation-wide, we are not failing to offer a benefit “everyone” gets. It’s highly unlikely a current staff member would use this benefit, so Finance’s recommendation that it’s ok to take 12 weeks, but not be paid. Until/unless we hire staff it applied to, it’s tabled.

Finance Board would like to see a “spending less” conversation. Now it’s a concern. 5-8 years from now, it’s a crisis. When we start budget planning for 2024, we will need to have a 2-prong strategy. If our financial hopes work out, that’s great BUT we need an organized orderly plan if not. If we have to shrink, we want to be faithful to our mission in doing so.

This question leads to a report from the ad hoc grant committee which Kent shared. Grant committee has met several times. They have been approached by a family foundation, asking for a proposal for a 2-3 year grant of $200-300,000 to help us. The tent-post will have to be a financial plan, since it won’t take long for that money to be gone if we use it to prop up the budget & not to empower what is next.

Nan Naumer suggested this [proposed letter](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1800HmqFHhkp2r5Vc7jKHO58-ztJR2LugQsm1uVJzViE/edit) - focus on becoming financially more stable, figure out what staffing will help us do that. Phase 1 would be to collect data; generate statistics; asset analysis, with a church finance program/consultant. Perhaps hire a marketing/communication company that works with progressive churches. Phase 1 is make the plan.

Phase 2 is hiring the people to enact the plan – personnel and advertising development. Maybe a fundraiser on staff, likely as a contractor. We need to gather as much info from people who look at this - $25-50,000 of this grant to get the personnel tools in place would not be out of line Then we use whatever required to establish financial relationships.

Phase 3 would focus on sustainability of resources and expanding what we do to the wider community if & ONLY if we are seeing fruits of Phase 2. It would be ideal to increase & expand pastoral support - half-time, full-time, a social worker? Marty pointed out this will take some education of congregation on how grants work, as they are targeted to specific areas and designed to be spent down to $0 and will NOT figure in budget at all. Hopefully Phase 3 will bring money into budget, but we need to be aware that the grant itself will not. Grantors are fine with us spending on Phase 3 – or wherever we see fit, actually. It’s OUR grants team thinks it’s only wise to spend if we have our Phase 2 in place. Spending grant money on yearly budget would be short-term and not sustainable. Might be best to contract, but not hire, an expert.

Their research shows are there church marketing consultants that are like catching a wave with progressive churches. If Council likes the phrasing/direction, they will proceed. The Foundation has a history of helping progressive churches & will remain anonymous. This foundation approached us, we are approaching others. Bernardo found a grant to help with arts & music targeted to the LGBT community, $25,000. This could support part of Bernardo’s salary as conductor.

Question - do we have staff support for this initial phase? Do we need additional staffing to support? Grantors are open to that. Kim doesn’t want staff to get bogged down. Discussion, generally supportive. Might need a short-term grant manager. A lot of the heavy lifting ends up on the bookkeeper, according to Donna’s experience. It would not be unusual to consider having a 4-hour a week person work as a project manager. It gets overwhelming, especially for the person who is book keeping. The team is using Grant Station, a program that does a lot of that tracking. We do not yet know what we are getting into. It will be very difficult to do this if, in June, we need to cut staff.

What is our step – affirm the direction? Yes. Going forward, Council doesn’t need a long report – just the direction they’re heading, a synopsis and a “thumbs-up’ and turn them loose, maybe a once-a-month report of what they’re pursuing. When they actually do an action plan with money attached, and we say that we are going to abide by grantor’s requirements, that’ll need a vote.

Would the grant team’s proposal name who the consultants will be? Not at this time, it’s not part of the grant committee’s charge to identify the people who will do the consulting. Who will choose that person-group? Finance-Admin; Membership-Growth Committee, CL&G Task Force. Might just be staff. Can we get all the evidence we need to know if their work has made the changes promised? Yes, would not proceed without that. Consulting can be the best use of dollars, or a bad one is the worst use of dollars. We had a good experience with our branding consultants; and also the Capital Campaign. It is a relationship, we have the expertise to figure out if it’s a good fit.

**Kim suggested that we affirm the direction of the Grant Team. Marty so moved, Jennifer seconded. Motion passed.**

**Flood Situation Update:** An insurance claim is always a process – they have approved the funding our contractor suggested. A percentage of the $ settlement is held back until the final bill comes in. If anything happens that needs more funding, we will need approval from the insurance company. The Community Room is done. There was a meeting today with our contractor, Twin Hammers, on process & plan. Pews will be moved to repair ceiling. There will be scaffolding, 24 feet high, at some point, to take care of a major section of ceiling. The plan is to be done August 1, hopefully earlier. Starting in 2-3 weeks, and after May 15, he will be hard at it.

**Coordination**

**Board Updates or Highlights**

* Ad hoc committee on Building Celebration - 100 year celebration will be rescheduled for August or September. Carla would like to confirm that a Mission & Service benefit auction may be included as a celebration event, agreed. But M&S may want to do that sooner & is empowered to make those plans.
* Admin -
* CL&G -
* FD –
* Finance -
* M&S –
* Nominating –
* N&C –
* PRB –
* Properties –
* Worship –
* Endowment -

**Pastor’s Report:** Alva has been hospitalized, but doing better. Eric Dodson’s sister has died suddenly. She was caregiver for their mom, who has Alzheimer’s. Working on a plan for summer worship, planning for staying in the sanctuary except when the floor is being done & that may be an outdoor service. He officiated a memorial service for a Fee descendent, Polly Embree and made/strengthened great connections. Their cemetery area has gotten a bit overgrown. It might be a nice fellowship opportunity to have a picnic and clean the gravestones of our founder’s families. Steve Connelly might be able to share some history. For our archives, esp, we will want rubbings.

May take a week of vacation end of May/early June to attend a meeting in Japan.

All-church conversation this week after church in the Training Room, there will be some listening and gathering of info, especially trying to reestablish groups. There will be 2 or 3 before June; several after, especially if the grant is a “go.” We’re getting a lot of visitors. Seek out ways to involve people when you see them!

**Announcements**

* Next scheduled consideration of Funding Requests – May, 2023
* Next Meeting May 15.  Marty will do devotional

 Meeting ended at 8:30 pm, with prayer by Rev. Kent.

Joan English