**Church Council Minutes Union Church, February 19, 2024**

**Present:** Joan English (Recorder), Dave Kobersmith (Staff), Kim Kobersmith (Vice Moderator), Kent Gilbert (Pastor), Jeff Hutton (Properties), Steve Gowler (Moderator), Carla Gilbert (M&S and Staff), Jennifer Melton (Worship), Steve Bolster (Pastoral Relations), Sally Hindman (Properties), Donna Lovell (Admin), Linda Parsons (Clerk), Charles Hoffman (Finance)

**Devotional** – Rev. Kent read a powerful poem by Rev. Sarah Are from our Lent Resource: *Truth that Ricochets*

**Question of the evening:** Favorite thing about spring!

**Action Items**

**Minutes:** Approval of January minutes. Charlie moved to approve, Steve G seconded, minutes approved.

**Nominations:** Church Council has the responsibility to nominate members to the Nominating Board, and Honorary Lifetime Deacons. Regarding Nominating: Kim is rotating off; Laura Nagle, Jeff From, Rachel Lakes are currently serving

Suggestions: **Pam Chabora**, Mathew Parrish, Donna Eder, David Duffee, Janet Northern, Chris McKenzie, Sandy Bolster, Alice White. Pam Chabora will be asked to serve; all names mentioned are recorded for future reference.

Regarding Honorary Lifetime Deacons: suggestions - Sue Blyth, Susie Ritchie, Debbonnaire Kovacs. Agreed they’re all great choices! Who will ask them and report to Nominating? Charlie will ask Susie, Sue – Dave; Jennifer - Debbonnaire

**Finance Report:** Charlie. Year-End reports for 2023 distributed. We’d budgeted for a $31,000 deficit; we are at a $26,000 deficit for the year. This good news is due to the Hutchins Fund, which covered the building expenses, so the draw on the savings that Kim explained in a previous meeting (Oct. ’23) is standing at $26, 354.

**Questions/Discussion**

* **Acct. 4120 –** pledges – we are at 94% of pledged income, we have had some losses in the church family that are reflected in this giving total. BUT - unpledged giving is at 122% of budget.
* Special collections for operations explained. $2000 budgeted – is that based on experience, or previous years, or a guess – answer – yes, educated guess based on previous experience.
* **Where does Open Table money show up?** Statement of Financial position, CL&G 3150.02. We’re spending more that we are taking in, which is expected. We’re about $1000-1500 down but the precise amount will be clear at the end of the year. RITI guests are also fed. If you invest with Thrivent they have a twice a year grant program – “Action Teams” – that one can apply for

**Report on Insurance:** We currently do not have property insurance. We DO, though, have liability. Kent & Dave have been talking to a couple of agents. No report yet. Berea College is not self-insured as we’d hoped they might include us.

Jeff Amburgey is the person at Berea to see if the college’s heft could influence an insurance company in our favor. Wondering if we are on college property, might we piggyback? Kent contacted the United Church of Christ (UCC) conference minister. He is very willing to talk with us, optimistic, well aware of our historical and current partnerships w/Presbyterian church, Quakers, UCC, Disciples of Christ.

Question – what would our obligations/covenant relationship be? No one sets a price, but all are asked to consider 2% of annual budget. Few do have those means, but it’s definitely a commitment to cooperate in mutual ministry. There are more things than insurance that we could/would share. Union Church has sent 10 + members through UCC ordination. Other benefits – benefit packages to staff, including health insurance, pension, dental. Resources like providing someone to help w/ interim ministry, counseling. Union Church could be a link to provide a place to start w/ service projects, mens/womens retreats - benefits are more than financial or insurance. Realistically, we can not afford 2% of our budget but that is not an impediment - but we don’t want to be a freeloader. The partnership would be valuable.

Best guess from UCC insurance agent – building insurance likely to be in the $20-25,000 range. That’s less than half of the next cheapest number we thought. If we add about $15,000 to a denominational body it’s a $40,000 investment and a $27,000 increase to the budget. We have an historic and abiding interest in ecumenism.

**Annual Meeting & Congregational discussions**: if Jeff Amburgey can get us in a door and we come up with an affordable/possible plan that’ll be a report to the congregation. BUT if there are conversations to be had in terms of money or affiliation w/ denomination that’ll be a much larger decision, and a lengthy congregational discussion. The urgency is less if we can get a lower price insurance.

But there does need to be a conversation of some depth – how deep will be seen. We have other options that we can pursue – affiliation conversations, realistically we’d need to make application and be voted upon by the local association is in Louisville for formal approval. If L’ville group says yes, we can apply for insurance right away. If we start process we can propose congregation endorse it, and hold conversations for several months, then (likely) a June vote. We’ll leave this piece for next meeting.

**Director of Development and Congregational Engagement**: Good team meetings (consisting of Rev. Kent, Dave, Nancy Adams, Tim Monroe, and Patti Smithson). They’ve gotten about 20 applications. Their process is one-on-one interviews with some really strong candidates and then 4 or so interviews as a team. Hopefully the person will be onboard April 1. They’d like to have a small team assigned to this new hire to help orient them, with meetings about 4 times a year – maybe more in the fall to guide Stewardship. They’d meet more oftern early on. Patti Smithson will be on that team.

**Update on discussion of Staffing Levels**. Working with Jeff Hensley, our consultant from Generis. Not much has happened with being occupied with hiring process. Depends on how long search takes – our time with him is not unlimited. Betsy Whaley has contacts who do this work, she’ll pass on to Kent. Hopefully that will glean the right person to help us with right-sizing based on our resources, financially; and our aspirations, ministerially.

**Coordination**

March 18 Potluck before CC meeting? Agreed, good idea.

**Board Updates or Highlights**

* Admin – re: staffing levels. Reviewing their mission/purpose for the year. Would happily look at resources and offer feedback. Will collaborate with Finance Bd about staffing.
* CL&G -
* FD – College Student trip to Smoky Mtns retreat, fundraiser dinner April 14 – watch for details!
* Finance -
* M&S – exploring a fundraiser for mission projects. They’ve had a couple of auctions, and need more help if another auction happens. We no longer have a bazaar, so how can we hold a community wide event? Adopted a beehive through Sustainable Berea.
* Nominating –
* N&C –
* PRB –
* Properties –
* Worship
* CL&G – Van trip to eclipse April 8, preceded by couple of orientations, equipment, shadow boxes, the plan is to get to the Indiana site by about noon
* Endowment –

**Pastor’s Report**

We had an incident with person who was staying here in the building for several nights. Rev. Kent & a police officer checked over the building. Ground level windows were discovered unlatched. Let’s all be very aware of doors/windows being secured.

**Pastoral Relations Board report**. Lily Foundation Pastoral Renewal Grant provides up to $60,000 for sabbatical of at least 3 month plus $20,000 for congregation to undertake a study/project; $40,000 to pastor for “Whatever Will Make Your Heart Sing.”

Next chance to apply (after a 2024 date which is too soon) will be March 2025, money released in 2026. Kent is eligible.

Discussion:

* Kent thinks we should apply, we need that money for the church’s side of things (hiring an interim perhaps)
* another possibility - Kent takes a non-grant supported sabbatical in early 2025, then we apply somewhat later but before his next available sabbatical.
* Would the congregation be willing to advance Kent’s sabbatical release for 2027? He has delayed sabbatical a couple of times. Is congregation is willing to entertain a shortened window.
* Steve G – what if K took half a sabbatical in early 25, with the other half in 26 if we apply and it DOESN’T work out with Lily? If it does, add to the 4 months. We can have a plan ready to go.
* Congregation can be involved with good notice. Kent would like to take a mini-sabbatical early 2025. What is the schedule for approval? September-ish. How to fill the interim? Several options – full-time person, several part-timers, lay volunteers.
* Independent of any mini-sabbatical, we should definitely consider working toward the Lily Grant.

Step 1 – motion: Pastoral Relations Board proposes that Church Council commits to pursuing a Lily Foundation Clergy Renewal Grant. Coming from a Board this motion requires no second. Passed unanimously, Council affirmed that Kent needs a sabbatical and that these are all good ways to achieve that.

Pastoral Relations will work through mini-sabbatical idea and will get assistance from Grants Team and Development person

Next step to share with congregation at Annual Meeting, seek people to work with that.

**Announcements**

* Next scheduled consideration of Funding Requests – May, 2024
* Next meeting – March 18 w/potluck. Charlie will do devotional.

 Meeting ended 8:30 with prayer by Rev. Kent.

Joan English