**Church Council Minutes Union Church, November 18, 2024**

**Present:** Diane Bailey (Worship), Steve Bolster (Pastoral Relations), Joan English (Recorder), Carla Gilbert (Pastoral Assoc), Kent Gilbert (Pastor), Jeff Hutton (Properties), David Jones (Program Coordinator), Dave Kobersmith (Church Administrator), Kim Kobersmith (Vice Moderator), Greg Lakes (Treasurer), Donna Lovell (Admin), Jessi Montgomery (Dev. Director) Alvera Perman (FD), Cadence Perman (FD), Patti Smithson (Finance), Maureen Spencer (Clerk)

**Devotional:** Kim found a particularly timely song, which Kent played for our Devotional: [National Anthem: Arise, Arise!](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QTi6m7v-x1k) sung in church in 2012 by Jean Rohe

**Question of the evening:** Favorite way to spend a dreary day

**Action Items**

**Minutes:** Correction to minutes – the Staff Handbook review cost of $900 will be paid from Transformation Fund, 3050. After correction Greg moved to approve October minutes, Patti seconded, minutes approved.

**Learning Moment**. Kim is open to any suggestions

**Finance Report.** Patti reported. Latest report showed we’re doing well for October into November. Biggest challenge, putting together a budget for next year, based on Stewardship numbers. Note: current $4200 deficit is not too bad. If carried through the year, it’s a lower total ‘24 deficit than we had projected.

**2025 Budget:** Dave reported. For 2024, we had a $260,000 budget for pledged income, and realized nearly all of that. For 2025 – we are currently 81% of the way to our budget estimate for pledges of $278,000 – Dave and Kent are comfortable with that estimate. Kent stated we may need to reach out to some previous regular givers. Currently, we’re about $50,000 short of that goal. The expectation is that more pledges will come in to close that gap. We’ve had substantial generosity. There was a wonderful spirit on Giving Day. Question – people who give in one large gift, are they counted yet? If pledged, yes, and that data will need to be “crunched.” Jessi reported that 13 households increased pledges pretty substantially, 3 pledged w/ minor decreases. There are several individuals/households who have not renewed pledges, but are very likely to. As always, if anyone’s circumstances change, please do let Kent, others, know.

**Kim reported on suggestions of the Task Force** composed of herself, Patti & Kent, which met to discuss lowering some line items with an eye toward reducing the deficit from 6.8% of the entire budget to 6%, continuing downward until the deficit is 0 in 5 years. The following suggestions would decrease the ’25 deficit to 6.07% :

**#6101** – Computer Equipment & Supplies, budgeted at $500 for 2024, was originally $1200 for ‘25, proposal to reduce to $1000

**#6202 –** Stewardship Expenses. 2024 - $1000 but largely unspent, dropped to $750

**#6301 –** Maintenance & Capital projects to $9000, because Properties’ Special Projects Fund is also available. Some things can be deferred (not repairs, mostly cosmetic things)

**#6304** – Contract Labor drop to $300 from $500 because nothing was spent in ‘24

**#6310 -** Natural Gas – in 2024 we used more heat pumps & less natural gas, that may be why gas is lower and electricity higher. This is less likely to be as much of an issue this year, due to change in technology (inc. Ring thermostats). We’re budgeting $1500 more electricity for the year.

**#6407** – Other Board Expenses - Budgeted $500 for ‘25, but we haven’t spent the $200 budgeted at all in 2024, group felt safe to drop it back to $200

**#6521** - Outreach – dropped to $1000

**#6522** - Membership – had $500 in ’24 but didn’t spend, felt ok to cut to $300

Opportunity to respond, ask questions, or are there plans made for the line items discussed which the group may not’ve known about? Are we comfortable with a deficit of 6.07% this year (if more money is pledged, those line items may be restored with potentially no increased deficit and/or the deficit may be lowered further)?

Rev. Kent reminded the group that, in 2026, we can use funds from Endowment Fund if we desire (that guideline is our own internal benchmark). The church received a substantial gift to put in that fund, making it close to $700,000. The goal is to reach $1 million by 2028. This endowment can offset big building concerns, we won’t need to use budget dollars for that.

Reminder that, with the generous gift from Sally Zimmerman, we have expanded our reserves.

Kim is comfortable, esp. since $27,000 was the deficit projected this year and we’ve done better. There have been years when we were looking at a nearly 10% deficit. What is our Contingency currently? It’s not a percentage of budget, but rollovers from previous years. Right now about $175,000, which is about 6 months of operations if we suddenly had $0 income.

Reminder of the good news that we were able to retain staff COLA increases for ‘25.

**Is there a motion to affirm the revised 2025 Budget to put before the congregation? Carla so moved, Steve seconded. Motion passed.**

**For Discussion**

Referring to the questions at the end of this doc – any additions, any rise to the top to consider in coming months?

Steve reflected on – “How do we incorporate new people into the life of the congregation?” An epidemic of loneliness has continued despite being back together post-Covid. Reminder of small groups of 4 or 5 that met for quite some time, based on a Lenten devotional booklet of writings by folks in church.

**Coordination**

**Strategic Doing process, Nov. 23** – Betsy will lead the session from 10 – 12. Very action & grass roots oriented.

**Advent & Sabbatical plans** – coordination needed? “Words for the Beginning” is the Theme through Epiphany. There’s a focus on quilting. Carla & Rita Barlow are putting together a quilt exhibit. Devotional booklet going out next week. Trying to get the first several weeks into Feb. ‘25 planned. Kent will be away on sabbatical Feb & March and return before Easter, Jessi will help with the grant to help finance his longer ’26 sabbatical. The idea is a theme of “Catching Our Breath.” Kent will use singing/breath/spirit, access by finding community in singing. Catching Breath will be incorporated into congregational life as well. Restoration of spirit; ideas for congregation to experience/explore – in 2026. In Feb., March 2025, he will be more locally based and attend some events w/o planning to learn to lead them. Will visit Japan, experience a Shinto practice on breath. Will be back before Palm Sunday. Any coordination re: hiring? That’s PRB’s major action item this week, as affirmed by Council in October (full-time, or nearly so). Then PRB will consult with Administration & Finance Boards.

**Board Updates or Highlights**

* Admin -
* CL&G -
* FD – Dec. 11 after Open Table, cookie-making, decorating, games, inter-generational things to do together. Alvera will do Childrens Church during Advent w/David Jones. Cadence – playground, are the swings going back up? Consultants from playground groups, equipment was problematic and dangerous. Properties Board decided it’s prudent to remove them (not unanimously). FD is invited to come up with a replacement/safer type of equipment. Maybe consider a moveable fencing, see-saw type swing? Paul Jacobs & Tennant Kirk have expertise and may be willing to consult.
* Finance -
* M&S – realized close to $7000 from Estate Sale, Tennant will set some times for items to be available at church. Designated $1000 for UP. They’re in transition so that will go to our emergency fund and buy some supplies for our unhoused neighbors. Planning some Christmas goodie sales on Betty Wray’s pretty plates. Raised $700 for the CoCoDA fundraiser. Also allocated funds to Food Bank.
* Nominating –
* N&C -
* PRB -
* Properties - Kent & Jeff will get together and finalize room numbers in a more logical pattern. Currently they’re numbered in the architect from 2014 plan, which made sense for their purposes but not so much for regular users.
* Worship -
* Moderator -

**Pastor’s Report** - there’s been a lot of anxiety and high tensions that may have been expressed in unhelpful ways recently. Can we express ourselves in gentleness and elasticity? Prayers & promises – how can we help folks who are unsheltered (not just winter months, but long-term)? Trying to pull together a meeting, hopefully at City Hall. Looking at ways people may be affected by immigration policies, also implications if DACA is ended. Families will be impacted. the private prison industry is making plans for detention camps, state legislature will be happy to have in KY ☹ What might it look like if the church was a sanctuary? Discussion of the trump threat of ending the Dept. of Education and Pell Grants, which would gut Berea College.

**Announcements**

* Next meeting: January 20
* Learning Moment?
* Devotion: Maureen Spencer
* Meeting ended with prayer, 8:30 pm

Joan English

**Questions to keep in mind, going forward:**

* Are there things we need to let go of?
* What are the pain points bringing people to Union Church?
* Can we do a worship flash mob w/young people?
* Can we sustain what we are doing financially into the future?
* How do we sustain our institution and serve the community in this fast-moving and needy world?
* What spiritual resources do people need right now?
* What are the traditions fed people in the past?
* How can we engage young people who don’t consider themselves Christian?
* Why are people part of Union?
* What do we offer people?
* What personal stories can we share?