

**SAINT LUCAS UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
CHURCH COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES
February 26, 2024, 6:00 pm - Zoom Hybrid/Room 19**

(This meeting was called to order at 6:25 pm by President, Marty Schmidt and was opened to visitors.)

MEMBERS PRESENT: Violet Brooks/Zoom, Phil Denton, Marsha Fey, Katy Forand/Zoom, Wanda Gillman, Kathy Herron/Zoom, Donovan Larson, Marty Schmidt, and Barbara Smith/Zoom, plus Rev. Vicki Hampton/ex-officio & Rev. Merrimon Boyd/ex-officio/Zoom || Eleven members.

ZOOM VISITORS PRESENT: Marsha Armentrout, Ken Hamilton, Sandy Harris, and Dan Herron || Four visitors.

OPENING PRAYER: The meeting was opened with a prayer by Kathy Herron.

GUEST COMMENTS: Lori Dalba, shared her concerns about ministers coming and going and questioned why it's been such a lengthy time to find a settled Senior Pastor. A group discussion continued with some of the Council members sharing their insights about how a search process can be a lengthy stretch. And that all of us need to have faith and patience the Search Team is doing their best to make sure we get the right candidate in place. The Council thanked Lori for her courage to come forward and express her concerns on this topic. The Council was very interested to hear her thoughts.

As a member of the Memorial Committee Barb Beck attended to share her presentation about purchasing new green paraments for the altar. The current ones are showing their wear, and age and are beginning to fade as they are used 85-90% of the church calendar year. The committee and Pastor Vicki have been collaborating with Jeff Wunrow, a local liturgical textiles artist. He is the same individual who created the John & Dorothy Gross musical banner. Barb had photos of the green paraments the committee had agreed upon. Jeff has assured the committee that once he has his Easter orders completed, our order could be delivered in less than four weeks after the Council's approval. The fee he has quoted for this order is \$1,980. The Memorial Committee is prepared to purchase this gift for the church. Marty made a motion to allow the purchase of new \$1,980 green paraments for the altar. Wanda seconded it. The motion was passed unanimously by a show of hands.

CONSENT AGENDA:

- Council Meeting - January 22, 2024, Minutes
- Council Meeting | Executive Session - January 22, 2024, Minutes
- ONA Task Force - January 2, 2024, Minutes

Marsha moved to accept and Donovan seconded that the February 26, 2024 Consent Agenda be received as submitted. The motion was accepted unanimously.

STAFF REPORTS:

Pastor Vicki - There is nothing to add from Pastor Vicki other than David Gildehaus passed away and his funeral/luncheon will be on March 8th. There were no questions from the group for her.

Pastor Merrimon - There is nothing to add from Pastor Merrimon other than he's been busy working with the confirmation kids and is enjoying getting to know them. Donovan asked how many students were attending confirmation. And have any dropped out? (No, not since he has taken over.) 9-10 attend on Wednesdays. Marty reminded the group that this year's class is two grades and that there will unlikely be confirmation next year.

FINANCIAL REPORT:

Financial Secretary, Wanda Gillman advised the following information for January 2024 -

- The Revenue and Expense Report was reviewed. Regular Offerings are up over last year by \$17,267.72 and over budget by \$23,234.38. The total Revenue was up over last year by \$40,337.75 and over budget by \$26,692.58.
- The increases are somewhat due to the early closing date for 2023. Some large offerings usually recorded at the end of the year were recorded in January of this year. Also the PET distribution of \$20,419 was received on January 19, 2024, into the General Fund which is usually recorded in December. The accounting system update made it necessary to have an early close date of January 8, 2024.
- The rent for the Mission House -11815 Denny Road- for December and January was received in January.
- The insurance coverage on the church building was paid in January. However, the Finance Committee is now asking for that expense to be paid quarterly rather than monthly.
- There were two applications of snow/ice removal in January which was approximately \$3K of an added expense.
- The increase in staff expense was due to the increase in the amount for health insurance coverage.
- Credit card charges for Christmas flowers and funeral charges were recorded in January. The postage charge was inflated due to postage being paid twice by accident. Sue discussed that part of the postage should be shared by Evangelism Outreach. Jeff will talk to Pat Stephens about how much to share.
- The church building insurance quarterly payment was paid in January.
- All of this resulted in a deficit of \$7,890 for the month of January.

Wanda asked for questions. Phil took this opportunity to share his concerns about our budget deficit spending and the drain it is contributing to our church. He took the averages of December 2023 and January 2024 total revenue of \$172,926.59. The total expenses for those two months were \$187,654. Which put us at a deficit of \$14,727.42. i.e. we spent more than we brought in. Therefore we are running a \$3,500/week deficit. i.e. \$14K a month. This is not sustainable. And he needs everyone to understand that you would not run your own home budget this way. As long as he is on the Council he plans to continue to track our expenses and revenues. We need to rethink some issues in this church. The numbers are stark and they don't lie.

Donovan replied by saying those deficits occurred during a dark time in our church... Co-vid and strife, etc. Kathy interjected our membership growth would not have happened had it not been for making those types of budgetary decisions. God was in it because our congregation was in it. She'd like to add that by using our faith to move forward we need to be grateful for what we have achieved. And we have agreed for 2024 to be our last year for deficit spending. Marty agreed, this is the last year we will do this. We were blessed to have Vicki come to us with her knowledge and background in finance. Helping us to clean up our books took a huge amount of her time. Plus we also now have an office administrator who can handle these tasks. Our next settled, senior pastor will not need to devote the time as Vicki did. This will allow that person more time for visitations and concentration on the congregation. Also, in that scenario, it begs the question of our need for a second pastor.

Marsha feels it is disingenuous to the new person called to our church with two pastors when we are discussing staffing cuts. She feels we need to give the future pastor at least a year to settle in. With endowments and CDs, Wanda interjected we are not a poor church. Marty shared he does not want to discount Phil's concerns. Marsha does not want to discount it either, but feels we also need to take into account the other resources we have. Phil countered that the Trust is a separate, legal entity from this church. It is controlled by law. Right now we are at the max of what we can get from the trust each month. Marty added current trust parameters are limiting us. Hence the discussions currently with Matt Wagner of the UCC. We need to get the new PET in place so we can accurately predict what income to expect. We have ten months of offerings in front of us to help gauge what income we can expect. We have the CDs earning more income than what they did in the former bank accounts. Unfortunately, past Councils and the congregation did not have the fiscal discipline that we are now exhibiting.

Pastor Vicki asked if the income in the budget is still divided by twelve (Wanda answered yes). As such, Vicki would expect the income in January to be much lower than a 1/12th figure. This is why she's been pushing to do a weighted average income, but doesn't feel the church is ready for it just yet. At this time, Marty jumped down to New Business to discuss the Calendar Year budget vs. Fiscal Year Budget. Please see that section below for this continued discussion.

Financials Continued -

- Restricted Accounts - Restricted Accounts are those accounts within the budget whereby offerings are marked by a congregant to go toward a specific goal, i.e. The Kitchen Fund or The Music Department. One of the problems with this type of restriction is that quite often these funds go untouched. Another is that they are becoming too cumbersome to manage due to the many categories that have been created. Jeff sent an email to Council asking for guidance on how to reduce them and manage them. Vicki cautioned that before we get too deep into this conversation, we need to have the name of the funds before us so we can identify the ones that need to be eliminated. Phil suggested that as we do this, we need to be conscious of and honor the donor intent. Marty shared Jeff's email with the Council to explain his question to the group, i.e. in the past Restricted Accounts have been deemed an "extraordinary" expense. Does this continue to be true? The discussion continued, specifically using the example of the A.V. restricted funds. Dan Herron shared his knowledge about Restricted Funds with regard to the A.V. team. Phil asked how many Restricted Accounts there are on our books. Marty replied approximately ten. Donovan asked if the question tonight is "how do we free up this money so it's not quite so restrictive"? Per Pastor Vicki & Marty, Jeff's concern is how to manage the reporting of these funds more efficiently as a group, rather than creating a report for each individual fund. In addition he's trying to eliminate having to make a phone call about each item as it comes across his desk. Marty feels we need to specifically designate parameters that will allow Jeff to manage these funds without micromangement by the Council. The decision was made to continue to allow Restricted Funds with new parameters established to increase the efficiency of management by Jeff.

Physical Facilities Ministries:

Donovan presented the following information to the Council -

- A new Broadband provider named I-Three has been secured for the church.
- Donovan will check in with Glantz Roofing to pinpoint where we are on their calendar for our repairs this spring.
- Donovan will also check in with the asphalt vendor to pinpoint where we are on their calendar for our spring resealing job.
- Violet and Donovan will be installing the No Trespassing signs around the ball fields to make sure our point is clear. We will deny liability in the event someone is using our fields without church permission.
- He and Violet are working with the larger users of our fields to secure proof of insurance certificates.
- Donovan has asked if he should start working on bids to replace the carpeting in the Welcome Center (the area at the top of the stairs between the stairs, office, and Social Hall) with tile flooring. He is estimating a \$6K-\$10K expense. Should he pursue it? Marsha and Wanda are concerned about the slick surface of tile floors. Marty agreed it needs to be replaced, as you can see fraying. However, Marty suggested getting bids for both. Perhaps a non-slick surface for flat areas with carpet on the stairs. Donovan will research.
- A walk-through inspection of both the parsonage and sexton's houses still needs to be performed soon.
- A lease still needs to be signed by the Fosters, hopefully next week. The new lease will be a one-year lease due to DECA's involvement. Violet asked about the rental amount. Donovan advised when they first moved in approximately 7 years ago, the monthly rent was \$800. It is now \$1,310/month. Phil asked if the new lease would spell out maintenance and upkeep on the part of the Fosters. Donovan replied yes.

- Donovan will be doing work in the parsonage this week and he will speak with Mrs. Foster about getting a dumpster on the property to allow them to get the garage emptied and maintained.
- Something else that has come to Donovan's attention recently is the state of our bell tower. He understands one rope from one bell has been cut to keep it from ringing. There is a concern about the stability of the rack/mounting unit with that bell. McShane Bell Company will be inspecting it within the next few weeks to advise what work is needed to correct the issue so both bells can again be rung.
- Donovan will also be working with the Preschool and the Cemetery in the upcoming weeks to continue the coordinated effort to install multiple security cameras and the necessary bids for that work.
- Finally, Jeff was able to negotiate a lower price with Republic Waste by \$150/month for our trash hauling.

OLD BUSINESS:

>Open & Affirming Task Force - Barbara Smith advised that since their Jan 2nd meeting this group has also met on 1/31/24, and 2/12/24. Those minutes will be forthcoming. The Gateway Open & Affirming Coalition will hold its annual Convocation on Saturday, March 2nd at Parkway UCC. It will run from 8:30 a.m. through 3:00 p.m. Anyone is welcome to attend. The fee for the day-long session is \$20/person which includes a light breakfast, and lunch in between three workshop sessions, an opening church service, and a closing benediction service. If interested, contact Gateway Open & Affirming directly to register.

>Land Use Task Force - Per Marty, nothing to report this month

>Choral Area Changes - Marty has nothing new to share on this topic.

>PET Trustees - Marty advised the Council our trustees have been working with Matt Wagner from the UCC conference office to compare our current trust document with updated trust guidelines and regulations currently in place by the State of Missouri. Review and discussions have begun.

>New Hymnals - Marty offered to the Council that after the last Council Conversation, he has taken it upon himself to review the new hymnal. Wanda offered that she had an opportunity to review it on Saturday and feels it's a wonderful update. The push-back that Marty experienced came about due to the language within the hymnal. He has found (1.) The word Lord is not excluded as it appears in over 81 hymns, (2.) the word Father appears in almost 30 hymns, and (3.) The word Mother appears in almost 30 hymns typically as a reference to Mary. In addition there are countless references to God, and Creator. He feels some of the changes are due to poetic license over the original text. However, he also feels the overall intent of this hymnal is still the Praise of God. Pastor Vicki agreed and supplied theological examples of this. She believes they have been "incredibly intentional" with the update of this hymnal. Their intent was to be consistent with the theology of the United Church of Christ, which is May They All Be One. People may find some of these changes unfamiliar, but that is to be expected with any change. Phil wanted to convey that his concerns expressed at last month's meeting about a new hymnal were never about the merit of the new version, merely about how it was presented and passed by the Council. Marty agreed last month and again this evening that in hindsight he should have presented it much differently. However, the hymnals have now been purchased and have been delivered to St. Lucas UCC.

>Bridge Senior Minister - *Please refer to the Executive Session of this meeting which took place before the *start* of this public meeting.

Marty asked for any other Old Business from the group.

Marsha wanted the Council to know that she and Katy have been working with Michele on the curriculum for the remainder of 2024. And they are making good headway with plans for the entire year. She has also been helping Debbie clean out some cabinets in the office and came across documents with signatures from 2021. She is wondering what to do with those. It was the consensus of the group that if they are sign-in sheets to the semi-annual and annual meetings, they no longer need to be kept. They would have only been needed on that day

as proof of a quorum at those meetings. As those meetings were voted on and eventually closed, a quorum must have been in place, so those docs can be recycled.

NEW BUSINESS:

>Change Budget from Calendar Year to Fiscal Year - At their quarterly meeting in January, the Executive Committee of the Council discussed changing the budget year from a Calendar Year to a Fiscal Year budget. Some Financial Committee members and a former Financial Secretary of our church do not agree with this decision. Donovan asked for the reasons this change would be beneficial. Marty replied with (1.) It would coincide with the Preschool's budget year. (2.) And it would iron out all the uncertainties of December/January revenue. Wanda added that when following a fiscal year you have actual numbers to base your budget on. Marsha raised the question about changing meeting dates. Marty and Pastor Vicki answered that the voting of the budget would happen at the semi-annual meeting rather than the annual meeting. And the voting of the officers would remain unchanged at the annual meeting. This could shorten the November meeting because the budgetary issues would be moved to the semi-annual meeting.

Wanda noted one member of the Financial Committee is against this decision and feels the timing is not good. This energy should be given to growing the church. Wanda stated that because there was so much pushback at the recent Financial Committee meeting, Jeff was not able to delve into what it would take to make this change. Vicki added that pushback came from one individual only. Marty asked Phil's opinion. Phil shared that you can make better financial decisions by tracking July to June. Marty added that we'll be able to make a more accurate prediction about what the budget is, which will allow us to better serve the church. Kathy added universities work that way. Vicki added that European businesses work that way as well. Katy added that if we don't have the December year-end to deal with it keeps our numbers cleaner. We're currently in February and we still don't have a clear picture of what our December or January numbers are. Vicki also inserted that we would not be losing anything. If something is postmarked before 12/31/23 or dropped off at the office before 12/31/23 it will be posted to 2023. Another concern by someone on the Financial Committee is it would effect how membership numbers are submitted to the UCC. Wanda explained that it could be adjusted with the needed parameters added to the financial software. At this time, Marty felt this topic should be tabled until the Financial Committee and the Executive Board of the Council can meet together to discuss it further. Marty wants to hear all sides of this topic and all concerns individuals may have before a final decision is made.

At this time, Marty requested a motion to adjourn. Phil made the motion and Donovan seconded it. The motion was accepted unanimously by a show of hands and the meeting was adjourned.

In closing, *The Lord's Prayer* was recited.

*This ended the Public Session of the February 2024 Council meeting.

(Minute marker: 1 hour/51 minutes)

Respectfully submitted,
Barbara Smith,
Recording Secretary

NOTE - the next regular Council meeting is scheduled for Monday, March 25th at 6:00 p.m.