

SAINT LUCAS UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
CHURCH COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES
March 25, 2024, 6:00 pm - Zoom Hybrid/Room 19

(This meeting was called to order at 6:05 pm by President, Marty Schmidt and was opened to visitors.)

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

VISITORS PRESENT: Donna Alexander/Zoom, Barb & Bob Beck/Zoom, Bill Biedenstein/Zoom, Shirley Bild/Zoom, Bill Brinkhorst & Joy Dressel/Zoom, Joan & Kirk Dalgaard/Zoom, Ken Hamilton/Zoom, Dan Herron/Rm 19, Ellen Littleton/Zoom, Kim Witbrodt/Zoom || Thirteen visitors.

OPENING PRAYER: The meeting was opened with a prayer by Barbara Smith.

GUEST COMMENTS: Dan Herron is attending this meeting to speak about the AV Fund & the AV Budget. The first item to discuss is how the AV Fund is used. Dan began assisting with the AV Team after Wayne Muehlenbeck passed away. The AV Fund is typically supported by memorial contributions, such as requested in Wayne's obit. The fund also receives money from those who feel the desire to help support the AV Team. AV Techs who work funerals do not personally accept money from families. Instead, they encourage them to donate it to the AV Fund. That fund balance is approximately \$5K. Currently, a replacement wireless microphone system is needed. The present hardware is becoming obsolete. In addition, the handheld microphones need to be replaced due to age and wear/tear. Compatibility for all mic hardware is also a reason new mics are needed. Replacement equipment is approximately \$12K. AV would like to request the \$7K difference from the Memorial Committee if available.

Secondly, the AV Team worked with Paul Simon last year when creating the 2024 AV Budget. One thing they did not account for was a \$240/quarter fee (i.e. \$960 annually), for computer software support from K.D. Computer. Paul specifically told Dan that it was not an AV line item. It should go against another church budget line item/s due to the support it offers to the entire church. Yet, Debbie recently told him that it is the responsibility of the AV budget.

Marty shared with the group the Finance Committee recognizes there are specific areas of the budget currently under review. Wanda is developing a policy for specific funds and how they are to be accounted for. At present, there are several "funds out there that nobody even knows why they exist anymore". There are areas of the budget that may need to have separate budget funds established. AV, The Memorial Committee, and the HS Mission trip are three areas to be reviewed and clarified how they are to be accounted for. Marty can confirm we are still finding accounting issues that came up due to the former accounting groups responsible for helping out the office after Pam's departure.

Bill Biedenstein is not here to ask for money... He is here to talk about our seating in the sanctuary during worship. Most importantly, the eye contact that occurs between the ministers and the congregation can be difficult to achieve and needs improvement. People sit where they always want to sit, regardless of whether they are spread out away from the others. He would like us to think about how we present ourselves as a church family through the seating we use. We need to sit together as a community. What are some ways we can enhance worship as a closer-knit group? Marty agreed and shared with Bill that this is a discussion that is on the Council's radar.

CONSENT AGENDA:

- Council Meeting - February 26, 2024, Minutes
- Council Meeting | Executive Session - February 26, 2024, Minutes

- ONA Task Force - February 12, 2024, Minutes
- Finance Ministry - February 20, 2024 Minutes
- Preschool Board - February 12, 2024 Minutes
- A/V Ministry - February 27, 2024 Minutes

Barbara moved to accept and Wanda seconded that the March 25, 2024 Consent Agenda be received as submitted. The motion was approved unanimously.

STAFF REPORTS:

Pastor Vicki - She asked if we had any questions about her report. Barbara asked if the organist position has been tabled to allow the Called Candidate to have input regarding the future of the Music Dept. Marty and Vicki both answered yes. Pastor Vicki suggested that we post the organist's position approximately three weeks before the start date of our candidate. That way our candidate will have applicants to review once in the office to begin their work at St. Lucas UCC. With no other questions, Pastor Vicki took the opportunity to remind the group this would be her last Council meeting with us. Her last day with St. Lucas is the day before our next meeting in April. Pastor Vicki stated it has been an amazing run for her at St. Lucas. We've been willing to take up difficult issues. There are many to thank for her time with us. Specifically, she'd like to mention Paul Simons -Council President when she came on board- plus Joy Dressel as president the following year and now Marty as president. She'd like to thank these three people who are so dedicated to St. Lucas UCC and what it means to our community. (*"I just wanted to get that out there."*) She'd also like to thank Donovan for taking up the Physical Facilities position. That is always an "unsung and unthanked position" and she appreciates all of the work he has given to it.

Pastor Merrimon - There was nothing to add to Pastor Merrimon's report. But he did take the opportunity to thank Pastor Vicki for introducing him to everyone at St. Lucas. It has been a pleasure working with her these past months. She thanked him as well for their time spent together.

FINANCIAL REPORT:

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

- The regular offering for February was \$40,188 which is under budget by \$13,312.
- The General Fund Income was \$56,057.14.
- General Fund Expenses were a total of \$82,351.30; expenses were under budget by \$3,207.68.
- The income from giving is not meeting the amount of expenses and not meeting the budgeted amount ending with a deficit for the month of \$26,294.
 - (*For clarification Phil asked if after one month we are adding \$26,294 to a budget that is already deficit spending. The answer was yes.*) Phil wants to be clear for everyone that our revenue is in the minus column. If you multiply that \$26,294 by ten months that is over one-quarter of a million dollars. And that is on TOP of the \$200k+ budget deficit we are already experiencing. "We're headed for insolvency." We need to have serious discussions about our financial matters. He has never confronted anything like this before. Kathy asked when you look at the YTD Actual this year vs. the YTD Actual last year it appears we are doing better this year, correct? Marty shared there was a lot of money that came in in January which should have been applied to December. "We closed the books too soon." It would have made last year look better. But in reality, it makes this year look worse. Donovan commented there are two ways to handle it; we either increase giving or cut expenses. Marty stated we needed to do both. (Phil preferred the first.) Donovan continued that we need to "squeeze down" on the costs we need to spend. One example is the ball fields. If we had volunteers to use the equipment we own to assist with field maintenance we may be able to reduce some of those expenses. Marty shared that the two biggest

expenses we incur are for 1.) Personnel and 2.) Building and Grounds. Due to the age of the building and its upkeep, he doesn't see savings coming from that area. However, the Personnel is something we seriously need to look at. "Are we appropriately staffed for the size of this congregation"? Because that's where we can make some significant savings. And hard decisions will have to be made. Phil added reorganization, as he suggested at the retreat, needs to take place. Marty added with a new pastor coming in "the time is now". Let that person settle in and then we need to review what our personnel needs are. In addition to the personnel, we need to look at giving too.

Due to the direction of this conversation, Marty moved the General Offering Stats under New Business to this portion of the meeting: He shared a .pdf graph with the Council analyzing the giving from 2023. Barbara pointed out we had this same discussion a year ago. We need to get the word out and explain how our finances are actually set up. Many people may think that because we have a \$3M+ trust, 10 acres of land, a church, two houses, a preschool, and a cemetery we must be a "really rich church". Katy pointed out that many universities and higher education institutions are using up their own endowments.

Marty advised that as Council President, the sequence of events he sees happening is this: He'll need to get in front of the congregation to tell them there is going to be hard news coming out in the next eBlast. This is our financial situation since the first of the year. Looking at the giving reports, it is not an encouraging sign. We're going to share data with you to reflect on. And then we'll need a push from the Stewardship Committee. How we formulate that and what type of message will be needed. Katy advised we could have some type of campaign revolving around the excitement of a new pastor coming in. The excitement and enthusiasm of having a new pastor may ignite some folks. After some conversations that she's had, Katy's feeling is that people are waiting to see who the new candidate is. She feels many may be holding their attendance, participation, and contributions until they have a better feel for what's to come about with a new minister. Marty shared that he'd hate to have people wait until the new minister arrives. He's hoping there will be a boost after the trial sermon during the candidating weekend. Regardless of how we do it and the timing of it, we need to get the message out. Donovan reminded the group that we're approaching a low-giving time of year as well.

Barbara asked Vicki what the difference is between what we're doing now vs. a weighted average income. Vicki replied what we're doing is divided by 12, i.e. the same amount each month. Whereas if you take a weighted average, you're saying in December we get 25% more income than what we do in July. So we'll budget for more income in December than we get in July.

A brief discussion ensued about budget decisions that have been made over the last year, the trends of giving over the past few years, congregants receiving their Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) and the perception of what our trust income is, and that we can only take from it the income we earn. "We are not as rich as they think." Marty shared that the Preschool is our biggest money maker. We need to be better stewards of that program. It is not a separate entity. It is part of St. Lucas UCC. Donovan asked if we've thought about speaking with them, perhaps a joint meeting with them. We could explain, that we'd like to expand or generate income. There is no intention of changing the character of their program. Marty reiterated we are asset-rich and cash-poor. He feels our asset behind the pavilion could be generating much more money than it is now with field rentals. Marsha shared that we are in a neighborhood and that needs to be considered as well. She remembers when years ago proposals were made about that land the neighbors surrounding the property were "horrified". They did not build their house to have high-rises or commercial buildings put in their backyards. Marty stated he didn't want anything commercial. "But it's our property. It's not their property. It's ours". Marsha again stated we're a neighbor. Then Marty added if we are fighting for our life we need to figure out how to be good stewards of the land plus earn income from it. A one-story preschool building is not going to be an eyesore to the community. It

will rarely be used at night except on occasion. Donovan added, “In case anyone thinks otherwise, we will never make much money on those fields by renting them out. By being careful, we are breaking even”.

Financials Continued -

- Restricted Accounts - The problem these accounts caused for our budget is that those funds were placed under assets which inflated our assets. But they're really liabilities. If we write a check against them the check would come out of the General Fund. Together, Wanda and Jeff created a list of those restricted accounts. Some were so old the General Fund had already used those balances. Wanda has created a new policy regarding the use of Restricted Funds which will go into effect as of 4/1/24, once the Finance Committee approves it at their next meeting. It will eliminate many items that have “fictitious balances”; except for the line items that have been deemed legitimate. It will give a truer account of what money is a liability and net assets account and their requirements. The new policy will apply to new activity moving forward. Marty asked the group to read her policy and comment on it for next month.
- Fiscal Year - Marty shared that last month we'd discussed changing our budget year in May from Calendar to Fiscal. Upon discussion with the Finance Committee, the decision was made to table that discussion for the time being. It is not a “dead” issue. It's just that now is not the time for that to take place.

*(*At this time Pastor Vicki excused herself from the meeting. The Council was happy with her presence after last week's hip replacement.)*

Physical Facilities Ministries:

Donovan presented the following information to the Council - There are no minutes in the Consent Agenda this month as Donovan was out of town, hence no meeting occurred. However, he did report the following:

- There was another sewer backup in the church last month. A camera was sent through looking for a break. They feel the blockages are due to low flow. He and Charlie feel that Charlie will need to consistently run water heavily through the lines to keep the sewer clear. That should help. There may still be a blockage off the downstairs Bride's room, however, that is still being determined.
- After McShane Bell Company came in to assess our bell tower, Donovan secured bids for the necessary repair work. One bid is \$2,100 to repair the instability of one bell. There is another bid for \$11K to install an automatic bell-ringing device that could ring one or both bells remotely. He feels the priority is making the bell/s stable and usable thus \$2,100. It may also allow the second bell to be used. We won't know for sure until the work is completed. Also, Donovan placed a new aluminum ladder in the bell tower to replace the old wooden one.
- Regarding grass cutting, Donovan advised we are in the second year of a three-year contract. There are some things he's cut out of the contract to save money such as mulching around the base of the trees. Joan Morris' volunteer work in the flower beds has also allowed us to eliminate that work from our contract. We will be paying a couple of \$75 charges to have the ball fields dragged this year. Lindbergh has not supplied us with their insurance certificate nor have they paid their bill yet. He and Violet are attempting to secure that. The Trespassing Signs have been installed. Donovan has spoken with a few neighbors concerned with them. He explained if their kids will be using our field we need a signature on our form that they will hold us harmless in the event of injury. It's the same form used for our smaller rental teams.
- Bob Beck is securing information to relight the marquee sign in front on Denny Road.
- Donovan and Adam Rustige hauled out loads of trash from the garage of the parsonage. The work is not yet complete but it's much better and less of an eyesore when the overhead doors are open.
- Violet is pursuing camera options for the fields and will have information to share in the upcoming weeks.

Barbara asked if Lindbergh Schools has ever not paid their bill or given us their insurance. Donovan replied this is the first year for us to ask for an insurance certificate. Also he and Violet agreed if they didn't respond by this Friday -the end of the month- they would call about both items.

Marsha mentioned that some of the neighbors are not happy with the signs. Marty advised that if anyone is approached with a concern about them this is how he plans to reply: 1.) There were illegal fireworks set off on the 4th of July and we are liable for that, and 2.) Parents are watching and allowing their children to use ATVs on our fields. If an accident happens, we are potentially liable for that as well. He wishes we wouldn't have to do this, but it is the world we're living in.

OLD BUSINESS:

>Open & Affirming Task Force - Barbara Smith advised the group that our "One to One Conversations" have begun and we will be working our way through the congregation so our group can track how the congregation feels about this pursuit. In addition, the group will be utilizing eBlast more often to let the congregation know what we are trying to achieve and the work we are completing. And finally, the group is so very appreciative of the time that Pastor Vicki has given to us since November.

>Land Use Task Force - Marty shared that he did reach out to Maureen Dunn who is the Chief Performance & Strategy Officer for St. Andrews, i.e. Cape Albion. To start the conversation, he sent her an email last week to advise them of our preliminary thoughts about our ten acres. He has not yet heard back from her.

>Worship Area Changes - This is too big of a change to decide on our own. Marty feels we need to have input from our congregation and the new pastor. Perhaps a survey could help. This topic is tabled for the time being.

>Bridge Senior Minister - Now that our Senior Pastor candidate has been identified, the Bridge minister candidate the Council recently spoke with in February will no longer be available for our timeline. However, she was gracious enough to give us a list of people she felt may work out for us. The first person on that list declined Marty's offer as they wanted to concentrate on retirement. The second person on the list has been contacted. Marty has a community choir associate -also a minister- who knows this new candidate and has given Marty a glowing recommendation of the person. (Marty received that same type of recommendation from the Bridge candidate we spoke to in February.) Marty spoke with the new candidate at length today. She would be available for our timeline. She asked pertinent questions. She's a UCC minister from Eden. Although, she has served in a Unitarian church, a Methodist church, and also a Presbyterian church. She has been retired full-time for some years, yet she is intrigued about the opportunity of getting back in the pulpit and looks forward to meeting with us. She will send us her resume. Marty also spoke with Damien Lake to discuss how to structure a Bridge package for a short-term minister who will not be performing the same tasks as a full-time senior minister. She would not be responsible for the staff. He sees her being in the pulpit on Sundays, filling in for Merrimon's vacation time, making visitation calls, and performing funerals when needed. Vicki does not know her. However, Vicki permitted Marty to share her contact information with this person so the two could talk about St. Lucas UCC. Once those details are completed he will arrange for the Council to meet with her. Marsha asked if she would do the Rite of Confirmation. Marty's answer was yes as Merrimon will be on vacation. Donovan asked her approximate length of time. Marty answered approximately May-July. However, her end date would be dependent upon what our Senior Pastor candidate has planned.

Marty then advised that Vicki asked to confirm that communion coverage on Easter Sunday was complete. The answer is yes, via the Sign-up Genius on the Council's login page. Marty asked for any other Old Business from the group. There was none.

NEW BUSINESS:

>General Offering Stats - See the discussion above under the Financials.

>Additional New Business - 1.) Michele has requested \$298 to purchase a playlist (for hundreds of songs) to use in future productions, similar to the Zak & Lizzy production in Advent. Barbara moved to accept her request. Donovan seconded that motion. No additional discussion was needed. The Council approved Michele's \$298 request unanimously. 2.) Barb O'Brien sent a letter to the Council. After her parents passed away a donation was made from their estate in their honor to the Memorial Committee. Barb is now asking for that money to be used to purchase the new hymnals. This is great, however, Marty advised we've already collected almost all of the money to pay for them. The amount of money approved by the Memorial Committee was \$3K. This will allow a surplus available to purchase extra hymnals "hoping the membership will grow". In addition, Pastor Vicki shared her concern about spending all the money on the hymnals for fear of having an excess of hymnals on hand. However, if we leave the excess in the Memorial Committee's account, more hymnals could always be purchased at a later time if warranted. (Presently, each pew has nine hymnals in place. The new hymnal order allows for six hymnals per pew.) Marty made a motion to approve the amount of money needed to pay off the hymnals invoice -after donations received to date are applied- and earmark the balance of the Bilgram money in the Memorial Committee fund for the purchase of future hymnals when needed. Marsha seconded that motion. No additional discussion occurred, therefore the Council approved the funds needed to pay the remaining balance after the donations received are applied.

At this time, Marty asked if there was any other New Business to discuss. As there was none, Marty advised the group the Council was moving into Executive Session for additional time together. He sincerely thanked everyone who attended tonight's meeting and cared enough to take the time to listen in. It's been a great expression of the "church body as a whole".

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

(Minute marker: 1 hour/34 minutes)

Respectfully submitted,
Barbara Smith,
Recording Secretary

NOTE - the next regular Council meeting is scheduled for Monday, April 22nd at 6:00 p.m.