

Minutes of Congregation Council Meeting
March 31, 2020
7:00 PM

- I. **Call to Order** at 7:02pm. Note that this meeting was a virtual meeting, with members of Council calling in via a Zoom arrangement, allowing for audio only or audio-visual participation.
- A. **Attendance:** M. Binkley, M. Blower, F. Casciano, R. Doty, Pr. R. Elliott, K. Ervin, S. Mathieu, C. McGrath, K. McNally, N. McNally, C. Pirrotta, Pr. T. Reichley, D. Rohrbach, Pr. S. Steele, M. Stanziola, R. Stevens
- B. **Excused Absences:** There were no absences.
- C. **Devotions:** Rick Doty
- II. **Approval of Minutes**
March 17, 2020 Council Meeting - Motion: To approve March 17 council meeting minutes as presented - by Chris Pirrotta, second by Mark Binkley. Motion **Approved**.
- III. **Staff Reports**
- Pr. Elliott noted that he had electronically mailed information to Council members earlier on March 31st.
 - In response to a question about communications with members, Pr. Elliott observed that “mail chimp” addresses are available for all but about 70 members. Those people are often sent materials for delivery by the US Postal Service. Since many of those members are also on lists of homebound or other members who cannot routinely attend services, these members also are likely to get calls (and visits, when feasible) by members of staff or other trained personnel.
- IV. **Mission Team Reports/Items for Council**
Faith Formation for Children- Kris Ervin discussed a recent meeting of the team to discuss the handling of Nursery School in the coming weeks. She noted that if classes are resumed this semester, it would be possible to provide a schedule extension to the end of May, adding about one week of classes to the previously planned schedule. After discussion Bob Stevens made the following motion: Nursery School staff would be paid to the end of the contract year. For those cases where a child’s tuition for April 2020 had been paid and no April classes are held, that tuition would be applied to May 2020. If classes are not held in May, discussions would be held with those making the payments to either apply the tuition to September 2020 or to refund the tuition paid. Denise Rohrbach seconded the motion. Motion **Approved**.

Finance Mission Team– Rick Doty observed that March net cash flow was better than expected, based on preliminary data. Income in March was apparently in the range of \$109.6k and expenses about \$75.3k. This results in a positive revenue-to-expense figure of about \$34.3k, better than the \$14.9k projected before the advent of the coronavirus issue. Bob Stevens added to the discussion by stating that he became aware that several giving units had sent in their entire annual pledge to Holy Spirit in March, likely in anticipation of strained congregational finances this spring, given the coronavirus issue. Rick made a motion that Lenten offerings received this year should be disbursed as follows: 50% to the Second Harvest Food Bank (local agency) and 50% to the World Hunger Appeal (global agency). Kris Ervin seconded the motion. Motion **Approved**.

V. Coronavirus Response

A. Building Closure

Bob Stevens noted that the facility is closed for services, meetings (except for staff meetings) and Nursery School until April 6th ; the facility is locked except for times when paid and unpaid staff are working within the facility (office area and Fellowship Center); and no outside groups are using the facility until April 6th. Upcoming baptisms are likely to be held in home settings, and funerals would be expected to be services only for close family, with larger celebrations of life scheduled for later dates. No weddings are scheduled for the church in the next several weeks. Bob recommended the closure date be extended.

After discussion and by sense of Council, the closure is extended to the end of April. Staff is to notify outside groups planning to use the facility of this extension.

B. Nursery School

See the discussion under Faith Formation for Children, above.

C. Relief Checks

Bob Stevens spoke to the e-mail of March 29th from John Mosovsky. Conceptually, John wondered if some congregation members might be willing to donate the amounts of their federal virus relief checks to the congregation, for the exclusive use of church members or surrounding community in need due to the coronavirus issue. There was considerable discussion regarding the optimum means of soliciting support for those affected by the virus and on developing appropriate messages about the process. There was general agreement that a reasonable first step is to communicate to members about some local agencies (and their specific needs) that are in the forefront of responding to the impacts of the virus on the population. Denise Rohrbach and Pr. Elliott will work on development of such an information piece to be provided to members. Pr. Elliott spoke to the existence of a modest local mission fund that the pastors can access to provide some help to members expressing specific needs; to date, no member has asked the pastors for financial help regarding impacts brought on by the virus situation. Before the next meeting, Bob Stevens will draft a letter for Council review describing avenues by which congregation members can be granted specific help

and potentially how members can contribute to the needs of congregation members and the local community affected by the virus situation (beyond the information piece noted above).

D. Finances / Capital Campaign

Bob Stevens observed that giving to Holy Spirit via the Simply Giving program is up, both in terms of numbers of giving units using that contribution option and in terms of dollars. See also the discussion above under Finance Mission Team.

Mark Stanziola noted that he had reviewed the proposed contracts for construction related to the capital campaign. He and Bob Stevens stated that the next questions are when do we sign the contracts and when do we desire construction to begin. Given the coronavirus situation and given additional review of the earlier proposed construction schedule, a modest delay in the schedule may be advisable. That would, for example, result in having the worship center available for Christmas or Easter, whereas the earlier schedule may result in having the facility unavailable at both times. Additional thought to schedule is being given, and Council will have another chance to review the proposed schedule at a near future meeting.

E. Virtual Worship

Participation in online worship has so far been promising. Online worship will continue to be offered through April. A Lenten midweek service is scheduled for Wednesday April 1st; Maundy Thursday and Good Friday services are in planning, as are services for Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday. The staff is still on a learning curve using the available technology, and some improvements in the process will be introduced when feasible. The staff is aware of the recent “Zoom bombing” hacks affecting some church services and other meetings nationwide; the way we screen participants may help us in avoiding those issues.

Previously ordered flowers are expected to be delivered to Holy Spirit for Easter Sunday. By sense of Council, consideration will be given to delivering those flowers to hospitalized or otherwise needy members, if members contributing flowers do not opt to pick them up at church.

A “drive-through” Easter egg package delivery for children had been considered since the traditional Easter egg hunt cannot be held. Concerns about ensuring the safety of the process have derailed that option. Another option under consideration is sending Easter cards to children of the congregation.

Pr. Ric observed that Holy Spirit and other congregations will have to consider if and when online services should be discontinued after the facilities are reopened. First, some congregation members may be for some time reluctant to return to spaces with numerous people, and second, some people may wish to continue to worship remotely if that option were open to them.

F. Drive-in Church / Communion

Consideration is still being given to doing a drive-in worship service, if safety concerns can be fully addressed. Consideration is being given to offering communion at such a service using pre-packaged elements distributed to individual vehicles.

Offering communion during an online service is not likely to be allowed. Both the ELCA and NEPA Synod Bishops have recommended not doing communion during an online service, in part because of the potential abuse that might occur when persons inappropriately extend the seeming precedence into other “remote” situations.

G. Pentecost Flowers

By sense of Council, flowers should not be ordered for Pentecost services at Holy Spirit because of uncertainty about when facilities may be able to be reopened. If we are able to worship in Holy Spirit facilities for Pentecost, attempts would be made to obtain flowers closer to that date.

VI. Next Steps

A. Next Meeting Date: Special Council meeting on April 14 at 7 PM. Another virtual meeting via Zoom or equivalent technology is planned. The primary topic is expected to be updating plans given the COVID-19 situation.

B. To Do/Assignments: Devotions for April 14 – Denise Rohrbach

VII. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned with prayer.

Time of adjournment: 8:28 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Richard Doty, Council Secretary