

**First Church Congregational Council Meeting Minutes
November 23, 2021; 7:30 pm – Wakeman Hall and Zoom
Open Meeting to the Congregation**

In attendance (in person): Jim Muschett, David Spollett, Vanessa Rose, Jacque Paige, Joy Nazzaro, Craig Way, Rita Skog, Patty Bilotto, Carrie Curtin, Maria Ferrante, Eric Treschuk, Harry French, Peter Robinson, Debby Dwyer, Donna Kersten, Derry Tomczyk, Jane Fidler, Gail Scholan, Paul Cahill, Grant Winston, Poppy Bonuomo, Tom Kristy, Connie Kristy, Patty Gregory, Todd Gregory, Michael Traum

In attendance (on Zoom): John Harmon, Amy Alison Ward, Lauren and Anthony DeNisco, Trudy Stevens, Frank Martingnetti, Chris Bilyard, Jane Barnes, Charlie Simmons, Deanie Eckert-Medve, Candace Meader, Pat Kearney

Jim Muschett called meeting to order at 7:34pm

David Spollett gave the Invocation.

Rita Skog made Motion to accept minutes of the October 26th Council Meeting. Joy Nazzaro seconded. Motion was unanimously approved.

There was an e-vote on November 9, 2021 regarding Jim Muschett's motion for First Church co-sign the second apartment lease for the Afghan family that is arriving tomorrow (Tuesday, November 9). As a second part of this motion, Jim Muschett also moved that First Church dedicate a second \$2,500 in IRCC funding support in 2021 to cover this second family. Lastly, as we remain stewards of First Church, too, the motion shall also state that First Church will not outlay further money should the IRCC account have a negative balance exceeding \$10,000. The motion carried with 10 affirmations and 1 abstention.

The meeting was opened to the congregation with questions on Hobart Chapel's decision.

Summary of Congregants' comments (complete notes recorded separately):

Concerns:

- Access to the Memorial Garden for quiet meditation and reflection
- Access to the Memorial Garden for people who have niches in that space
- The school may use that door from chapel to garden as an egress
- The communication regarding the changes was shocking for those who worship at the 8:15 service
- The compensation from the Montessori School to the church for the additional space.
- The need for more transparency to the finances and proper accounting for the financial benefits and costs of these changes
- The chapel is a significant loss and we only gained a choir room.
- Lack of transparency, pray, communication and opportunity for the congregation to discuss these changes
- Suggested a bylaw change that would not allow Council to make a major change about the physical space

Comments:

- Council's and Moderator's apologies to the Congregation regarding the process. This meeting is a learning experience for us so that we can do better in the future.
- Steps forward would be to share the agenda for Council Meetings earlier so that congregants can be aware of what is going to be discussed. Likewise, Congregants should be encouraged to speak with Council members regarding agenda items.
- The Montessori School was informed that the door to the Memorial Garden was only to be used in the case of a need for emergency egress.

- The Church is in the process of renegotiating a lease with The Montessori School taking into account square footage. As tenants they are contributing to the cost of renovations.
- In January a subgroup will be appointed to review and revise bylaws and establish how we define material change. Currently it is defined by monetary amounts.
- We need more multipurpose spaces and the Choir Room can be used for meetings and adult education
- Encourage more Congregants to volunteer as there are plenty of opportunities for leadership
- Support for church spaces being updated and modernized
- Support for church spaces to be multipurpose

Rev. Vanessa Rose delivered a closing prayer.

Michael Traum issued a report on the sale of the Parsonage. There have been four offers. Our team is negotiating diligently and has accepted one cash offer. We expect to close in December

Rev. David Spollett and Rev. Vanessa Rose delivered the Pastoral Team update. Despite early fall concern with attendance, the recent attendance at 10:15 service has increased. In addition, two new families visited church after having attended the “Fall All Welcome” event.

- Disciple Road children, bell choir, children choir, adult choir recorded pageant last weekend. Frank and Alex did a wonderful job
- We have resumed weddings, baptisms, and funerals. The Pastoral Team is busy.
- Rev. Vanessa Rose reported on her Committee for planned sanctuary improvement and repair projects. Recommendations go far beyond the sanctuary: Eunoia kitchens, basement office will need to be renovated for a shower so that the area can be used as a sanctuary for those in need, Music room become multi use space, new Hobart Chapel, restore Tiffany windows
 - Rita Skog suggested a new entrance from the parking lot.

Jacque Paige delivered the Finance Committee Update and 2022 budget reminders.

- Jacque Page made a motion that Store Grants of \$10K be distributed in 2021 over and above the \$5K budgeted due to the significant revenue increase over budget by The Store. The distribution is \$2K to Mercy Learning Center, \$2K to CIRI, \$2K to Operation Hope, \$2K to Westbridge and \$2K to FCC Work Camps. Patty Bilotto seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved.
- 2021 came in as overage which included some cost associated with David leaving and interim. Currently the 2022 budget at -\$66K. Council and congregation is encouraged to reach out with ideas for how to have savings in that budget. The Endowment doing very well
 - Discussion: Craig Way: where are we on pledges? Are we at the same point last year at this time?
 - Jacque: budgeted same as 2021

Jim Muschett gave the Personnel/Search Committee update on Pastoral leadership discernment. We have met with the UCC regional minister to assess next steps in the discernment process. Michael Ciba thought we had been thoughtful and prayerful. Plan is to proceed with singular discernment with Vanessa over the next several months. The process and timeline will be shared with congregation over next several weeks

- Patty Bilotto is now chairing Personnel Board

Craig Way gave the Resource Management updates on the status of electrical service upgrade and HVAC installation for the Facilities Committee. The surveyor conducted an A2 utility survey which was completed last week. An electrical engineer will complete plans before Christmas then we can get bids to hire electrician. They will coordinate with UI. Timeline is unknown.

- We hired an HVAC company and they will procure equipment before we are done with the electrical upgrade and will be able to start immediately.
- Goal is to be completed March/April - looking to be in by Easter (April 17th)

Joy Nazzaro reported on the Resource Development Stewardship campaign and Three Kings Bazaar (Dec 3) updates.

- 94 households pledged for total of \$297K. Thanks to Maria for all help with pledges
- Three Kings Bazaar on Friday, December 3 will be an outdoor event with bakesale, hotdogs and drinks for sale, music, Prove Pizza truck (15% of sales to church), activities for children, ornaments for tree outside and take home

Jim Muschett reported for Wendy Williams Brown regarding the cost updates to Wakeman Hall stage curtain. Team met with curtain installers and the new cost is now \$10K . Jim made a motion to increase the amount to \$10K. Craig Way seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

- Rita Skog added that we are looking for more deacons

Rita Skog reported for the Outreach Committee.

- Covenant to Care completed their Thanksgiving gift cards and will also do Christmas gifts for children.
- Council of Churches is not going to have a coat drive because they are understaffed, but they will have angel appeal. We are reaching out to see if Bridgeport Rescue Mission will want to do coat drive
- CONNECT-10th anniversary on 11/30 / way to be involved in greater-Bridgeport community
 - 1.67% of our pledging to be donated to CONNECT
- We need a liaison for Operation Hope

New Business

- **Holiday decorating for Wakeman / Jane Barnes is leading**
- **June 5th shindig for David**

Future Meetings

Fourth Tuesdays	• Council
February 22	• All Church Finance Meeting

Rev. Vanessa Rose delivered the Benediction.
Jim Mucshett adjourned the Meeting at 9:27pm.

Submitted by Carrie Curtin 12/27/2021