

St. Mark's United Methodist Church

Guiding Council Meeting Minutes

October 16, 2023—6:30 pm—Zoom Teleconference

Members Present:

Administration: Sarah Vaughan, Betty Schiele
SPRC: Julie Marshall, Andrew Crisp, David Harmon
Trustees: Laura Godwin, Matt West
Finance: Kitty Ambers, Chris Franklin, Teresa Chambers
Lay Leadership: Lynn Kelly

Non-voting:

Administration: Rebecca Harmon
Secretary: Dani Corrigan

Observing:

Kevin Miller

Staff present: Justin White, Hannah Hopper, Kelly Chin

CALL TO ORDER (6:32)

Sarah Vaughan called the meeting to order and conducted roll call.

DEVOTION and OPENING PRAYER (6:33)

Andrew shared a devotion based on his Growing Deeper in Faith Class as they are connecting the Old Testament with current day issues. 1 Samuel 14: 1, 6-14 talks about then the Israelites and Philistines were at war. Jonathan and his armor bearer were crossing a path between the two armies. They were two men against many. When Jonathan suggested going against them the armor bearer never flinched. With God's help they overcame the enemy. The church needs strong leaders to face spiritual foes, but they also need help from others that are the 'armor bears.' Galatians 6 also connects more with spiritual role of lifting each other up. We are not meant to struggle alone. We should support others by reaching out to be a burden sharer. The same for the importance of reaching out for help from others if needed. By doing this we are filling Christ's commands. Andrew lead a prayer.

PRAISES (6:37)

- Lynn thanked Becky, Carol and Pastor Rachel for the Women's night last night. There was great fellowship of all generations, good food and a mission project for the Veteran's Home.
- Pastor Justin shared that there was a fantastic Children's Sabbath yesterday. The kids did a great job at 9 and 11 service. The 11:00 worship leader was outstanding. Holly and all of Children's Ministry Team were wonderful. They also had a Blessing of the playground yesterday that went well.
- Lynn is proud of the two youth who are serving as worship leaders at 11:00. They are doing a great job. Keep them in your prayers.

MINUTES (6:40)

The minutes for September 18, 2023, were reviewed.

Julie Marshall motioned to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by Andrew Crisp and was approved unanimously.

FINANCE (6:40): Reports in Google Docs

Kitty Ambers informed:

- September Balance Sheet Highlights
 - September is the third month in a row that offering income has been below budget. Kitty and Kelly have discussed how to figure out why. They are trying to figure out this is something we should expect to continue with inflation in 2024. This is something for the group to think about regarding planning the budget for next year.
 - When looking at the Balance Sheet Highlights, we are fine. The mortgage balance is under one million dollars. This shows the efforts of the Capital Campaign are working. Everything else is holding steady. Designated giving funds are sitting as liability. We have talked about making a concerted effort in using these where appropriate. This is happening and going well.
 - For the month of September there are a couple areas that were over budget. It relates to a timing issue of when things were booked or paid. The budget is spread out over twelve months but it hit this year at the ninth month.
 - Net ordinary income for the month was -\$6,823.00. This is \$13,452.00 below the budget. When we look at YTD we were ahead for the year before we entered summer. We are mindful of this as we go into budget planning for the upcoming year.
- YTD
 - Total Income: \$502,669.00. This is 97% of our budget YTD. This is better than the same period last year. Offerings are below budget YTD by about \$1,800.00 below budget YTD. Rental income is about \$2,500.00 ahead of budget.
 - Total expenses are in line with only a couple of small exceptions.
 - Net ordinary income: \$35,048.00 This is under budget by about \$3,800.00.
 - When math is done with moving money around from Capital Campaign which is called Other Income and Other Expenses, the YTD income is \$81,076.00 which is slightly under budget about \$3,000.00.
 - If you have any thoughts or comments regarding giving, please be in touch with the finance committee, Pastor Justin or Kelly.
- Capital Funds Activity
 - September Balance: \$82,160.87
 - So far 63% of pledges have been received to date.
- Reserve Activity:
 - Repaying the loan from the Capital Campaign back into Reserves
 - September Month End Balance: \$150,860.27 which is cash plus the CDs
- Kitty opened the floor for questions.
 - Hannah added that she was estimating that we would not meet the budget for this year. She had estimated we would be shortfall by \$3,400.00. It does seem like we are on track for this. December is usually a good push. It is not great but we are not near having to shut the doors. Hannah said there was not much more that could be done to lower the budget. Kitty asked if the deficit estimate was based on revenue or expenses. Hannah

- stated this is just from revenue. Rentals have not been as good as hoped with expenses from the summer for cleaning the gym. The anonymous giving is estimated higher than initially at the beginning of the year. Donor estimates were \$624,000.00 and currently at \$610,000.00. It ebbs and flows every month.
- Laura asked if in the quarterly giving statement that Hannah sends out has ever included a statement regarding if your pledges change, please let the church know. It could be done respectfully with education on how we use the pledges to plan. Kitty added this would be helpful if someone needed to replan or was moving away that would leave us a deficit in a pledge.
 - Sarah asked if people are not meeting their pledged giving. Hannah said it is not the pledges it is the donors she is guessing based on trends. Some people set up a Breeze plan and then stop giving so she must change her estimates. Most people who pledge fulfill their pledges. Sarah was curious where the differences are and if it was from the impact of the economy. Hannah added it can be from member's passing away or their spouses passing away which changes giving. It is difficult as expenses go up by a little with contractors and revenue is going down by a little.
 - Justin is expecting October to be a normal month regarding budget and should exceed September. November stewardship campaign will include conversation that inflation is real, and the church is being directly impacted. Expenses of most of our contractors are going to rise. We will ask people to think about this in their pledges. The good news is, there are always new members. There are four joining Sunday and some of them have already started giving. This is part of the solution. If we want the church to keep pace with the expenses, then we will need to increase giving. There is not much more we can cut in expenses.
 - Chris added that the budget was a stretch from a revenue standpoint this year. He expressed concern when comparing August/September 2022 to August/September 2023. 2023 was less revenue, specifically with offering than 2022. Are we seeing people leaving or this from what is going on in the economy? Two months don't make a trend, but it is something to be aware of.
 - Laura asked if there is a track of the number of donors through the years. Hannah said we do. The number of donors has been decreasing. Laura was wondering if this is directly related to the revenue. There is a concerning trend if we cannot account for where these donors went. Hannah shared the number of donors for the last few years. 2019: 264, 2020: 269, 2021: 246, 2022: 261. It seems as if we are stabilizing. Currently we are at 260. A lot of the donations will occur in December. We don't usually lose many donors, but people are not able to give as much. Trying to get as many rentals is helpful. There are some people who are now making up for the first half of the year in the second half of the year. Some people will give larger sums later in the year. If people do not give online, then the donations tend to be sporadic. Laura agreed and is a sporadic giver.
 - Kelly brought attention when comparing 2023 to 2020-2022 month to month. In previous years we accounted for advanced giving. If we received advanced giving for the upcoming year or in January then we would amortize that throughout the year. In 2023 our advanced giving was not as high as it had been in the past that we would not do that in the budget. If we look line to line, there may be some fluctuation between September 2022 and September 2023. September 2022 may have advanced giving that had been

- amortized. Revenue is still down but this is something to consider when comparing month to month over the previous years.
- Kitty thanked Kelly and Hannah for all they do.

TRUSTEES (6:59)- Report in Google Docs

Matt West informed:

- CLC rental contract revisions are being reviewed by an attorney. Once he gets that approved then he will email the Council for a vote.
- Trustees will be setting up a meeting for a plan for church security.
- There is an estimate for signs for church estimates and will be completed.
- Annual building walk through is scheduled.
- The alarm near the elevator has been going off this week. Vector called Matt. The fire department was dispatched. It was a false alarm. The alarm was for “battery low.” Laura added the elevator is not working. Hannah said they cannot come out until October 24. It seems to be a low battery causing several alarms. Matt said the batteries are easy to replace. Laura said there are two alarms. One is for the battery low in the elevator. Stacy and Hannah called today, and they had it silenced. They cannot come until October 24. The other alarm is in the ductwork in Room 203 in CLC. Matt wondered if the one in CLC is from the heat turning on the first time. Laura said it is probably dust. Matt asked if the battery low is keeping the elevator from working, Hannah and Laura said it is. It will be another week until the company can come to look at it and the elevator will not work without the battery. Matt said he could look at the battery but could not bypass the alarms if they started going off.
- Sarah opened the floor for questions.
 - Sarah added that she and Katy White noticed that a part of the fence at the playground is dirty. It is probably from the crepe myrtle disease shedding. Laura said it needs to be power washed. Matt said he can power wash that this Friday. Sarah clarified it is near the preschool door area towards the right.

VISION COUNCIL (7:06) Report in Google Docs

Rebecca Harmon informed:

- Homework to read the Vision Council meeting from last week and the October ministries. In Guiding Council meeting we focus on the behind the scenes so that Vision Council and the people of the church can do the work of the church. Just one of those things is the Children’s Sabbath.
- Requests are highlighted for what we really need.

Hannah and Kelly left the meeting. Sarah thanked them for joining us tonight.

SPR (7:09)- reports in Google Docs

Sarah thanked everyone for promptly responding to the email vote for raises for the Pastor’s salaries to ensure the deadlines for Charge Council were met. Julie thanked Sarah and everyone.

Julie Marshall informed:

- Charge Conference is this Wednesday.
- SPR is reviewing salaries for the other staff. They will be making a recommendation on that and bring it to Guiding Council for a vote.
- Staff appreciation luncheon is December 13, 2023.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE (7:11)

Betty informed:

- There was a special called Annual Conference session on Saturday, October 7 for the purpose of ratifying churches requesting disaffiliation. You can read the report. At the end of the report is the list of churches.
- The first meeting was three hours long. This one was one hour long. The first meeting they listed the reasons for disaffiliation. They no longer do that. The reasons include churches that will no longer exist or will be joining another church, becoming independent or joining the Global Methodist Church.
- The meeting was smooth. There were 120 churches seeking ratification. 20% of churches have disaffiliated but only 10% of membership. It is mostly small churches but there are some larger churches. When you hear that many churches disaffiliating it seems scary but in the bigger picture it is not.
- This meeting was right after the attack on Israel and there was a special prayer for that.
- This is Betty's last annual meeting. Sarah will attend next year. Everything changes after December 31, 2023.
 - Teresa asked if there are national numbers. Justin said it's a ballpark estimate of about 20%. It has fallen along political lines. Higher percentages of disaffiliation in Southern churches and lower in Northern churches. The purple states, like Virginia, have 80% of churches and 90% of membership that have stayed. The special sessions are over because the special exception that was passed in the 2019 General Conference is expiring at the end of this year. There is always a way to leave the church but is it an extensive process. There will be more churches that leave over the next 5-10 years. The churches staying in UMC will focus on starting new churches. We can close the book on this painful chapter. We have had several visitors from churches that have disaffiliated. There will be a couple transferring their membership to St. Mark's.

Housekeeping items

- Charge conference is this Wednesday at 7:00 at New Life for anyone who can attend. Sarah wrote out the answers of three questions to share to highlight all the wonderful things from Vision Council reports. One question is regarding how we will revitalize the church in 2024. Sarah feels very fortunate that we are in a good place and only must focus on continuing our mission. Betty will present these as Sarah is unable to attend the meeting.
- Kitty will be doing devotion for November. Sarah will not be at the meeting in November.
- Dani shared that turkey bags will start October 29 and please return November 12.
- Sarah reminded everyone that Trunk or Treat is coming up. Please bring candy and sign up for trunks. Contact Kristen.
- Kevin Miller attended to learn more about the Vision Council Chair role. He thanked everyone for allowing him to join tonight.

CLOSING PRAYER AND ADJOURNMENT

Julie closed with a prayer. Julie adjourned the meeting at 7:29 PM.

Next Meeting: November 20, 2023, at 6:30 PM on Zoom.

October 2023 Minute Addendum

On October 2, 2023 Sarah Vaughan emailed the members of Guiding Council regarding need for voting on the Pastors' salary raise prior to the October 16 Guiding Council meeting.

In the September 2023 meeting, SPR proposed a salary increase for Justin and Rachel and recommended a vote during the October 2023 meeting. Julie Marshall informed Sarah on October 1, 2023 that this information is due October 8, 2023 prior to the charge conference (October 18, 2023). Sarah presented the following motion from SPT and requested for votes to be submitted via email.

“In anticipation of the Charge Conference on October 18, 2023, the SPR Committee is making a motion to increase the salary of both Justin and Rachel by 6%.”

Guiding Council members responded through email. On October 5, 2023, Sarah emailed the Council that she had heard from all but one voting member. All replies were YES. The motion to give Justin and Rachel a 6% raise passed.