

Sunday, February 20, 2022 UMC Congregational Meeting, 11:20 am to 12:15 pm

Present: Cathy Bresee (Congregational Chair); Terry Yoder (Assistant Chair); Pastor Kate Heinzl; Ken Litwiller (Secretary; Minutes) and Laura; Jim Rosenberger (Treasurer) and Gloria; Ben and Meredith Wideman; Leah Witzig; Hope Brubaker; Doug and Vonda Yoder; Karl and Evelyn Bartsch; Ruth Kitchen Tillman; Leah Lumeya; Amy Sattler; Sally Minnich; Sam Yoder; Kwadwo and Fran Osseo-Asare; Nel Kopp; Faith King; Ankit and Rebekah Saxena; Carolyn Brubaker; Rodney Brubaker; Bethany Spicher Schonberg; Paulette McLane; Mike Bratt and Elaine Mercer; Kris Charles; Mary Derstein; Ross Hardison; Evelyn Stauffer; Becky Kephart;

Opening: Cathy Bresee welcomed the participants and read a prayer from the new hymnal. May you be rooted and grounded [from new hymnal]

Minutes from November Congregational Meeting: Leah Witzig moved to accept the minutes. Jim Rosenberger seconded the motion while requesting a spelling change on the name of *Sefu*. The minutes were accepted by a show of hands.

Church Around the Table (CATT): Cathy provided the following information via email in advance of this meeting:

The Elders Team, Laura Litwiller, Meredith Wideman, and Doug Yoder, with Pastor Kate Heinzl, recommend Church Around the Table (CATT) services continue as follows:

1. A CATT block will consist of 4 - 6 services, with one service per month.
2. Leadership will plan to have 1 - 2 CATT blocks per year.
3. All regular attenders will be assigned to a group and invited to attend.
4. Groups will remain the same within each block and will be shuffled for the next block.
5. Host and Facilitator roles will continue with worship materials provided.

Cathy and Meredith explained that the Elders wanted to form a recommendation that allowed flexibility concerning blocks of time, church calendar, COVID, other matters. They welcomed questions about the recommendation. There were no questions, comments, or recommendations.

Meredith described how we will process the recommendation, explaining that she will send out an email inviting a “yes” or “no” response. The majority would determine the outcome.

Update from Creation Care Committee regarding renewable energy for our building: Jim provided the update. Jean Landis leads the CCC but could not be present today. CCC members include Jean Landis, Marvin Hall, Matt Rooke, Jim Rosenberger, and Pastor Kate.

Jim reported that our building is heated by resistant electric which is the least economical and efficient method. A professional walked through the building to do an energy audit. A heat pump supplier also made suggestions for saving energy. Matt Rooke, who is on the CCC is also a solar energy professional.

The CCC is making two recommendations to the congregation:

- A. Augment the current resistant electric heat system with a heat pump.
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heat_pump]
- B. Add solar panels to the building which will generate electricity.

Jim showed a picture showing 56 panels on the northeastern roof of the facility. He noted that although UMC is tax exempt, we may be able to capture a government benefit to reduce the cost of the panels.

Terry Yoder asked if UMC had considered including batteries to store electricity during high solar periods (summer, day) to use during low solar periods (winter, day). Jim noted that the facility is connected to the electric grid which acts like a battery, a net metering system.

Doug Yoder asked if we could we save energy by replacing windows in the facility, some of which are cracked. Jim noted that the windows are double paned and energy efficient. Cracks in glass do not generally allow cool air to enter. At some point we could consider replacing the windows for aesthetic purposes.

Jim requested information on the insulation which was added when the facility roof was re-shingled. The work was done by an Amish company and records have not been readily available.

Update about the upcoming MCUSA's Special Session of the Delegate Assembly, May 27-30, 2022, in Kansas City, Missouri: Kate provided the following information by email before this meeting:

MCUSA is holding a special delegate assembly this May in Kansas City, dealing primarily with the issue surrounding Mennonite Church USA Polity and the Role of the Membership Guidelines of Mennonite Church USA. The lack of clarity of how the guidelines are to be used has caused harm to individuals and confusion regarding how pastor's and congregations are to live out their calling, specifically around the understanding of same-sex marriage.

Important votes regarding retiring these guidelines as well as a resolution to work toward repentance and transformation will be brought before the delegate assembly in May. Due to our size, UMC is allowed to have 1 delegate (Joyce Hall is going as a representative of CLC, from AMC) present to vote. Kate is prepared to go unless someone else feels called to go represent our congregation. Whoever represents UMC should be well educated on the proposal. MCUSA has been hosting a series of webinars to educate us on the proposal and how we work with polity as a denomination.

If you'd like to represent UMC as our voting delegate, please speak with Kate or someone on Leadership Team.

Pastor Kate explained that this special assembly was postponed from last year. The Constituency Leadership Council (CLC) believes that this needs to be an in person event where delegates sit around tables in face to face communication. Allegheny Mennonite Conference (AMC) is represented on the CLC by the AMC Moderator and one other person (who is Joyce Hall from UMC). Pastors in the AMC have urged that our voting voice be heard in the upcoming assembly.

Delegates to this special assembly will discuss a proposal to retire the Membership Guidelines. This would move decisions concerning sexuality and membership in congregations from general MCUSA polity to the conference level. Pastor Joanna Harader of Peace Mennonite Church in Lawrence, Kansas, has recently published a position piece on this topic in the *The Anabaptist World Review*.

Joyce and Pastor Kate hope to schedule an informational session in the next few weeks so that UMC can vote together on the proposal. Webinars are also available on the MCUSA web site for educating the delegates. A session is scheduled for tomorrow night to discuss the Inclusive Pastors recommendation.

As a congregation, we need to choose a delegate (in addition to Joyce as AMC CLC rep). Pastor Kate is willing to go. If anyone else is interested to represent UMC, they are invited to contact Pastor Kate or the UMC Leadership Team within the next two weeks. Otherwise, Pastor Kate will go as the delegate. Gloria Rosenberger and Karl and Evelyn Bartsch spoke in support of Pastor Kate representing UMC as our delegate to the special assembly.

Budget Update: Jim reported that thanks to everyone, UMC has a healthy financial situation. People have been contributing ahead of schedule. There are some congregational reserves that could be shared; Jim encouraged UMC participants to think of things to support. Expenditures are well within budget due to not meeting in the meeting house. Our commitments have been paid up to date. We have also raised funds above budget for various special projects (Including Afghan project (\$3,000) and support for Ndunge Sefu study at AMBS).

Doug Yoder suggested that we renovate the two downstairs bathrooms at the meeting house which are falling apart with tiles, etc. The appearance of the windows could also be improved.

Jim will send a brief financial report by email and post on the web site. Cathy thanked Jim for his work.

Update from State College Interfaith Group (SCI) - Afghan resettlement project: The Steering Committee from UMC includes Kathleen, Pastor Kate, Mary Derstein, and Joyce Hall. Pastor Kate provided an update since Kathleen was travelling.

The first wave of Afghan refugees has been resettled from the military bases located in the USA. The next wave will come from bases outside of the USA in the next few weeks. Church World Service (CWS) is one of nine agencies working with the U.S. state department.

Housing is often the bottleneck. We have pledges, in the SC area, for both a two bedroom apartment and a one bedroom apartment, rent free for at least 6 months. We are excited that the churches have come together and prepared for a family.

Another consortium of churches in State College is preparing to welcome 4 families. At this point, 1 family has already been settled in State College. Up to ten families could come to State College in total.

Report on Kate's successful application for program: Ecumenical Center for Clergy Spiritual Renewal, a two-year program: AMC Moderator Dave Mishler encouraged Pastor Kate to apply for this program. This is a cohort approach including 19 pastors with 3 to 15 years' experience. The program is funded by a Lilly grant, which attracts many applicants.

There will be two in person sessions during the first year. The first session will be an 11 day retreat at a monastery in Wisconsin in July 2022. The second will be a 5 day retreat at the same location in January 2023. The retreats will use the Benedictine discipline of the hours.

Moderator Cathy noted that this is a wonderful opportunity for Kate and for UMC as we benefit from Kate's inspiration.

COVID precautions - next steps: The Elders have decided that in-person worship begins again next week and will continue indefinitely unless there are new virus threats including another phase of COVID. Those speaking from the podium (leaders/speakers/readers) would not be required to wear a mask since there is a lot of distance between the platform and the participants. The leader of Children's Time would be masked. All other participants would remain masked.

Kris Charles noted that as we move forward, we need to remember that there are various ways to experience COVID. A strength of our church is that we accommodate people with various differences. There is a minority who have a compromised immune system; they look normal from the outside; we need to be welcoming to the marginalized. We need to take steps to make sure that all can worship in person and not be limited to remote worship. We may need to wear masks much longer than other churches. Perhaps we could allocate Camp Hebron funds to a new air filtration system. This is a difficult phase of the pandemic where government restrictions are being lifted.

Kwadwo Osseo-Asare affirmed the cautions raised by Kris. He has been out of his office for two years. We need to listen to those among us who work in the health system and follow the science. Some church and political leaders, including in Africa, have said that as believers we do not need to fear a virus. This attitude has led to a lot of unnecessary suffering and death.

Ruth Kitchen Tillman noted that we do not need to follow what most people or groups are doing since this could lead to harmful consequences. There are also long term effects of viruses including COVID which is a treatable disease with a retro-life.

Jim Rosenberger noted that UMC has invested a lot of funds to make our facility visitor friendly for people with many types of needs. He also has concerns about the short term and long term effects of being isolated.

Ben asked Kris to provide specific recommendations from a medical point of view. Kris noted that she is not an expert on air filtration. She would like the speakers up front to be masked since children will be coming into their air space afterwards. Or the speakers could take rapid COVID tests ahead of time. How can we include as many people as possible and encourage them to come to services? Perhaps worship participants could sit in groups according to their choices about travel and their immune situation. We need to be cautious and take actions that facilitate all people to come to worship. As a church, we will need to move slower than wider society in lifting restrictions.

Closing: Cathy thanked all for attendance and participation. Cathy closed the meeting with a prayer.