

Council minutes

St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church
Arlington, Massachusetts

13 June 2011

Council Members Present: Pastor Ross Goodman, Mark Olson, Dana Ramish, Heather Sheridan, Brian Sniffen, Wendy Stack, Chris Trost, George Wilson.

Also Present: Katherine Corneilson spelling, Ken Heyda, Don Mitchell, Jen Nahn, Vicar C.J. Stratton.

Absent: Maile Hedlund inexplicably chooses to spend her birthday elsewhere, and Alison Roberts is stuck working late.

Gathering

A quorum was gathered and we came together in God's name at 7:35PM. A candle was lit to remind us that Christ is present with us as we meet.

Agenda

The agenda was accepted.

New membership

Before any other work, we appoint Katherine Corneilson to replace Airin Cherian for the remainder of his term:

Motion 1. *We appoint Katherine Corneilson to serve the remainder of Airin Cherian's term.*

MOVED, SECONDED, CARRIED.

Devotions

Dana Ramish then led a devotion on the penitent thief from "Paradise Now" by Howard Hageman and Luke 23. Next month, Wendy Stack will lead devotions.

Hymn

We sing *Jesus remember me* from memory.

Check-In

We introduce ourselves for the new member:

- Mark Olson, president;
- Ken Heyda, treasurer for 2011;
- Dana Ramish, Bruins fan;
- Katherine Corneilson, sophomore at Medford High;
- Jen Nahn, Director of Christian Education;
- George Wilson, chair of Personnel;
- Wendy Stack, member of the Council;
- Vicar C.J. Stratton, who had her first Rancatore's frappe today;
- Brian, scribe who runs the Internet;
- Chris Trost, who grew up in Texas;
- Don Mitchell, who is cynical and believes in nothing;
- Pastor Goodman.

Word

Minutes

The minutes of May were accepted as amended.

Reports

Director of Christian Education's report

Jen Nahn reports that her other work has been asking for more and more of her time. She can't sustain that workload as well as her work as DCE. We're now looking for a replacement—she'll continue to serve until we do, but the start of the new school year would be ideal.

Pastor Goodman speaks highly of the care and dedication she's brought as Director of our Christian Education program. Both speak about the proper shape of the job: more attention to Youth Ministry is required. The confirmants and the post-Confirmation youth need more attention. New seminary graduates are specializing in "Children, Youth, and Family Ministry," so one of those might work. Anyone who can give long-term attention to the youth program (instead of the current subscription to the Vicar-of-the-year program) would also help.

Financial secretary's report

Don Mitchell reports that we continue to have fairly strong income; we're ahead by number and by percentage of where we were last year. The Korean church's payments and the cell tower rents have been a little bursty.

Treasurer's report

Ken Heyda gives a quick tutorial of the treasurer's reports. The dedicated accounts are all fine. The snow removal account is negative.

New business

Social ministry

Over the last weeks, there have been two requests from the Social Ministry committee: one for a Camp Calumet campership, and one for ELCA Disaster Response. The campership passed cleanly, but the ELCA Disaster Response motion was in the middle of a motion for amendment when we stopped:

Motion 2. *We approve the request of the Social Ministry committee to send \$1000 from N7 to ELCA Disaster Response for help with tornadoes.*

MOVED, SECONDED...

Alison Roberts proposed an amendment, that this be undirected. After short discussion, that is passed.

Motion 3. *We approve the request of the Social Ministry committee to send \$1000 from N7 to ELCA Disaster Response.*

MOVED, SECONDED, CARRIED.

E-mail and emergency motions

Mark suggests we switch from e-mail motions to emergency meetings as appropriate for urgent business that requires deliberation.

More social ministry

Motion 4. *We approve the request of the Social Ministry committee to send \$2000 from N7 to LSS Disaster Response to support refugee families and LSS clients who lost their homes in the Springfield tornadoes.*

MOVED, SECONDED, CARRIED.

Brian Sniffen moves an amendment to make this undirected, but it is not seconded.

Directed giving

Motion 5. *The council directs that when giving to charities or organizations larger than St. Paul, the gifts be made undirected to any specific purpose. Gifts to charities or organizations no larger than St. Paul may be made directed or undirected, as the discretion of the Social Ministry committee.*

MOVED, SECONDED, REJECTED.

Brian says: "We've made some large gifts to LSS and similar large charities lately. Those organizations regularly have problems with a bad match of directed gifts to real problems. We'll help more people and reduce the overhead of the megacharities by letting them redirect gifts as appropriate. Even if we're moved to give by a specific disaster or problem, we do more good when we make our gift fungible."

I have less strong arguments about gifts to small groups or individuals. It may be best to give undirected money to them also, but directed gifts may also be appropriate."

Mark and Heather both propose that we make a general practice of undirected giving, but that we be flexible about others' need to be constrained (e.g., capital campaigns).

E-mail motions

Brian brings a proposal for dealing with e-mail motions. He writes:

We've had some good results from e-mail motions, but I worry that the deliberate discussion that provides the principal value of the Council is lost.

The relevant section of the bylaws on conducting business is this:

7. The Church Council shall normally meet once a month. Special meetings may be called by the president or any pastor of the congregation, and must be called at the request of one-half or more of its members. Except in case of emergency (serious harm to persons or property), prior notice of each meeting shall be given to all who are entitled to be present, and when time permits to the congregation.
8. A quorum for the transaction of business shall consist of a majority of the members of the Church Council; however, this must include a pastor of the congregation or the vice-pastor except when all such persons request or consent to be absent and have given prior approval to an agenda to which the business of the meeting must then be restricted.
9. The Church Council shall exercise only such authority as may be delegated to it by the congregation, and this authority shall be exercised in accordance with the articles of incorporation, constitution, bylaws, and resolutions of the congregation. In all matters not decided by the Word of God and not subject to civil laws, and when not prohibited by these bylaws, the Church Council shall have the right of decision. The congregation, however, reserves the right to override or preempt any right or decision of the council.

In brief, it says that we do business at meetings with half of the lay members plus the Pastor, that we can't have secret meetings, and that we can make exceptions in case of risk of serious harm. It also says that we can work around the bylaws as long as we don't outright break them.

I like that definition of emergencies—if something's important enough to do as urgent e-mail without time for discussion, then it's important enough to show up at St. Paul in person. Contrapositively, if it's not important enough to show up at St. Paul, maybe it's not important enough to bend the rules for.

Let's sketch out a proposal for the next Congregational meeting, try living within it for a few months, and have time to revise before January.

I propose:

10. The Council may conduct certain business by e-mail. Such business may be initiated by the president or any pastor of the congregation, or by agreement of one-half or more of its members. Except in case of emergency, such business shall include a message from the president specifying the text of the motion and a date at least one week in the future, on which votes will be counted. If by that date no requests for amendment have come in, the majority of the council have voted, a pastor or vice-pastor has voted, and more votes filed between the opening and closing of the voting period have been for the motion than against, the motion shall be considered passed. If any requests for amendment are made during that voting period, the matter is tabled until the next in-person meeting. If if the lay and ordained quora are not met, a separate e-mail session may be held, or the matter may be brought for reconsideration by any member at the next meeting. No such voting period may extend over a scheduled Council or Congregational meeting.

The intention here is that we'll announce an idea, discuss the idea, and then have a separate voting period. Votes aren't welcome during discussion.

If the idea's not well-enough thought through, then we'll have to have an in-person meeting. The bit about reconsideration is to prevent a botched e-mail motion from being unraisable at the next meeting, because nobody's left from the losing side¹. My biggest concerns:

1. Is a week too long? Do we need to pack discussion and action into only a few days?
2. Is this too complicated? I'd like the simplest procedure that could possibly work.
3. Is the amendment booby-trap too harsh? Will it give the wrong incentives?

Mark suggests this be taken up in e-mail and consider telephone conferences as well.

Pastoral reports

Pastor Goodman speaks about the upcoming leadership retreat. We'll have about twenty-five persons for reflection, prayer, and guided discussion with some wonderful facilitators from Bethany House. A small group has started meeting to discuss—separate from the retreat—the best structure for the congregation: staff, council, executive bodies.

He also tells us he's been speaking David Swain, the pastor of High Rock church down the hill. Rev. Swain came along to the intern retreat at the seminary. That went wonderfully.

He also speaks about Confirmation, two graduations in his family, and a funeral.

Vicar Stratton reports that some of the Confirmand parents have talked about what a blessing it was to cook and bring food with their kid. The class will be even bigger next year. On the other hand, that'll be another vicar: only two months left. In two weeks, twelve of us will be piling into a van and driving to Calais, Maine for a service trip. The garden has already harvested radishes. The new purpose statement from the Synod is "To go where love leads, to serve where love calls." It's been under discussion for the last year, which continues now. The Synod meeting was enlightening.

A group called SpokeFolk are staying with us while biking around New England. They'll have puppets and music to share with us on July 5. We'll be sharing a

potluck and our most comfortable sleeping floor with them.

Pastor Goodman talks about fund raising for the new piano; perhaps we'll ask folks to sponsor a key. We'll have a fundraising recital later this summer.

Meal

Pastor Goodman gathers us in prayer and leads communion at 9:17PM.

Respectfully submitted, Brian Sniffen

Next regular council meeting: 11 July 2011 at 7:30PM.

These minutes can be found online at

<http://evenmere.org/~bts/Church/>.

¹See Robert's rules of order on reconsideration, but have strong coffee at hand.