

FCC Board Meeting
First Congregational Church of Minnesota, United Church of Christ
Thursday, February 15, 2024
7:00 – 8:30 pm
Meeting on Zoom

Minutes

Attendance: Jane McBride, Chris Bohnhoff, Xan Laurence, Linda Valerian, Jean Anderson, Mary Byers, Carl Dyar, Paul Fate, Kris Felbeck

Absence: Tom von Sternberg, Hikaru Peterson

1. Opening — Jean Anderson
2. Check in with each other.
3. Approve minutes from January meeting.
Move: Paul Second: Jean **Passed**
4. **Begin next program year planning conversation.** (see document in drop box)
 - With respect to this year's goals, what have we accomplished? What still needs to be done?
 - Consider the process for planning next year's goals and how we will engage the congregation in it.

Linda reviewed the Planning document. In terms of "voting" for next year's goals, it's not black and white, yes or no. It misses the people in the middle, who have internal questions. We lose the depth of the discussion and the nuances. Linda proposes that our decision-making approach, both for tonight, for the Board going forward, and for the congregational opportunity to vote on next year's goals to be:

 1. Yes
 2. Yes, with some concerns
 3. Yes but, have some serious concerns
 4. No, I just can't go along with this
 - Jane begins her sabbatical in May. We should get her input before she leaves.
 - Jane: There's probably work for the Board to do – not just the Ministry teams. Perhaps the Board can work in June/July/August on evaluation of past year and reflection on new goals.

Reflection on this year's goals:

First Goal:

- It's not clear how we are clarifying our progressive stance to the wider community. Response: If a visitor came to worship and heard one of our stories, they might better understand our theology.
- This goal helps us to better balance our internal and external stances.
- Much of our recent story telling has been internally directed. We are now moving into sharing these stories on our social platforms, and starting to communicate externally.

Second Goal:

- There is some overlap between the goals.
- There is outreach, but not necessarily to those on the margins. We can put ourselves out there, but we can't force people.
- How do we want to think about the possible joint sponsorship by Justice and Faith Formation of an Election Year support group? Is there someone(s) who might want to take this on? This idea is just floating out there at this time – it may or may not happen. The idea is pretty amorphous right now. It may turn out any one of a number of ways – a prayer group? A support group? Linda is concerned that it not add to people's anxieties or depression. She suggests that it be shelved for tonight. It probably isn't a Board decision – the Ministry teams can decide.

Third Goal:

- The Study Hall never yielded a large number of students – it felt like a mismatch between our expenditure of energy and the turnout. Perhaps we need to make sure what the community's needs are, rather than our wishful thinking about what the needs are. A couple of members of H & E really wanted to try it. It's worth a try, to see if the results are any different.
- What is thisspace? It started on the West Coast. They take a 20% cut. It's a way to match available space and people looking for space. It's just starting in the Twin Cities. We will be discussing the Flourish report in March, and can delve more deeply into this program (thisspace), also.

Planning next year's goals

- How are we called to apportion our time and energy for this next year?
- One year is a short time to implement these three current, significant goals. It takes more than one year to make progress.
- We still have a lot of work to do to bring people back from COVID. Start small. Have a potluck – sit down and eat together. It's a good way to get people invested.
- Perhaps we need goals for the decade? To fully explore the nuances and angles of these three goals. Let's not let the process rule us – let's not select new goals just for the sake of it.
- There's a reason that most strategic plans are 3 to 5 years.
- Perhaps our goals have been too loose and too big – more like a 3 -5 year strategic plan. Perhaps our goals should be tighter and more specific.

- After having heard from everyone, perhaps we need to deepen our current goals? Rather than select new ones?

5. **April planning retreat**

- Saturday, April 20, 1:00-3:30pm

6. How can we integrate a more sustained and diverse approach to **stewardship and legacy giving** into our yearly rhythm? – Jane (see document in drop box)

- Jane: This is more a way for her to weave the theme of stewardship throughout the year. There is no one group in the church who makes sure that this happens – it kind of rests with her.
- Kris was touched that stewardship was so broadly defined - much beyond the annual financial “ask” to include story telling, writing thank you notes, Ministry Moments, etc.
- We need to plant the seeds about a possible Capital Campaign upcoming. We don’t yet have the projects identified. There’s a number of decisions that has to be made – do we hire a consultant? What are our projects? What is our budget? If we’re really considering a Kick Off in January 2025, we probably need to plug steps into the calendar to keep us accountable. Next month’s meeting will be looking at both the HVAC results and the MHS grant possibilities – we will then start thinking about what capital we need. We need to keep communicating with the congregation about projects and costs and longer-term goals.
- Linda thinks it is so important to integrate Stewardship into the whole year and life of the congregation.

7. **Reflection on Israel/Gaza listening sessions.** Next steps? – Linda (Review 2017 policy statement in drop box. Is this a helpful guide?)

- 36 people attended the Listening sessions, including Facilitators and Note Takers. No one was counted twice. The themes were:
 - initially despair
 - that the violence on both sides is wrong,
 - two state solution is what is needed but how do we get there?
 - the people of Gaza and Israel have no real power to influence policy making
 - general lack of knowledge
 - what does it mean to be a Just Peace congregation?
 - generational differences in perceptions about the war – older ones who remember the early days of Israel, younger ones who only know Netanyahu
 - gratitude for having a group to talk about this
- Next steps? We should say something! Do we need to bring up Just Peace obligations? Does it need reexamining?
- All the notes suggested that the conversations were deep, broad, respectful. We did a good job of setting up a safe environment where people could be present.

- Paul's group was a good experience – people were willing to be vulnerable. People both wanted to create a statement of values, and also to take tangible steps/actions.
- With the enhancement of the website, we could more directly/completely address who we are, and incorporate the Just Peace stance. We could build up a position statement.
- Senator Klobuchar came up in one group. The feeling was that we need to be careful for the safety of Senator Klobuchar and her family. An individual stated that it was not OK to protest at her home. That is the only group where Klobuchar came up.
- **2017 Policy on Staff Taking a Position** (see document)
- Linda: Some lack of clarity around the meaning of the word, “support”. Does it ever mean financial?
- Jane: She feels some urgency around the Israel/Gaza issue. Does this policy address the Israel/Gaza issue, or is it not relevant? Does it work when there is a time constraint?
- Question: In the small Lenten groups, would it be helpful to ask participants what they think of the Policy?
- Jane is proposing to take a 25 mile walk in March/April (length of Gaza).
- **What is next?**
- People will want to hear back from the Listening sessions. They might be expecting some public clarification of our values. Some people want to know what they can specifically do – give money, go on the 25 mile walk, something else?
- Tricky part is framing a public statement of our values to include our differing but kindred minds.
- The notes from the sessions might provide the material for the values statement.
- A values statement is not action. We need to continue to wrestle with the issue – there is no completion or finality.
- Can we use the notes to reflect back what we learned from the sessions? Linda is willing to start working on a summary document. It's a situation where we have very little control, and a lot of anxiety. What we need to do is find one or two or three things that we can do (individually), to help alleviate the anxiety. We've done what we can (listening groups, small Lenten groups, other activities) – that's all that we can do. Individual people will then need to take their own actions.
- Interesting that Linda is suggesting that there is no neat solution, no tied up strings
- There was a feeling that because the US government is providing funding for this war, that our country is partially responsible for the war, and that we, as US citizens, need to do something

Kris offered to open and close the March meeting.

8. Report on Worship Team - Linda
9. Reports and action – discuss only as needed:
 - Treasurer and Finance Committee

- COVID working group
- Building Committee
- Preservation Projects
- Building Use group
- Planned Giving group
- Principal Minister
- Personnel Committee
- Flourish Final Report and Recommendations

10. Closing — Jean Anderson

Next board meeting: Thursday, March 21, 2024

April planning retreat: Saturday, April 20, 2024