

Hamline Church United Methodist – Church Council Meeting Minutes

April 25, 2023 7:00 PM

Attendance: Rev. Mariah Furness Tollgaard, Angela Wolf Scott, Emma Close, Nathaniel Dempsey, Stephanie Engebrecht, Jay Alexander, Kristin Purcell, Ellen Schroeder, Jeff Dreisbach, Pete Theisen, Stephanie Jones, Adine Momoh, Janet Beneke, Kyle Pennington.

Welcome & Check-in: Kyle Pennington opened the meeting with questions posed by John Wesley, and a question about camping. Condolences were extended to Jeff Dreisbach on the loss of his father. In Rachel Joyeux's absence, Janet Beneke volunteered to take minutes.

Consent Agenda: The consent agenda included minutes of the March meeting, and two growth grants for CPR training and a Katie Morris/ Olivia Clemens planned event supporting children surrounding school gun violence. Pete Theisen moved for approval and Emma Close seconded the motion. It was approved unanimously.

Discussion Agenda:

Kyle Pennington introduced Miriam Friesen who presented the results of an energy audit of the church building performed last November, which had been arranged by the Earthkeepers. The audit was performed free of charge by EnerChange, a local non-profit with experience assessing church buildings. Comparisons of data for the twelve months ending November 2022 were made to the year 2014, when the last audit was performed. Electricity usage was down 4%, and natural gas usage down 11% compared to 2014. The solar panels provide 28% of our electricity overall. Miriam stated that the time ending in November 2022 which was studied should represent post-pandemic usage.

The recommendations of the audit were in the following categories:

- 1) Behavioral/ operational; includes labeling light switches, posting preferred thermostat settings, and replacing weather stripping. Steph Engebrecht will address these.
- 2) Boiler tune-up with combustion test. Steph and Kelly, our boiler consultant, will schedule this. Projected savings are estimated to be \$1637 per year, and a rebate for costs should be available.
- 3) Continue the move to LED lighting in the education wing and sanctuary. Premier Lighting will replace all the 4 ft. fluorescent bulbs in the education building with LED for free, taking advantage of an Xcel Energy rebate program. The work will begin this summer.
- 4) Replace heating plant; The church is currently heated by steam heat from two boilers which are over 90 years old. Options for replacement of the heating plant include hydronic (hot water) heat which would offer a substantial savings in energy costs and be most economical, and heat pump. There are two types of heat pumps to consider for our building, ground source and ground water. Heat pump in general has the advantage of providing cooling as well as heating, and uses 1/4th the energy of the best gas-fired boiler, so is the most energy efficient option, but costs more to install. Miriam presented a slide showing a comparison of costs of the current boiler system, hydronic heat, and heat pump over twenty years, which she said should be considered preliminary. There is a new direct-pay of investment tax credit available through the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 which would cover at least 30% of the installation costs of a heat pump system, and low cost financing options are also available. Miriam's presentation prompted questions and discussion. Kyle asked if heat pump is new technology and might be expected to improve. Angela answered that ground source heat pump technology has been around for some time, but ground water heat pump technology is new and currently offered by one company. Angela offered that she is studying heat pumps for churches in Minnesota as part of her professional activities, but this study may take two years to complete. Steph pointed out that a split system might be considered with the Sanctuary using one heating system, and the education wing another. Pastor Mariah commented that the air conditioning in the office area is aging and may need to be replaced relatively soon. Pete emphasized that heating is a big expense for the church and doing nothing is expensive too. Pastor Mariah pointed out that we had made improvements to the boiler system since 2014 which may account for the energy savings seen in the audit.

The Earthkeepers also asked for an evaluation of ceiling mounted fans in the sanctuary as part of the audit, but did not receive a recommendation. They will continue to explore whether larger fans, or fans mounted lower on the ceiling might be helpful in heat distribution and energy savings.

Next steps for addressing the energy audit findings were discussed. In the short term, a tune-up will be performed on the current boiler. To further explore the options for a replacement heating system, Angela and the Earthkeepers recommend hiring a mechanical engineer to do an assessment of our property. This is estimated to cost \$10,000. Angela expects to have more information from her broader study which might reduce the scope and cost of the assessment by an engineer, but this may not be available for a couple of years. Miriam pointed out that a more efficient heating system is aligned with our Creation Care goals, and that the climate crisis is urgent; Hamline Church has an opportunity to be a leader in this regard. The question of urgency and timing of a replacement heating system was discussed. Pastor Mariah said that a property condition assessment was going to be performed later this year, and the replacement of the heating system should be considered as part of the larger picture. Angela said we need to keep investigation of a new heating system as a priority. Adine asked how the information from the energy audit was going to be shared with the congregation. Miriam plans to include appropriate information in a blog post on the Earthkeepers site and post to Facebook. Pastor Mariah announced that Hamline Church had just been named a Climate Justice Congregation by Minnesota Interfaith Power and Light. Miriam was thanked for her excellent presentation, and the time she and the Earthkeepers have devoted to the energy audit.

Pete Theisen reported on the first quarter 2023 finances. Overall the church is in a very good position; we are approximately \$60,000 ahead of the year- to- date budget. This is attributed to income, including a substantial non-pledged gift made by a donor. Pledges for the year are 30% paid, with only 25% of the year completed. Automatic payments are \$24,000 per month and it would be helpful to increase this method of payment of pledges in the future, since it serves to even out income, especially through the summer months. Heating and electricity costs are slightly higher than budgeted. The investment accounts have grown modestly since the first of the year. We have a good cash balance in our operating accounts. We also have substantial cash in some designated accounts, and might consider investing some of the accounts to take advantage of higher interest rates. The gifting account was reviewed. It was noted that the Growth Fund, under the stipulations of the endowment, will be available for use in 2027, and might be considered as a funding source for large projects such as a heating system. A capital campaign could also be considered.

Pastor Mariah reported on church attendance which has been reviewed by Walker and Emma. We had over 400 people in church on Easter Sunday, and more on-line, making it the highest attendance since 2009. Overall we are close to pre-pandemic attendance levels, and now have on-line viewers as well.

The May Volunteer Appreciation Month activities were discussed by Pastor Mariah. Groups of volunteers will be recognized during the church services, and there will be opportunities to offer personal thanks at the coffee hour by adding a note to the Gratitude Tree or writing a card. Special treats will be ordered. Council members are asked to volunteer to help with the after-church events and treat pick-up. Use the Sign-up genius (link on meeting agenda). Nathaniel moved to allocate a council-initiated growth grant of \$1000 to cover the costs of the planned appreciation events. The motion was seconded by Janet and was approved unanimously by the council.

The Learning Garden Child Care Center has again approached the church with a request to terminate their lease a year early, June 30, 2023. Pastor Mariah reviewed the history of their recent requests to alter the lease and our responses. After discussion, a consensus was reached to maintain our previous positions on the lease. Angela moved that the council let Learning Garden out of the lease early if we can find a suitable tenant, and allow a \$1000 monthly decrease in rent when they vacate the activity room. This is to be documented in an addendum to the lease. Emma seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously by the council. We will actively pursue a new tenant. The possibility that improvements to the rented space would be needed were discussed by Jeff and Angela, including whether a sprinkler system is now required by code for day care buildings. This will be further investigated.

Pete Theisen moved to adjourn and Jay seconded it. The motion passed unanimously at 8:59 PM.

Next Steps:

Pete Theisen and the finance committee will model budget alternatives if we lose revenue from the Day Care tenant.

Trustees will consider security camera bids and sanctuary LED lighting bids when they come in. Trustees will assist in drafting an addendum to the Learning Garden lease, and further investigate what upgrades may be needed to the rental space for a new tenant.

Sign up to help with May appreciation month.

