

**Congregational Meeting
Minutes
January 24, 2016**

1. Presentation of updates to Safe Ministry Policy

Amended policy was presented to the congregation, showing that those interested in working with children will be given the opportunity to see their background checks prior to viewing by the church representative. The amended policy was distributed to all. It is also available on the church website.

Concern was expressed about how much time we've spent on this policy this year. Does the entire congregation need to review this policy yearly? The Policy states that the Committee will put the names of the current committee into the policy and then distribute it to the congregation. It was clarified that Leadership Team, Sunday School Coordinator and those involved in ministry with children are required to review every year. The congregation is simply notified of the changes and a revised policy is posted on the church website, unless major changes are to be made.

2. Finance Ministry provided a year-end review of the 2015 budget and a refresh of 2016 budget. See attached.

3. Update on our partnership with the Ethiopian tutoring program

Program is running smoothly every Saturday from 12:00 to 2:00. We have a signed agreement with Tsegaye and will review the program in March. Anyone who wants to participate can sign up on the sign-up sheet on the fridge in the kitchen or simply contact Tsegaye to let him know you're coming-his phone number and email address are on the sign-up sheet. Or, for that matter, you can just show up if you like.

4. Discussion of congregational and leadership team decision-making (Dan)

First, we read sections of the by-laws that pertain to decision-making so we'd all start from the same knowledge base with different members reading the sections aloud for the group.

Dan then led us in an exercise in which we were asked questions and we responded by placing ourselves along a continuum (from strongly agree to strongly disagree).

The first questions were warm-up: "I like Bacon" to which most responded strongly agree, and "I am enjoying this weather in Rochester" to which more were in agreement although there was 1 strongly disagree.

The next four questions were about the church as a whole: "Rochester Mennonite Fellowship is a welcoming place" to which almost all strongly agreed, and "I feel involved in the life of the church," for which there was a range of responses but the majority of the group was in agreement with the statement. "I am aware of what the ministries, mission and activities of the church are," to which almost all were toward the agreement side, and "I know who to go to with an idea, concern or question." After redirecting a member who had gotten confused, the whole group was toward the agree side).

Next were two questions to lead into the discussion of decision-making: “The church needs to be more congregational in decision-making,” to this there was a good mix along the spectrum; and then the opposite statement “the church needs to be more representational in decision-making.” There was a similar mix with only one person strongly opposed and a few strongly agreeing, everyone else found a way into the spectrum.

Dan explained that Leadership Team is interested in hearing what member’s values are with regard to what kinds of decisions the congregation wants to make as a whole, and what kinds of decisions the congregation wants to leave to Leadership Team and the various ministries to decide. The procedures for certain decisions are clear – budget, changes to by-laws, etc. There are others that are less clear. More centralized decision-making frees up the congregation’s energy to do other things, like outreach. Less centralized decision-making allows for more congregational ownership. What’s the balance that we are looking for? If we were to have monthly congregational discussions focusing on the quality of our life together would that increase trust of leadership and each other? What motivates us to attend congregational meetings, to join various ministries, etc.? What enhances the quality of our life together? Do people feel comfortable bringing issues to Leadership Team and other ministries?

We broke into small groups to discuss two questions: 1) What is the balance we are looking for? And 2) What enhances the quality of our life together?

Summation of what the groups presented after their discussions:

-one of the smallest phrases in the bylaws was key for some: “All authority resides in the congregation” (Article V.1)

-Is there a way to have some sort of rubric or set of questions that would help Leadership Team know what to bring to the congregation and what decisions to just make?

- Acknowledgment that this is a legitimate question for LT to ask. It’s not always clear what to do.

- Ministry reports are important to keep congregation informed even as ministries are making decisions

- We used to have a one to three finger process for decision making. What happened to that?

- There seems to be a gap in our history of decision making. Is there a way to record and keep track of decisions we make? Would that help us to have a sense for which decisions to make as a congregation and which can be made by a smaller group?

- Is there a document that we can access that has past decisions that went to the congregation and decisions that ministries/LT just made on behalf of the congregation?

-A representation style would be much easier. In that case, committees **would** bring decisions to the congregation so they are aware of what’s happening.

-Quality of our life together is enhanced by maximum transparency

-Our current method for making decisions may miss out on people’s talents – some people may have skills and gifts that aren’t being used because they aren’t being included.

-Does everyone know about the opportunities to serve?

-Re: enhancing quality of life, small groups seem important to enriching our relationships and helping us to understand each other better. Lubricates everything. Also just being in each other's homes for meals and get-togethers.

-Trust is crucial to our common life and to decision-making, whether representational or congregational. Also respect and honesty.

-Don't dismiss the best efforts of those who work in our ministries and committees. Have respect for the time and work they put in. Be careful not to dismiss their effort and accomplishment and be willing to "let go" if things aren't exactly how we'd want them to be.

-Quality of life when we are all together is different than the quality of life when we are in small groups.

-Our most underdeveloped quality is listening and talking in the large group.

5) Possible further congregational conversations were proposed and those present voted on their first and second top priorities:

Outreach (got 14 votes)

Financial values (got 5)

Worship (got 5)

Mission and values (got 8)

Decision making (got 8)

We will discuss outreach at our Feb. 7 congregational conversation

Ministry Reports:

Worship: We need worship leaders for February

Outreach: Those interested can participate in our monthly commitment to the REACH homeless shelter. See Nancy for details.

Pastoral: Meeting with members of Finance Ministry soon to discuss how special offerings are determined and how the choices are communicated.

Education: Always interested in ideas for Adult Hour from the congregation. Most of this Winter/Spring is all set, including a couple presentations from outside groups, a series on "Worshipping Well," a series on the book Toxic Charity, and a series on Prayer. They are looking for someone to plan that series. Please see Mark, Gail or Anthony if you are interested.

Stewards: Have received a suggestion that we build a pizza oven in the back yard. They are looking into it (re: zoning, neighbors, etc.)

Retreat Committee asked if anyone has concerns about meeting in Deer Lodge (the room under the kitchen that has stuffed animals in it) this coming September. Some have had an allergic reaction in that room before and we want to make sure that using that room won't cause problems for anyone. No one present expressed concern. Amy said she'd put a note in the midweek announcement to catch anyone who was not at the congregational meeting.

Finance Ministry Report

We approved an ambitious FY2016 budget of \$74750 at our November 2015 congregational meeting, adding back \$1750 of discretionary giving during the meeting (\$1250 for MCC, \$500 for MMN, and leaving \$400 in Outreach) with a verbal commitment from many during the meeting to increase their pledge for the coming year. At the congregational meeting in March we plan to have a fresh conversation about our fiscal priorities. In May for the congregational meeting we will present a brief report about our first quarter FY status in comparison to the 1st quarter of previous years. We are hoping this will help us evaluate if our stretched budget is supportable.

As of 24 January 2016 our fund balances are:

General Fund: \$4403. This is ~\$3100 above the fund balance we closed with for FY2015.

Sharing Fund: \$512.

Menn. Ed. Fund: \$7081.

Imm. Ed. Fund: \$886 including \$500 matching funds that Kathy Kern secured from our giving Artie's scholarship

Additionally, Savings \$9128; Capital Fund CD \$5332, MVS Fund (previously start-up fund) \$399. We will owe approx. \$142000 on our mortgage by 1/31/16. Selected YTD numbers were mentioned verbally and a complete set was available as a handout. We are on track to close our fiscal year with a small excess absorbed into our General Fund.

Attached are year-to-date numbers as of January 22, 2016 for the 2015 budget year, along with the approved 2016 budget. Final Fiscal-year-end numbers will be available mid-February.

Submitted with gratitude,
your Finance Ministry (Kathy S., Jen, Aaron, Tammy, Tim).