

Rochester Area Mennonite Fellowship
Congregational Meeting Report

19 May 2013

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Meeting Minutes:

In attendance: Austin, Megan, Anne, Jeffery, Bryan, Aaron, Dan, Steph, Samantha, Amy, Jason, Walt, Teresa, Ben, Wendy, Rob, Anthony, Gail, Kathy S., Rachel, Nancy, Mellissa, Judy, Chrissie, Mark, Bob (notes), Jen.

Opened with prayer and a couple hymns.

1. Worship Leader Sign-up – Facilitated by Bob.

The Worship Ministry Team (Anne, Bob, Nancy, and Sonya) are interested in getting some input from the congregation regarding how to best approach filling out the worship leading schedule for each season. We have experienced a fairly chronic shortage of volunteers for over a year. We are highly appreciative of all the great work and effort people put into planning and leading worship services (indeed, this is a huge strength of our church) and want to encourage people to continue doing this without us having to "twist folks' arms" to get the sign up roster filled up each month. We reviewed a couple ideas.

Ours is an example of a new trend in churches where worship leadership is done by many voices. It provides breadth and creativity to worship.

New sheets for leaders when doing an "ordinary time" Sunday, where there are no materials available. New format for "gifts" sign up this year – broken out by seasons of the year.

Jason: he would just assume that someone would ask him – it's hard to plan way out, and would be less stressed by having one thrust upon him a week in advance.

Chrissie: Likes the idea of signing up for seasons and being reminded.

Mellissa: Likes working in groups.

Seems that many do like having broader worship planning materials available like those from the *Leader* magazine. Bob mentioned the website www.textweek.com that has a very comprehensive list of resources for each Sunday (plus other Christian holidays).

We asked people to indicate next to their sign up on the Gift Pledge if you would like to be reminded, simply signed up, be part of a team

2. Immigrant Scholarship Fund:

Proposal was adopted. It is closely adapted from the Education scholarship we previously developed. Will encourage Arturo to apply. There will be a special offering taken in June to fund this scholarship, if there is an applicant.

The approved description and application form is at the end of these minutes.

3. Trustee election:

Jason had volunteered to be the replacement trustee. Kathy recently had an experience where she was getting some questions answered from the IRS, and realized that it's helpful to have trustees who are available during the day time to handle these matters. Kathy S. was affirmed unanimously by the congregation for a 3 year term. Bob Carter continues as trustee for 1 more year and Rachel Stuckey for another 2 years..

4. Introduction to Bylaws:

We will be have several discussion sessions over the summer to get feedback on the draft version of the by-laws. Today, Walt is giving a brief introduction. He explained why we need to have them – basically, they are a codification of the way we do things. Some asked what our present bylaws are, an Walt explained that they are a set that were somewhat hastily put together at the time of our incorporation to satisfy the letter of the law. These were based largely on a church handbook that Walt had been compiling over the years that described various functions and practices in our congregation. These are very dated, and don't generally encompass appropriately what areas need to be covered in bylaws. We will be have several discussion sessions over the summer to get feedback on the draft version of the by-laws and we will move toward adopting them over the next several congregational meetings, beginning in September. (Distributed at the end of the meeting).

5. Why do we use the consensus model?

The following statement was read aloud.

As a community, we don't want big decisions pushed through in an authoritarian or exclusionary way, leaving out those opposed to a move toward a change. Instead, because we are a priesthood of believers, we have chosen to use a consensus model, believing everyone has something to contribute. We will make better decisions with wide participation.

We all need to hear any concerns or potential reasons that we shouldn't move in the direction of the majority. That is, we need to be aware of something that isn't consistent with our core values, or something that is not in line with scripture – something that truly might not be right for our community. So we try to listen respectfully to each other.

At times our self-interest may win out over our concern for the whole community. We are human- we have feelings about issues. However, because mutuality is one of our core values, we yield first to God and then to each other (the community) over our self-interest. Sometimes we may need to let go of what we hold onto, as we seek God's will together.

Consensus does not mean we will all be in agreement, but that everyone is willing to accept – consent to – the direction in which we are trying to move together.

6. Covenant revisions:

Amy introduced revisions to new covenant draft to include "we" language instead of "I" language. She read aloud the new version.

Jason explained the method we intend to use for testing for consensus and making decisions by consensus. We will ask people to indicated whether they are:

- i. Affirming the proposal
- ii. Willing to stand aside even if not in full support
- iii. Need more information before being able to decide
- iv. Actively block proposal

Those in categories iii. or iv. must explain their questions/objections. It must be stressed that in a group decision-making process, it is essential that people frame their questions and objections in terms of core values of the group. In cases where a decision is being blocked by a small minority, the congregation must decide where to abandon the proposal or take the decision to vote. A simple majority vote is used to decide between these two courses of action. If a vote is indicated, then the Leadership Team will schedule a vote at a later date – at least two weeks hence. A proposal is approved through a vote by a super majority support of 2/3rds approval.

For the revised covenant, all were supportive except for Walt who indicated a willingness to stand aside. The approved covenant is at the end of these minutes.

Sang a hymn and pause for a moment of prayer.

7. Church Name:

Rachel went through the ideas outlined below regarding the outcome of the March congregational meeting.

Leadership Team has prayerfully considered the discussions surrounding the name change. It is clear that for some of us, feelings on this topic run deep on both sides of the issue. We acknowledge that whatever the ultimate outcome, some among us will experience hurt and a sense of loss. We ask that everyone join us in seeking to discern God's direction for our community.

In the March 24th Congregational Meeting, it was evident that three primary drivers have arisen for a potential name change:

1. The name "Rochester Area Mennonite Fellowship" was adopted at a time when the group met casually (monthly) and was comprised of people from a wide geographical area. This description no longer suits us.
2. Racial implications surrounding the acronym "RAMF."
3. Our current name is long and cumbersome, making it difficult to use with outsiders and guests.

Conversely, motivations for keeping the current name include:

1. Attachment to history of the name.
2. Feelings that the name describes us well.
3. Cost and time involved in making a change (new sign, legal fees, administrative work)

Our sense from the March meeting was that most of the congregation feels led to make a name change. Though feelings on the relative importance of each of the individual drivers vary, our sense is that the group is ready to move forward toward a change. Thus we propose testing for consensus on *moving toward a change*.

This would potentially mean that we form a committee to flesh out the details of this decision. Final approval of a name will rest with the congregation, but we ask that the congregation commit to consider seriously the recommendations of the committee. Further, we wish for the

congregation to agree on a clear framework or set of criteria to guide this committee in their work – as a starting point we suggest the following:

1. Investigate and quantify the cost and work involved in the change.
2. Develop suggestions for new names – through surveys, discussions, further meetings, etc.

We began with initial test of consensus:

Affirm:	19
Stand aside:	5
Needs more information:	3
Block:	none

Opened floor to getting further questions and comments regarding the proposal to move toward a name change and formation of a committee to facilitate.

Walt posed that the proposal to change our name does not have a clear backing by our core values. Seems like this needs to be done more clearly.

Gail explained that the idea of the acronym have racially offensive nature could be related easily to our core values.

Teresa – had questioned whether there was indeed a clear sense that most of us were wanting to move in this direction. Having seen the results of our initial consensus she is somewhat surprised and sees that this is indeed the case.

Anthony share that he thinks the word Fellowship in essential to our name.

Nancy expressed concern that the proposal in too open-ended. Bob explained some of the history and intent behind this proposal.

Ben – Contends that the proposal is too open-ended and is not grounded in our core values. Concerned that we will never have enough agreement. Questions whether a committee can work effectively on something like this where he thinks it requires input from the broader group.

Bryan – Perhaps it is partly just an issue of process; we could have anyone who is interested in the issue can be part of the committee.

Chrissie – Asked for clarification on what the proposal is. Are we truly agreeing to all agreeing to allow the name to change. She thought that such an agreement would be essential for the committee putting in the work on this.

Dan – Agrees that proposal to change needs to be framed in core values and think the reason around implied racial slur of the church's acronym seems to be a compelling reason.

Mark – Seconded Dan's comment and referred to Gail's quoting of Paul's text to the effect of don't doing things that cause others to stumble. Additionally, having heard various folks voice other reasons over the past 6-7 years, he is in support of this proposal to have people be able to more fully explore other name options. It seems that there is small chance that the discernment process will result in us realizing that we don't want to actually change it, but at least we will have explored it more thoroughly.

Austin – Getting the input from Bryan about our acronym being used as a racial slur in urban settings as very compelling.

Bryan – Acknowledges that the term may not be used in Rochester, but knows that is a racial slur in other regions.

Jen – Her reason for “standing aside” is highly personally based – because she would have to put in a lot of effort to change addresses and this may affect her relationship with the church. Her

reasons for supporting is that in terms of hospitality, our name is cumbersome, and this does make a difference in how we relate to those outside of our group.

Bob – asked for clarification on whether those who had expressed contention that the proposal is not grounded in our core values. The reasons are that the acronym has a racial slur in certain contexts and that the cumbersomeness of our name is an issue with hospitality.

Amy - Our current name's cumbersome nature creates a barrier in talking with people outside of our church.

We tested for consensus again (Anne & Rob had left room):

Affirm: 22

Stand aside: 2

Needs more information: 1

Block: none

Ben's remaining issue is that it is not clear what the process would look like in coming up with new name.

Once it was explained that the process would include an ad hoc committee working with the congregation to get input on the various parameters regarding the name change then he is willing to stand aside.

final test

23 in support

2 stand aside

We had run well over the allotted time for this agenda item, so there was no time to determine the charge for the committee or even seek names of those who might be interested. Leadership team will take next steps in setting up the committee and defining specifics of their activities.

8. Announcement from Leadership Team Discernment Committee:

Bob gave brief report: At this time, there are no new people who are interested and able to serve on LT, so Bob and Rachel will remain on for now. Several people do have interest but do not presently have enough time to serve. Specifically, Wendy Shelly is possibly willing to join at the beginning of 2014 and one of the Pettigrews may be willing to join in a similar timeframe. Bob mentioned that there is a strong desire in the existing team to have one of our "younger" members join soon to be sure this group is represented. The discernment process will be revisited in about 6 months. In the meantime, the LT may have to consider scaling back a bit on "new" projects with the congregation.

Immigrant Scholarship Fund description and application form

We at Rochester Area Mennonite Fellowship wish to support immigrant students who are continuing their education. We recognize the difficulty that many immigrants face in accessing grants and loans to pay for college expenses, so we offer a yearly scholarship funded by 2 special offerings each year to immigrant students who are part of our fellowship. The amount of the scholarship will depend entirely on donations received during the special offerings prior to each

semester of study, but will not exceed the full amount of tuition a student is charged. The scholarship is renewable annually for as long as the recipient meets scholarship criteria.

Any immigrant student in our midst is welcome to apply for a scholarship. The application consists of naming all of the colleges to which the applicant is applying and declaring which ones the applicant would like the Scholarship Committee to inform of our decision to grant an award. It will also include a description of the applicant's rationale for choosing the particular institution or course of study and of what the applicant hopes to gain from his/her studies.

Scholarship awards will be based on how well the following criteria are met. Scholarship Criteria:

1. Immigrant status: The applicant is a first or second generation immigrant.
2. Mennonite ideals: The applicant has shown dedication to Mennonite ideals by choosing to participate in Rochester Area Mennonite Fellowship worship and community life activities.
3. Mutual Encouragement and Nurture of the Body: A scholarship award is a concrete expression of support and appreciation for the immigrants among us. The learning and experience gained by attending higher education is valuable to the student themselves, to our congregation, to the Church, and to the world. Priority is given to immigrants personally involved in the life of Rochester Area Mennonite Fellowship.

The Application Process: The Immigrant Scholarship Application form will be completed by May 31 if beginning courses during fall semester or October 31 if beginning courses spring semester. Mennonite colleges or universities that offer matching grants want to know funding commitments by March 1st, so the application for one of these schools would hopefully be submitted by January 1 of the year the student plans to start coursework.

The Scholarship Committee, formed to process immigration scholarship fund applications, will be approved by the congregation. The Scholarship Committee will have at least four members and ideally consist of a Budget Committee member and at least one representative each from Pastoral Care Committee and Leadership Team. It will not contain any members from the households of any applicant for the scholarship.

The applicant will be notified of the approval of his/her request by July 1 or December 1, depending on the initial semester of study. The special offerings will take place in the month following the approval of the application, and the approved applicant will be notified at the end of the month of the total amount of the scholarship to be provided.

If the awardee does not use all collected funds for the semester, the money will be held for their educational use for 2 years. If at that time, the awardee still does not need the funds, the money can be moved at the recommendation of the scholarship committee with the approval of the congregation.

This policy complies with Internal Revenue Service regulations to the best of our knowledge and ability.

Application for Rochester Area Mennonite Fellowship Immigrant Education Scholarship

Rochester Area Mennonite Fellowship wishes to support immigrant students who want to continue their education. We recognize the difficulty that many immigrants face in accessing grants and loans to pay for college expenses, so we offer a yearly scholarship funded by 2 special offerings each year to immigrant students who are part of our fellowship.

If you are not expecting this scholarship to be matched by your college or university of choice, please complete this form by May 31 if beginning courses during fall semester or October 31 if beginning courses spring semester. You will be notified of the approval of your request by July 1 or December 1, respectively.

For Mennonite colleges or universities that offer matching grants: if you submit your application by January 1 of the year you plan to start coursework, the college or university for which you request notification will be done so by March 1, as per their deadline.

Name: _____ Date program begins: _____

List educational programs to which you have applied (or plan to) and indicate which, if any, of these you want the scholarship committee to notify of this scholarship:

Briefly describe your intended course of study: _____

Describe how your goals incorporate the scholarship criteria: _____

Is there anything else you would like the committee to know about your Christian faith, career interests or life goals as we consider your application? _____

(Use extra pages as needed.)

Signature of applicant

Date of application

Revised Church Covenant

Rochester Area Mennonite Fellowship is a Christian community in the Mennonite tradition whose core values include Following Christ, Reconciling, Mutual participation, and Affirming. Because we also affirm those values, honor that tradition, and wish to be a part of this community as it lives those values, we covenant with our fellow members to:

- Grow as disciples of Christ, learning with each other what it means to follow Jesus;
- Seek peace, within our church and without, restoring right relationships, standing with the marginalized and oppressed, and working for reconciliation;
- Participate in the life of the community, giving of ourselves as we are called, helping to discern the gifts and callings of others, and accepting and affirming the participation and contributions of our fellow members;

- Care for everyone within our fellowship, offering support and nurture, sharing burdens and joys, listening and speaking in love, and giving and receiving counsel, extending grace and forgiveness; and
- Offer hospitality to guests and strangers, welcoming those who seek, and receiving with joy those who wish to join us as we seek together.

Treasurer's Report

Our new accounting software (Aplos) is fully operational, up to date, and retroactive into December of 2012.

The program still only offers either complete access to all accounts or none. They are working on adding a totals-only option which would allow ministries or approved individuals access to fund and line item totals without seeing individual donor contributions. We will be pleased to utilize that feature when they offer it. Meanwhile, you can request up-to-the-minute details from Jen whenever and wherever she has a secure internet connection.

As of 30 May we have \$9,091 in our General Fund, \$1,143 in Sharing Fund, \$10,081 in Education Fund (Vince accepted \$1000 to attend Goshen College which will be disbursed later this year), \$5,312 in our Capital Fund Certificate of Deposit, and \$9114 in our Savings.

We spent \$1324.75 to send Austin to Convention on behalf of the church. We will send \$644.33 with him for the two convention offerings. (\$327.16 to the DREAMer fund, and \$317.17 to the Shine curriculum fund)

Our coin collections totaled \$233.74 for the Open Door Mission and \$80.00 for the Foodlink Community Garden.

Comparing our balances against our annual budget, we are one-third through our fiscal year. We have received a little over half of our expected income, we have spent a little under half of our expected expenses, and we have disbursed about two-thirds of our budgeted charitable giving.

Updated Covenant of Understanding from Minister-Congregation Relations Committee

This committee (Bob Carter, Sonya Stauffer Jurtz, Chirssie Walls, Gail Ricciuti, Jason Poole, Mark Shelly) meets approximately every other month to check in with how Sonya's ministry is going and to provide feedback from the congregation. Annually, we look at the covenant of understanding and make any needed revisions. The new one for the following year is attached below. The only change from last year's is to update the time frame of Sonya's role as Moderator for the NY Mennonite Conference, which will now go until Sep. of 2015.

Covenant of Understanding between Sonya Stauffer Kurtz and Rochester Area Mennonite Fellowship, Rochester, NY

As a ordained minister, Sonya pledges

- to cultivate a life of prayer and Bible study
- to continue her personal and professional growth
- to serve the church by leading worship and adult education as time and interest allow

- to serve in church ministries as time and interest allow
- to be available to congregational members for conversations regarding faith and spirituality, as time and interest allow
- to maintain an awareness of developments in our conference and denomination, and to serve as a link between the congregation and the broader church, as appropriate
- to take on leadership roles in the conference and denomination as time and interest allow (serving as NYMC moderator until Sept. 2015)
- to officiate at weddings as appropriate
- to uphold ethical standards for leaders as outlined in A Mennonite Polity for Ministerial Leadership (1996, Faith and Life Press, pp 106-127)
- to be accountable to the congregation through the leadership team, and to the conference and denomination through the NYMC leadership commission

As members of Rochester Area Mennonite Fellowship we pledge

- to encourage and support Sonya in her ministry
- to explore with Sonya the ways ordained ministry can enhance the ministry of RAMF
- to continue to exercise our own gifts and ministries with zeal
- to provide accountability and discernment through regular meetings of a group of interested persons, the Minister Congregation Relations Committee
- to review this Covenant and relationship at least annually, typically in May