

## **Rochester Mennonite Fellowship Congregational Meeting Minutes, 3/16/2014**

**Attending:** Tammy Besse, Arnie Pederson, Walt Nickeson, Teresa Nickeson, Kathy Shelly, Rebekah Enns, Rachel Stuckey, Aaron Stuckey, Melissa Carlson, Ting Davidson, Anthony Ricciuti, Jen Carter, Bob Carter, Drew Langdon, Mark Shelly, Wendy Shelly, Rob Shelly, Ron Lugbill, Jason Poole, Amy Poole, Austin Pettigrew, Megan Pettigrew, Judy Bernhart, Kathy Kern

**Austin read a prayer**

**Opening Song: Hymnal Worship Book 322, "Strangers No More"**

**Austin read another prayer**

### **Listening Meetings and Prayer about LGBTQ Welcome**

Wendy highlighted the contents of a recent letter from the Leadership Team to the congregation (see attachment). There are two designated Sunday mornings set aside for prayer about this issue (3/16/14 and 3/23/14 at 9:15 am), and three planned listening/sharing meetings about sexuality and the church (3/18/14 at 7pm, 3/22/14 at 9 am, and 3/24/14 at 7 pm).

### **"Looking Outward"**

The congregation divided into 4 small groups to discuss the following questions related to the place of Rochester Mennonite Fellowship in our larger community: Thinking more broadly than "outreach" and by building on our core values, what might our service and work look like? With whom should we be standing, and to whom should we be speaking? What are the things individuals amongst us are already doing, or are dreaming of doing, that we strongly want to support?

**Song: Hymnal Worship Book 142, "Brothers and Sisters of Mine"**

**Prayer: Hymnal Worship Book 751**

### **Sharing/Discussion regarding "Looking Outward"**

The 4 groups summarized their responses to the discussion questions stated above:

1) We would like to find ways to sustain and increase support for "outward looking" work that members are already doing as part of their employment or daily life: community development in the 19<sup>th</sup> Ward, the Voluntary Service Unit, foster parenting, urban beekeeping, the Gandhi Institute, working with immigrants, St. Joseph's Neighborhood Center, Christian Peacemaker Teams, working with the disabled and mentally ill, and probably others.

2) We might consider some new ideas for "outreach": helping with a community soup kitchen, homeless ministries, Rochester Interfaith Hospitality Network, after school tutoring, community garden through the Unitarian church or others, "single event"

ministries or service activities (but not with an “Invasion Day” model), bring in outside speakers who share what their organizations do.

3) We want to remember the importance of our worship hour and corporate prayer for connecting with concerns in our communities and the world.

4) We might look for ways to connect with our Fellowship’s neighborhood (e.g. Hillside Avenue, School #1) and with the neighborhoods we live in (e.g. shared worship or other gatherings with Trinity Emmanuel Presbyterian Church).

5) We might consider changing the wording of our core values to explicitly include people of diverse races and sexual orientation.

6) We are challenged by our finite resources, and our need to use those resources to care for our own building and RMF community.

### **Our Budget/Use of Resources**

Jen led a discussion about a broad range of issues relevant to the RMF Budget. The purpose of the discussion was to help guide the Finance Committee as they seek to incorporate the congregation’s values and preferences into future budget proposals.

Jen asked those present to indicate whether they mostly agreed with a series of statements:

1. I have difficult, challenging, or negative thoughts or feelings around the topics of money, church stewardship, or how our church handles money [3 participants agreed].
2. I came to this meeting without much advance thought regarding the financial questions on the agenda [10 participants agreed].
3. I spent a moderate amount of energy sitting with questions of stewardship of the church's money either because it appeared on the agenda or because it is a topic I naturally ponder [6 participants agreed].
4. I sat with the topics and questions on the agenda for a long time, put a lot of energy into it [3 participants agreed].
5. I care a great deal about stewardship of time, money, current possessions, and effort, and I am frequently framing my attitude to God's world by asking, “How should I respond with the resources I have control over?” [19 participants agreed].

Jen asked each member present to describe their hopes for the budget with one word or short phrase. Responses included: generous, bigger, attainable, needs to incorporate capital reserves, outreach, “2/3-1/3” rule (1/3 of our spending on ourselves, 2/3 of our spending on others), caring, proportional, reflecting our priorities, values before numbers, generous and responsible, have an emergency fund, gratitude to Finance Committee, budgety, sustainable, appropriately secondary, abundant, savings, flexible, a tool for service to God, enough, balance/proportionality, sustainable but focused on outreach.

We held a discussion about a distinction between “determined” and “discretionary” spending as a way to think about our budget, as opposed to thinking of spending on “ourselves” and “others.” The Finance Committee defines “determined spending” as expense incurred from congregational decisions resulting in long-term obligations (e.g. mortgage payments). Discretionary spending is defined as everything else: expenses that we control annually.

We held a discussion about whether we should include money in our budget toward a facility improvement/maintenance/repair fund, to save ahead of time for predictable expenses such as a new roof or repaving the driveway and parking lot. It was noted that we currently have ~\$5000 in such a fund. Most comments favored either setting aside money for these needs as a regular budget item or having special offerings to contribute to this type of fund.

We held a discussion about appropriate use of periodic “Special Offerings.” Should these be used for expenses such as facility repair or improvements, only for meeting unexpected and urgent needs, one-time events such as Mennonite World Conference scholarships?

We held a discussion about whether we should pay a stipend to those who perform RMF tasks such as bookkeeping, administration, and perhaps others. The large volume of work required for these tasks was acknowledged, as was the difficulty in finding volunteers for many tasks. It was noted that having RMF “employees” introduce new legal and administrative requirements for us, and could have a potential impact on interpersonal relationships if the paid staff members were also members of our fellowship.

**Closing Song: Hymnal Worship Book 407, “We are People of God’s Peace”**

**Closing Prayer: Hymnal Worship Book 763**

Addendum:

No ministry reports submitted.

Treasurers’ report to congregation (Jen Carter):

As of 5 March 2014 we are about 1/12 through our fiscal year. We have received more than 1/12th of anticipated income or about 10% of our expected offerings. We have given a small portion of our annual budgeted donations and our expenses are as anticipated so far.

We have \$2179 in our General Fund (up from our starting balance of \$1403). We have \$9118 in Savings and \$5319 in our CD. We have \$9081 in our Mennonite Education Fund, \$1702 in our Immigrant Education Fund, \$643 in our Sharing Fund, and \$1954 in our MVS Fund. We owe \$176,849.12 in mortgage principle.

## Attachment

Letter to the congregation referenced at beginning of these minutes.

March 9, 2014

Dear community,

The recent flurry of emails amongst ourselves regarding the current controversy in the Mennonite Church around LGBTQ welcome has made us well aware of the depth of feeling in our community about these things. We also know there is a range of opinions about how to respond, and that many of us have a strong sense that we should say or do something right now. What we don't know as well is how wide the range of opinions is; nor what the responses are that we could all support; nor what the feelings are of each of one of us in our Fellowship. To help us all better understand each other as we consider how to move forward as a community, we are proposing beginning with some listening meetings. We intend that these open with prayer and proceed with our sharing of our own stories about sexuality and the church, with the goal being that everyone be able to speak freely and find affirmation in simply being heard. These meetings should not become debates, but rather be places of sympathetic listening.

We have at this point scheduled three such meetings to be held at 111 Hillside Ave: Tuesday, March 18 at 7 pm, Saturday, March 22 at 9 am, and Monday, March 24 at 7 pm. We hope that everyone can come to at least one of these meetings, but if you can't make it to any, please tell Leadership Team so we can arrange for more.

In addition, the next two Sunday mornings, March 16 and March 23, at 9:15 before our worship service, we invite you to join us in prayer about these matters.

What we learn from each other at these meetings and other conversations will help us discern our next steps.

Leadership Team

Walt Nickeson

Jason Poole

Kathy Shelly

Wendy Shelly