

COUNCIL CONVERSATION - Sunday, Aug 27, 2023 | 10:50 am - 11:44 am - Room 19

0 pastors, 7 council members, 12 visitors, and 2 online visitors, for a total of 21 participants.

**Note - A conversation regarding the finances was underway when I walked in*

- Marty Schmidt was explaining that currently, we're currently in the same financial condition as last year at this time.
 - Paul Simons added we may even have a slight excess, as offerings have increased from this time last year. Right now we are only \$7K-\$8K under budget. We're doing better and there's a good possibility we will end the year in excess of our budget.
 - Phil Denton asked where would we be if we had not received the ERC money due to Co-Vid. Marty answered we'd be behind. Because of his answer, Phil wanted to make one point very clear: Many may think of the Co-Vid money as a "windfall". However, that is not the case. That money is money paid to the church for compensation for losses the church sustained during the pandemic. We took a huge hit because of that crisis. We can't presume we are ok this year. He's happy to hear there's an uptick in giving. However, we need to look at this objectively.
 - Marty reminded the group that our congregation voted for two pastors in 2023 by an overwhelming majority. However, once we hold our annual meeting in November, there will be less than two months before we enter the 2024 budget.
 - It may be unfair to a called/settled minister to expect him/her to be the only minister when we have had two for many years. Therefore, if we go to one minister in 2024 we need to step up our volunteer workload. When we asked for help -i.e. Communion- only a couple of people stepped up. Plus now, as of October 2nd, we will be without our Community Meal leaders. We've also had discussions and made a tentative plan about shoring up Funeral Luncheons.
 - Marty is not sure our congregation is ready to do the "heaving lifting" yet. Perhaps we look for a Bridge minister as a replacement. Have that individual until we really know what our circumstances will be in the future.
 - Another point is our church is in a much better place than we were two or three years ago. Therefore, do we really want to throw a wrench in that situation which could trip us up going forward?
 - Bill Brinkhorst asked to confirm that giving this year is close to what we have budgeted in 2023. Marty and Paul both answered yes.
 - Marty also advised there are improved streams coming, including the current endowment discussions. The preschool has not officially passed this yet, but preschool board members have shared the preschool intends to double its gift to the church in 2024. As well as voluntarily increasing their rent by \$500/month. This is a 33.333% preschool increase.
 - In addition, the finance committee has decided to invest excess cash into CDs which could result in an additional \$20K/year. All told if these things come together it could mean \$60-\$70K additional revenue for the church.
- Sue Simmons encourages us to think of the life of the church in something other than annual terms. Budgeting and financials are annual but it's also a continuum. However, through the life of the church we have built it up to a point and then plateaued. Many churches like ours have hit their plateau and have begun losing ground. But our challenge is to begin a new rise from our own plateau. Sue feels we have begun to do that and if we stay together and stay focused we can continue on this new momentum and building toward our vision.

- Sue added that because we look at our cash flow in and out, we tend to forget that our General Fund is quite healthy. Not to mention our other assets and endowments. There are many churches in the community that would love to have our General Fund position. If we look back at history we have had many years where we have had a negative balance or mere cents in our General Fund. Compared to our current General Fund of \$600-700K.
- Marty added that he feels it's time for us to have an appraisal of our properties -homes, the church, cemetery grounds, and the ball fields so we know what we are worth. In the event we need to borrow money, we can then know what our equity is.
- Sue added that the momentum we are building is not only due to financial giving, but it's also in our staff activity. If we make a significant change in how we're staffed, she feels that momentum will fall off.
- Ellen Littleton worries about our roof. How is it we keep having the same problems on the roof?
- Donovan Larson -as Facility Chair- replied that we don't have any big problems with the roof. We have some leaks that were not addressed with the big push for the new roof some years ago. We have leaks around the chimneys and the older portions of the roof on the preschool side. Also, some of the flat roofs above the kitchen and office need to be addressed. All of these need attention for potentially \$60K, although more bids are still being secured. It's expensive, but it will not be extensive. It's small problems that will be expensive to fix.
- Marty added the greater problem is we have an aging building where many repairs come up whether it's the roof or the carpeting.
- Joan Dalgaard asked about a Bridge Minister while the Search Committee is still looking for our Senior Minister. Is this something the Council is considering? Marty's response was that we have not yet discussed it in Council. His view is a Bridge minister is someone we'd seek to fill Pastor Carole's spot for a specified period of time. A Search Committee is not needed for a Bridge Minister. A Bridge Minister is hired by the Council. The interim work is being done by Pastor Carole and Pastor Vicki at St. Lucas UCC. Bill Brinkhorst asked if a Bridge Minister could become a settled minister. That answer is yes, but it would be dependent upon the contract wording and whatever Bridge Minister accepts our call.
- Ken Hamilton asked two questions: 1.) What is the average attendance now? Answer: About 125 each weekend plus another 60+ during the week that watch our services via YouTube. Pastor Carole Barner noted some of those YouTube viewers could very well be ministers looking at us due to our current Search. Although Sue responded that the 60+ plus on YouTube has been consistent for the last year. 2.) How is the work progressing on the ByLaws? Marty responded with "Slow". There were concerns and ideas raised by the Council when first presented last month. Revisions have been presented to the Council and discussion will continue tomorrow. He will not bring it to the congregation at the annual meeting unless there has been adequate time for review and discussion by the congregation. It's a big change that cannot be rushed. If it needs to be delayed until the May 2024 semi-annual meeting it will be.
- Bill Biedenstein asked if the Finance Committee has come to a decision about the budget cut made this year to the Missions. The answer was it has and that is to restore it to what was proposed for 2023. That amount is almost 10% of the total budget.
- This led Marty to begin the discussion of endowments. Should they be going into the General Fund for any reason? He views endowments as a safety net or for extra special things. His experience is from his work at Cardinal Glennon is the foundation gets funding from big donors for special niceties. Whereas the hospital runs on its revenues from insurance or self-pay. When applied to the church perhaps our day-to-day operations should come from our offerings whereas our endowments should be aspirational for our missions or for helping the community.
- Bill Brinkhorst asked, "May I move off of money"? He's not looking for an answer today but, would like to know if Council has considered a way to the future of the church with regard to our youth,

people younger than 35. Different from what we're doing now, what can we do to get these people back and involved in the life of the church?

- Donovan referenced a recent article from the NY Times about declining membership in churches. The black-eye that Christianity has gotten over the last 20 years. The unusual interpretation of the Gospel. Setting aside the sins of our leaders. As it focuses on wealth tied to Christianity. All the various things that have pushed people away from the church. He feels St. Lucas UCC needs to stand out as something different than that.
- Sue added how can we communicate who we are and what we believe in and stand for. Ellen Littleton added we need to stand up and be in favor of Open and Affirming too.
- Kathy Herron commented that the most successful churches preach the gospel of prosperity. That's their niche. We need to determine what our niche is. How do we do that? By survey?
- Bill Biedenstein says we do have an audience on an immediate level we can start with. And that is the Mission Trip families. He had a great experience two weeks ago at the shareholder's luncheon. Marty added not only do we not see those youth in church we also do not see their parents in church. And unless the parents are showing that commitment and activity, the youth will be unlikely to follow.
- One bright spot Marty shared is that he let the group know he met with the new Music Director, Stephen Jones, and his wife this week. Stephen had many questions about the youth in our church. Marty explained we don't see them in church. Yet we did have two dozen attend this year's Mission Trip. Stephen asked why is that? Well, they've asked and have made suggestions about some modern things they'd like to see happen in the church. Yet those things have not happened. Stephen asked who should I talk to about that. Marty referred him to the Pastors, Amy, and Lynn.
- Marty then shared his big dream of using the 10 acres of ball fields to build a new preschool that could include full-time daycare which our program does not currently include. Sue tagged onto that theme by adding that a Senior Day-Care program could also be included in that new building. Interaction between youth and seniors is vital. Between grants, loans, and partnering with other organizations this could be a true reality for St. Lucas UCC. As Christians how can we make better use of those fields? We need to think of that land and how we can make it work with the mission of St. Lucas UCC.
 - In addition, IF that could be a true reality, we then use the old preschool space -which has plumbing fixtures in each room- as a dormitory-type setting. Bunk rooms and showers would be available for visiting church groups that come to St. Louis to perform mission work.
- Changing topics, one comment given by Joy Dressel was that she has heard many say that St. Lucas UCC has never experienced a solo pastor. However, as a lifelong member of this church, she shared that back in the 1960's this congregation did have one single minister, Rev. Martenson. Plus, Dr. Allrich was a single pastor as well. Both were during times when our church population was on an upswing.
- A final, brief discussion was held about how to get our QR code or Venmo info out to the public during our live stream worship services for potential contributions to St. Lucas UCC.

Without any further comments/questions from the visitors, The Lord's Prayer was said to close this session.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Smith

Recording Secretary | St. Lucas UCC Church Council