

SAINT LUCAS UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
Minutes of the Church Council Regular Meeting
March 24, 2025

The Church Council convened for the public March Regular Meeting on Monday, March 24, 2025 in Room 19 and via Zoom. The meeting was called to order at 6:03 P.M. by Barbara Smith, President of the Council.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Amanda Boyer, Melinda Borman, Kirk Dalgaard, Phil Denton, Katy Forand, Wanda Gillman, Tracy Mulderig, Marty Schmidt, and Barbara Smith. || Nine members.

STAFF PRESENT: Rev. George Miller, Senior Minister, and *Rev. Janet Pillman, Associate Minister of Pastoral Care and Visitation/Zoom.*

VISITORS PRESENT: *Donna Alexander/Zoom, Marsha Armentrout/Zoom, Bob Beck/Zoom, Barb Beck/Zoom, Shirley Bild/Zoom, Bill Biedenstein, Mike Bohn, Mary Kay Bohn, Bill Brinkhorst/Zoom, Joan Dalgaard/Zoom, Laurie Dalba, Joy Dressel/Zoom, Marsha Fey, Pat Fribis/Zoom, Ken Hamilton/Zoom, Dan Herron, Kathy Herron/Zoom, Donovan Larson, Ellen Littleton/Zoom, Cynthia Rosfeld/Zoom, Shirley Roth-Roffy, Linda Taylor/Zoom, Kim Witbrodt/Zoom, and Jackie Zeitinger/Zoom.* || Twenty-four Visitors.

OPENING PRAYER: Barbara Smith opened the meeting with a silent prayer.

GUEST COMMENTS:

Barbara Smith asked all guests in attendance to identify themselves for the record. Donovan Larson, Bill Biedenstein, and Mary Kay Bohn gave statements about the discontinuation of Saturday services and requested that the Council reconsider this decision.

Comments included:

- Poor transparency due to all discussion occurring during Executive Session
- Saturday night as a potentially attractive worship time for new members
- Minimal budgetary / time savings, as the service is relatively inexpensive and easy to execute
- Alienating 10-25 loyal members & how best to care for them moving forward
- Mixed messages of wanting to grow the church while also making a decision that will hurt membership
- Absence of consensus-building activities and whether this should have been a decision with broader congregational support
- Poor communication with Saturday attendees who were under the impression that the service would continue indefinitely if the pulpit was staffed
- Delays publishing Council meeting notes to the website
- Council not understanding the preference for smaller, shorter, and more informal service by members
- Failing to host a second Council Conversations discussion about Saturday's future and suddenly announcing the decision hurt Saturday attendees, resulting in disinterest in shifting to Sunday and the loss of contributions
- Satisfaction with Rev. Kies leading the service & a willingness to accommodate changes if it allowed the service to continue
- Disappointment with the decision not to renew Rev. Boyd's contract

Barbara Smith read a prepared statement about the need for personnel discussions to occur within Executive Session and why the publication of meeting minutes was delayed. Barbara reiterated that the decision was difficult. To be united as one church, Sunday services are available to everyone with a livestream option and recordings for on-demand viewing. If transportation is a barrier to attending on Sunday, the Council is open to input on how to address this challenge.

Rev. Miller reassured visitors that many hours were dedicated to this topic even though the announcement seemed sudden. Attendees were reminded that a decision was made last month following the authority granted in the Constitution & Bylaws. Mary Kay Bohn thanked the Council for their time and the Council thanked all guests for attending to voice their feelings.

ONE WORD "THANKS": Each Council member shared one thing for which they felt gratitude.

CONSENT AGENDA:

It was moved by Marty Schmidt and seconded by Kirk Dalgaard that the following items be approved by consent agenda:

- Council Special Meeting – October 13, 2024, Minutes (Amended the date)
- Council Regular Meeting – October 28, 2024, Minutes
- Council Retreat – January 19, 2025, Minutes
- Council Special Meeting – January 26, 2025, Minutes
- Council Regular Meeting – January 27, 2025, Minutes
- Council Regular Meeting | Executive Session – January 27, 2025, Minutes
- Finance Committee Meeting – November 19, 2024, Minutes (Previously linked wrong file)
- Finance Committee Meeting – February 18, 2025, Minutes
- Membership & Evangelism Committee Meeting – February 4, 2025, Minutes
- Membership & Evangelism Listening Session – February 4, 2024, Minutes
- Membership & Evangelism Engaging Younger People – March 4, 2025, Summary Document
- Open & Affirming Update – March 2025
- Personnel Committee Meeting – February 5, 2025, Minutes (Approved last month prior to committee approval)
- Physical Facilities Committee Meeting – March 20, 2025, Minutes

The motion carried unanimously (9-0) by show of hands with no abstentions.

GENERAL BUSINESS:

Staff Reports – Two written reports were submitted to the Council prior to the meeting.

- Senior Minister Report – March
- Associate Minister of Pastoral Care and Visitation Report – March

No additional discussion was necessary.

Finance Committee Report – Financial Secretary Wanda Gillman submitted two written reports to the Council prior to the meeting.

- Balance Sheet Analysis as of February 28, 2025
- Analysis of Revenue and Expenses as of February 28, 2025

Wanda supplemented the written reports with an oral update that the February 2025 Regular Offering (\$40,634.15) and February 2025 Total Income (\$56,668.57) were underbudget. There was a large contribution to the High School Youth Mission Trip of \$10,323.00. February Total Expenses (\$81,637.95) were underbudget by \$5,495.15. The total deficit for the year so far is \$40,796.13. Marty Schmidt clarified that we are only about \$3,000 underbudget for year-to-date, which is impressive considering the aggressive income growth goals built into the 2025 budget and the flat monthly offering revenue assumption that does not account for seasonality. Rev. Miller corrected the record that Saturday night services cost \$18,200/year, not the \$27,000/year quoted during Guest Comments.

Physical Facilities Committee Report – Kirk Dalgaard and Donovan Larson co-presented. The committee would like to be renamed “Building and Grounds Ministry”, which would be a change to the Constitution and require approval by the Congregation in November.

Council approval is required to replace the original 1999 Sexton house roof, as this expense was not included in the 2025 budget. The committee recommended acting now to prevent additional leak damage. Three competitive bids were solicited for similar quality materials. Donovan reported that Jeff Wagener recommended against submitting an insurance claim given the age of the roof and recent claims on the policy. No other significant repairs are currently planned for this property. The Council discussed whether this repair would be eligible for PET funds, but it was determined that this fails to meet the criteria for catastrophic repairs.

It was recommended by the Physical Facilities Committee, moved by Amanda Boyer and seconded by Melinda Borman to accept the bid from Reger Roofing for up to \$12,000 to replace the Sexton House roof. The motion carried unanimously (9-0) by show of hands with no abstentions.

Donovan Larson reported that dirt has been applied to low spots on the fields and grass seed will be put down soon. The Lindbergh School District agreed to perform these tasks, but St. Lucas UCC members ended up assuming the responsibility. The feasibility of offering concessions again this year was discussed. Donovan recommended that the Council monitor whether the cost of maintaining the fields is being offset by the revenue generated.

The Council recessed for 10 minutes.

OLD BUSINESS:

Associate Pastor Search Committee – Barbara Smith and Katy Forand reported that the Personnel Committee intends to conduct a survey of all current staff responsibilities to identify gaps for the Associate Pastor job description. The objectives are to 1) ensure that the job descriptions match the actual tasks performed and 2) check in with staff about their employment intentions for succession planning purposes. Barbara will meet with Lynn (Fey) Follis and Amy Bush. Katy Forand will meet with Michele Ottinger. Rev. Pillman's title and contract terms were discussed briefly.

Sports Contracts – Barbara Smith reported that Violet Brooks agreed to lead the contracts with the Lindbergh School District through the fall season. It was recommended that the new person assuming this responsibility shadow Violet for the summer and fall contracts to prepare for 2026. A long-term lease with the Lindbergh School District may be easier to manage.

Saturday Worship – Barbara Smith opened the floor for Council members to discuss anything about Saturday night services that is not personnel-related.

Tracy Mulderig requested that Council members reflect on what we can learn from this experience, especially related to change management and communication.

The purpose of meeting notes was discussed with a warning that overly specific notes containing too much detail for who said what in the name of transparency can unintentionally cause reputational harm.

Rev. Miller shared an example of how staff have spent hours on the topic of Saturday night services at the expense of other important activities such as calling on people in the hospital. He encouraged the Council to consider the costs of lingering on this topic indefinitely instead of focusing our limited time on future strategic decisions.

The Council reflected on the comment today that some Saturday members may be unable to attend Sunday morning service. Are there obstacles that the Council should understand better and mitigate? Rev. Miller reported that some older members have expressed a wish for a 10:00 am start time due to difficulty getting ready in the morning. The density of attendees was raised as a reason why members concerned about large gatherings may choose not to attend in person on Sundays. Other elderly members may need a ride in the morning.

Accounting Audit – Wanda Gillman reported that Jeff Wagener has requests for bids in progress with 3 vendors. July remains the target start date.

Establishing a Worship Committee – Barbara Smith initiated the formation of this committee. Two members have been approached. Barbara intends to ask Cathy Forand because she was on the previous Worship Committee. Rev. Miller recommended asking a youth to join the committee. Tracy Mulderig reported that she recently taught Emily Simpson how to change the paraments and recommended approaching Emily. To prevent diffusion of responsibility, Tracy recommended delegating the responsibility of the paraments to one person as the task owner to ensure that it gets done. Next year's confirmation class may be active participants in worship planning, as well.

PET Legal Guidance – Marty Schmidt summarized the findings of the attorney engaged to review the trust document on behalf of the Council.

1. *Is the document up to date with current trust laws? Yes.*
2. *The Congregation voted to amend the trust to increase the amount of income. What needs to happen next to make this a reality? The Trustees need to execute a formal amendment reflecting the vote of the Congregation.*

3. *Can the Grantors suggest to the Trustees the types of investments they would like to see invested in?* No. The election of Trustees is how the Grantors impact the investment mix decision-making. Phil Denton disagreed with this conclusion due to the expressed language in the Trust. Marty Schmidt reported that the mix has changed favorably to ETFs, high dividend stocks, bonds, and safer vehicles.
4. *Can the Trust be decanted?* No. This is the second trust attorney who has reached this conclusion. There is insufficient discretion built into the language of the documentation to open the door for decanting.

The Council was disappointed by this result, as the original stated purpose of the PET to rebuild the church after catastrophic damage has been made obsolete by insurance policies on the property. The document was written so narrowly that attorneys have concluded that the principal and capital gains cannot be touched. Marty Schmidt reported that there is a method to petition the court to change the original intent. Full buy-in from the Trustees and the Congregation would be necessary to proceed down that path.

Moving forward, the Council recommended that future donations be made to the General Fund instead of the PET given that the PET already has nearly \$3 MM that the church cannot access for more urgent needs.

As a Trustee, Bill Biedenstein stated that the attorney's conclusions matched his understanding of the PET. Bill recommended that the Council sit down with an attorney to better understand the document. He also reminded the Council that Scott Benack's successor will need to be appointed.

NEW BUSINESS:

Guest Comments Format – Barbara Smith reported that a visitor at last month's meeting expressed concerns about the Council interrupting Adam Rustige and Donovan Larson during Guest Comments. The Council discussed distinguishing between members appearing before the Council representing a committee and visitors appearing to express an opinion or concern. Committee reports belong under Old Business or at the start of New Business.

Council Conversations Format – Barbara Smith expressed a desire to hold a Council Conversation that is more attractive to members who do not typically attend these sessions. A proposal was introduced to have two tables with two Council members each in the Fellowship Hall during Coffee Hour. This would be more informal, private, and personal than the prior format.

Rev. Miller shared what worked in the past at other churches he served. "Air conditioner chats" occurred every 3-4 months during fellowship time with the pastor celebrating recent achievements, discussing upcoming plans, and then opening the floor for questions with a moderator. All questions and comments were welcome. Knowing this was on the calendar reassured members that there would be a regular opportunity to have their voices heard. Remaining in the fellowship hall was critical to prevent attrition from relocating. Tracy Mulderig asked if minutes were taken during these meetings – no, this was intended to be informal.

Amanda Boyer suggested holding these conversations on the Sunday prior to the Council meeting so that issues mentioned can be added to the New Business agenda. To start, the tables with Council members could help collect information as "office hours" to be noted and shared with the broader group. Kirk Dalgaard recommended pursuing both formats. Rev. Miller cautioned against creating opportunities where different individuals communicate different messages instead of moving together as one body. The Council discussed holding separate "air conditional chat" style sessions on Zoom and in-person.

The Council agreed to communicate to the Congregation that they are welcome to approach us after service. To prevent burnout, these conversations should be avoided prior to worship. Barbara Smith will remind the Congregation that the Council and President email addresses exist.

Organizational Chart – Tabled

Sexton House Roof Approval – Completed during the Physical Facilities report.

Fence Repair – Barbara Smith reported that part of the fence line by the parking lot was damaged by an unknown cause. Donovan Larson approached the neighbors to suggest that St. Lucas UCC cover 50% of the costs of the expense to repair the fence.

Amanda Boyer moved for St. Lucas to cover 50% of the repair costs. The motion was tabled until the Physical Facilities ministry has an opportunity to collect bids.

Katy Forand asked whether or not the fence sits on our property line. The Council discussed that relevant Physical Facilities files are not in the church's possession and agreed postpone further discussion for Executive Session.

Carole Barner Social Hall Rental Request – Barbara Smith and Rev. Miller shared that Carol Barner is seeking a venue for a Deaconess Fund event on August 17th. Forms will need to be submitted to Debbie Heagle to provide more information. Rev. Miller recommended that Jeff Wagener be responsible for coordinating this event in his capacity as business manager.

Friendship Village Worship Proposal – Rev. Miller proposed that St. Lucas UCC consider hosting a service at Friendship Village on the first Sunday of the month at 2:30 pm. The same liturgy and bulletins would be used as Sunday morning with the same sermon. The Caring Ministry could assist with set-up and greetings, whereas the Worship Committee would be responsible for Communion. This would create another worship opportunity for members who cannot attend at 9:30 am with a similar experience. Another benefit of this service would be the opportunity to evangelize to the community. The costs of this service would be \$5 for a loaf of bread and \$200 for Linda Radick's performance fee. The target start date would be in June or July. It was important to Rev. Miller to have the support of the Council before proceeding any further than the proposal introduced today.

The Council asked whether this has been approved by Friendship Village. Rev. Miller responded that no steps have been taken beyond introducing this idea to Council for discernment. Historically, it has been easy to secure space for Bible studies and dedicated services.

The Council expressed support for serving the needs of our members at Friendship Village and recognized that this would be a promising opportunity to execute a second equivalent service as on Sunday morning with minimal incremental cost and labor given that it is a day Rev. Miller already works.

Rev. Miller reported that deep wounds are beginning to heal for St. Lucas UCC members at Friendship Village in response to the work of Rev. Pillman and St. Lucas UCC's re-engagement with the community. Phil Denton stated that there are 780 residents at Friendship Village, many of whom are former members of St. Lucas UCC. Today, only a Catholic service is available.

Concerns were raised about how creating a new service offering, albeit monthly, would be interpreted by members upset with the decision to terminate Saturday evening services. Rev. Miller emphasized that the service would be open to anyone and could be a viable alternative for Saturday attendees who are unavailable on Sunday mornings. Barbara Smith stated that Rev. Pillman intends to reach out to Saturday attendees to offer pastoral care.

The Council discussed how to measure success if this service is piloted. Rev. Miller cautioned against focusing exclusively on attendance or donations.

It was moved by Marty Schmidt and seconded by Barbara Smith that Rev. Miller proceed with discussing the implementation of a once-a-month Sunday service with Friendship Village. Discussion focused on the feelings of Saturday night attendees who are currently grieving. Amanda Boyer reminded meeting attendees that working on Saturday was not included in Rev. Miller's call agreement. Rev. Miller expressed regret for having stated that he could lead Saturday night, which he discovered was unsustainable after piloting the arrangement for 3 weeks. He cautioned the Council about the importance of our words and that "maybe" can be misinterpreted as "yes". The Council agreed that more discussion is needed. The current motion on the table is about gathering additional information, not agreeing to implement the service. The motion carried unanimously (9-0) by show of hands with no abstentions.

Dartball – A member approached Barbara Smith for information about Dartball (what, where, when, etc.). Council decided to postpone further discussion for Executive Session.

The public session of the Church Council meeting recessed at 8:57 P.M.

(Minute marker: 2 hours/54 minutes)

Respectfully submitted,
Tracy Mulderig
Recording Secretary

The next regular meeting of the Church Council is scheduled for Monday, April 28th at 6:00 pm.

Approved by the St. Lucas UCC Church Council on April 28, 2025