

THE CHURCH OF THE COVENANT

JOINT MEETING OF SESSION, TRUSTEES, AND DEACONS

Wednesday, February 24, 2021, 7 p.m., via Zoom

Elders present: Heidi Braun, Mary Anne Bromelmeier, Barb Clint, Jenny Conner, Susan Dahm, Anne Wombwell de Coningh, Dale Goode, Matthew Garrett, Rod Keen, Chris Langmack, Sybil Marsh, Cathy Miller, Erica Stubbs, Cindy Szafraniec

Trustees present: Patty Fowler, Martha Goble, Keith Kallay, Jim Mate, Dennis Matz, Jim Prince, Nancy Smekal, Harriet Wadsworth, Ann Williams

Deacons present: Tom Denbow, Joan Drushel, Julie Mailey, John Marsh, Lucy Matz, Nancy Matz, Sue Prince, Liz Shriver, Norma Shuskey, Janet Takeyama, Nick Tomko, Kate Williams, Paul Williams

Moderator present: The Reverend William Long Hudson

Clerk present: Deni Horstman

Guests present: Kaori Hongo, Jonathan Moyer

Rev. Hudson called the meeting to order and opened with prayer at 7:03 p.m. A quorum was declared. Approval of the agenda was M/S/C unanimously.

The trustees' Building & Grounds Committee chair, Keith Kallay, gave a slide presentation of the committee's projects to maintain and improve the property indoors and out from 2017 through 2020 as well as plans for 2021. A wide range of completed work, much of it behind, over, or under the scenes, includes improvements or repairs related to roofing, plumbing, HVAC, lighting, and painting. Total cost for those four years of B&G work is \$257,443. Plans for 2021 include stained glass window and hardware repairs, carriage entrance renovation, and carpeting replacement.

Chair of trustees and president of the Society Martha Goble discussed efforts to lease portions of the education wing. The Cleveland Friends Meeting (Quakers) is in discussion regarding the Sonia Golden Room. CWRU is in discussion regarding the two rooms upstairs, i.e., the large area long used by various campus ministries and the worship space across from it; use would be by CWRU's English Language Studies program. (UPCaM's office remains in the large room at the moment.) The Muslim Students Association is already leasing space downstairs. (The Friends of the McGaffin Carillon is leasing an office off the Beckwith House reception room.) Elder Jenny Conner expressed the need to keep in mind space for future children of the Covenant when considering long leases in the education wing.

Rod Keen reported as elder and chair of the Long-Term Financial Strategy Task Force. The 70-some pages sent to all board members may seem intimidating. All church leaders should understand the basics. At a minimum, focus on the 9-page Update Report just completed. It is the successor to three earlier reports completed under three earlier ministers' pastorates. Chart 1 showing the decline in collected pledges reflects a point made earlier in this meeting by Keith. The Consolidated Endowment's \$10.1 million value at the end of 2020 is an all-time high, and the Bird Fund is around \$1.5 million, totaling \$11.6 million. Discussion included apparent trends in giving among younger persons, costs to potential income of any major endowment withdrawals, and the possibilities that our record-high endowment wealth represents toward addressing Rev'd Bill's "Transitional Eyes" concerns regarding our property and its role in our church's potential growth.

Rev'd Bill invited elder Susan Dahm to repeat some of the reflection she shared with him following the January session meeting. Susan focused on Covenant's vision statement, our long-term recognition of Micah 6:8, our current participation with Matthew 25 congregations, and other ways in which our Christian beliefs urge us to remember the poor, homeless, and hungry in Covenant's neighborhood.

Elder Barb Clint questioned the tone of some of the comments from trustees, when we all love the church and are trying to do what is best for it.

Bill spoke to the long view of our congregation and our current building. Our history speaks of our congregation's national leadership in the faith community. Our stone from Edinburgh's St. Giles Cathedral (Church of Scotland),

embedded in our chancel floor, is consistent with our congregation's construction of a cathedral church. Some of the current conditions of our property do not live up to what we can be for our own congregation and larger community.

MOTION by deacon Paul Williams to hire an architect. Seconded by trustee Harriet Wadsworth.

Before any discussion continued, Rev'd Bill requested screen sharing of photographs by the clerk, who had technical difficulties in doing so [the photographs were later sent via e-mail to everyone serving on the three boards].

Discussion included the following: Deacon John Marsh expressed the need for further modernization to be welcoming for those in wheelchairs. Elder Rod Keen pointed out the accessibility features and improved elevator created in 1999 thanks to donated funds. Paul commented on continued challenges he witnessed as frequent usher at the Christ Chapel entrance. Elder (and music director on Covenant's staff) Matthew Garrett recounted discussions with outside musical organizations—a potentially significant revenue source for the church—such as Apollo's Fire, who want to have their concerts in the beauty of our renovated sanctuary but have concerns about how well their patrons would be served in our facility, including artist and patron flow in and out of the sanctuary and lack of easy access to more than one restroom stall. Deacon Janet Takeyama remarked that this meeting seemed to be connecting the deacons in some business in which they were somewhat out of the loop. Elder Cathy Miller suggested that the retired long-time architect of the Cleveland Museum of Art staff, Jeffrey Streaan, be asked if he would visit to provide initial direction, and John said he was thinking of CMA, too, with its astounding renovation.

After further discussion of wording and process, the initial MOTION was amended: Building & Grounds will work with Paul Williams to hire a consultant to help in planning. The motion was carried unanimously with one abstention (Martha).

Discussion of the Video Project concluded that the responsibility for purchases of sanctuary cameras and related equipment is with the trustees' Building & Grounds Committee, with Martha signing purchase approvals. The project has evolved some, to include an additional, moveable camera that will be most frequently used in the rear gallery.

Janet commented that it has been a horrible year, and our staff deserve special gratitude for all they have done to hold our church together. She suggested a \$500 bonus to each one. Cathy concurred. Bill referred the suggestion to session's Personnel Committee.

Discussion of reopening the building included that many members and others already have been in the building. Bill said that members in their last stages of life really want to be in our sanctuary again. Paul and Kate both gave examples of schools and churches that are open every day or week. Keith suggested Easter Sunday as a good goal. Heidi asked how many church leaders had already been vaccinated. The Reopening Task Force will meet again with this discussion in mind.

The meeting adjourned and closed with prayer at 8:48 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Denise Horstman, Clerk of Session