

St Stephen Lutheran Church
Church Council Meeting, December 11, 2023

Marla Amborn called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

Present: Marla Amborn (President), Ted Field (Vice President), Cheryl Skrypez, Phyllis Ballata, Denise Ashley, Scott Ziemann, Kathy Stickler, Bethany Zenner, Mary Beth Skunes (Treasurer).

Absent: None

Devotion – Marla Amborn

Marla read Psalm 100. Make a joyful noise to all the earth. This is the Season that we think about joy but also stressors. We think about our church budget issues, other stressors, people busy, etc. Take the time to think about joy, our faith, joy in our families, in our God who blesses us in many ways. We all went around the table and stated what brought us joy. We then sang the first verse of “Joy to the World” together.

Prayer Concerns –ALL

Kathy Stickler, two friends awaiting medical test results. Various people who are traveling. All the people from Israel, Gaza, Ukraine, Russia. Churches across the country that are struggling in some way. Karen Smith. Viki Bosin. Pray for lots of people at the Living Nativity.

Approval of Minutes: Minutes for November 2023 reviewed. No corrections.

MOTION: A motion was made by Ted Field and seconded by Phyllis Ballata to approve the November 2023 Council minutes. Voted on and carried unanimously.

Adjustments to the Agenda – two announcements (discussed at this time)

- Workshop announcement: SPAS Tool Kit February 24 at Faith Lutheran, Forest Lake. Encouraging council members to attend. Good workshops!
- Nominating Committee announcement: Denise Ashley will take the final 1-year council position vacated by Bethany Zenner.

REPORTS:

Treasurer’s Report – Mary Beth Skunes (Treasurer)

Treasurer’s Report in its entirety for November is included for review. Mary Beth handed out a summary page of the 2023 Monthly Income/Expenses for August through December (estimated month) to give council an idea on what the estimated deficit will be at the end of 2023.

In the last 18 months we have lost 24 giving family units (those we have identified) – from death, moving, ending giving since Jim left. Have we gotten any new family units? Yes, 2 family units. The loss in revenue has been around \$38,000. Mary Beth is estimating that December income will be around \$52,000 based on what she knows may still be coming in. Deficit at the end of 2023 is estimated to be \$83,603.58. Benevolence total, if comes up negative, will be taken out of current income to honor what we agreed to pay. November expense of \$104,028.58 was a little higher because we had an insurance payment. We still have money in the bank.

We have asked congregation to do a new way of pledging (putting the entire pledge into current fund). We will have put around \$25,000 into capital in 2023. But we can't spend that on current fund expenses because we are obligated to spend it on capital projects. Cash reserve is used for when we are short as well. This fund was started in 2019 with a goal of raising \$90,000. But 4 years later we are still only halfway to our goal. We are not taking money out of cash reserve. We want these accounts to sit but won't let them grow anymore. We want the money people would be giving to capital and cash reserve to go into current fund. We need to pay the bills each month. If the money pledged last year had all gone into current fund, we would not have been at negative \$16,000 at the beginning of last year. So we want all money to go into current. If we have extra money, we will stick money into capital and cash reserve. We get from NHN \$700 a month that goes directly into capital. If we need to pay for a big project, we will get a loan and use special fundraisers at that point. No further questions or discussion.

MOTION: A motion was made by Kathy Stickler and seconded by Bethany Zenner to approve the November 2023 Treasurer's Report. Voted on and carried unanimously.

Pastor's Report – Pastor Juli Thompson (presented by Marla Amborn)

Report from Pastor Juli Thompson included for review. Pastor Juli has increased her duties since Pastor Kelly has left and before the new interim pastor arrives January 2. She has been managing funerals, pastoral care. She initiated an adult forum "Our Whole Lives" that addresses sexual education for all ages. She is using Icon software to track her pastoral visits. Sandy Smaker volunteered to do the Waters Memory Care services for December.

Ministry Team Reports – ALL

Worship and Music – Denise Ashley
Committee planned the Christmas Eve services.

Stewardship – Ted Field

Around 75 intent pledges have been received. It is around what we usually get every year. We did not get a big boost in the number of pledges. But around 1/2 of the people who pledged did raise their pledge, 1/4 went down, 1/4 stayed the same. There was a net increase in giving. Intent cards represent who give. Around half of the people who give turn in intent cards. The people who give but don't turn in intent cards, their giving is estimated by Mary Beth based on historical data. Stewardship team finished the on-line course. For the most part, the course was good. We used a few ideas from the course, using "intent" cards and using templates they provided us.

MOTION: A motion was made by Cheryl Skrypez and seconded by Denise Ashley to approve the Pastor's Report and Ministry Team Reports. Voted on and carried unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS:

Interim Update – Marla Amborn

Pastor Karri Anderson will be starting January 2. She will focus on interim work, worship, and bible study. She will be at 2/3 time due to budget constraints. She receives high recommendations from

other pastors that Marla knows. The Mission Exploration Team has been working together since June. Council needs to affirm the Ministry Site Profile tonight. We will officially move into Phase 3 of the Pastoral Transition Process. MSP will be made available for interested pastors to review through the Synod. MET team has put in a lot of hours. Call Committee will get orientation from the Synod on December 18.

Marla asked for additional comments from those who are on the MET. Cheryl – What we have written has been taken from both the cottage meetings and the Holy Cow survey. We thought we needed to talk about the good and not so good and be very honest. We did write and re-write many of the areas. Lots of thought and discussion was put into this. Different sections were assigned to different people but in the end, everyone was involved in the entire final version. Ted – cottage meetings were more positive than what the survey represented. People taking survey by themselves maybe would answer differently. Cottage meeting participants were invited by the MET team and were a group of people more active than perhaps who responded to Holy Cow survey. Kathy Stickler said she thought the summary meeting this Sunday was excellent. The group was very transparent. Feedback from the congregation was very positive.

Review and Approval of MSP – Marla Amborn

Ministry Site Profile was reviewed by council members. This document will be sent into the synod after approval from the Council. Marla asked for any comments. The entire document does not go on the ELCA website. Part that does go on the website is the “Summary Description” from the first page of the MSP. Any pastor from ELCA can look on ELCA website and see this and contact SPAS and let them know they are interested in being considered a candidate. The document would then be sent to the candidate to review. Synod will send 3-5 of their best candidates to us. They will not just send anyone; they will send those who seem the best fit. Synod acts as an employment broker. Each candidate will also have a detailed profile that they need to fill out that will be made available to the call committee. Synod wants to make sure that the potential candidate will be voted in by the congregation by at least 2/3 of the congregation. No further discussion.

MOTION: A motion was made by Denise Ashley and seconded by Phyllis Ballata to approve the Ministry Site Profile and submit it to the Synod. Voted on and carried unanimously.

Youth Fundraiser Appeal – Marla Amborn (for Melissa Whitman)

Request from Melissa Whitman for a combined Redeemer/St. Stephen pizza fundraiser for the children and youth to be held January 7, 10, and 14. Pickup February 7. The council did not cite any other conflicting fundraisers or use of space during that time.

MOTION: A motion was made by Kathy Stickler and seconded by Scott Zieman to approve the requested Youth Fundraising Appeal. Voted on and carried unanimously.

Redeemer Partnering Agreement (DRAFT) – Marla Amborn

Melissa Whitman requested that something be in writing for the Redeemer and St. Stephen partnership with sharing Melissa’s services in addition to other things we share like the confirmation service, common worship services, etc. Review by both councils is needed. Marla said that council is not

required at this time to approve this document, only review and provide feedback. The hope and expectation is once we have a new pastor, we will look at more ways to partner with Redeemer. Question Kathy – is there a starting date for this document. Yes, #2 states this agreement will be in effect at the time of the signing. It is not a legally binding document but an “intent” document. Redeemer and St. Stephen are equally sharing Melissa (for youth). St. Stephen executive team needs to check in with Melissa. Question from Denise and Bethany - As a parent do we want to have confirmation service to alternate between Redeemer and St. Stephen? The council had strong reservations to alternating the confirmation service between Redeemer and St. Stephen. There was consensus that parents and extended family would want to have their children get confirmed at the church they attend and during the actual church service. More discussion is needed on this particular topic between Redeemer and St. Stephen.

Council feedback:

- #2 – put in something that when revised, effective date based on the last signature.
- #6 – each signature line needs a date as well (don’t have the date at the end, have with each signature).
- #4E – Council objection to alternating location of confirmation each year. Council preference that St. Stephen kids be confirmed in the church they are members of – more discussion is needed here.

Marla will get back to Melissa with this feedback.

2024 Budget Discussion – Mary Beth Skunes

Discussion on the 2024 Proposed Budget. Mary Beth started with a cash flow chart that shows a steady drop in total cash in the bank starting with 2021. At the end of 2021 there was \$220,905.99 in the bank. At the end of 2022, there was \$171,339.87 in the bank (a drop of almost \$50,000). At the end of 2023 there was \$126,554.59 in the bank (drop of almost \$45,000). Mary Beth estimated by the end of 2024, there will be only \$51,745.88 in the bank (drop of almost \$75,000). We will have to move money from CD’s to make sure we have money in the checking account.

Line item review of the 2024 Budget (draft) – Tonight only 2023 and 2024 budget comparison was done (there were no actual numbers listed). Specific discussion of interest:

Income:

- Request to put all intended money into current brought up envelope income a little but not significantly.
- Envelope giving has not gone up since offering plate has resumed, mostly visitors, or extended family putting into the plate.
- We only have about 70 giving families that receive envelope boxes, the rest do Simply Giving.
- The \$18,175 Benevolence line is what we pledge to give. This will be taken out of Current. This brings the total expected income down to \$326,025.

Expenses:

Council Minutes
December 11, 2023

- Pastoral salaries represent total numbers, not broken down by line item in this graph. It will be next month.
- 3% raise recommended for staff (including Pastor Juli).
- Interim pastor budgeted for first half of year (6 months). New pastor budgeted for last half of year (6 months).
- Total salary expenses slightly less for 2024 than in 2023 because Senior Pastor salary is budgeted at slightly less than what Jim was making.
- Simply Giving does charge fee for the transactions. People can also set up automatic deduction from checking account and not be charged a fee.
- 2024 Income to Expenses Budget will have a \$67,298.71 deficit. Add that to the anticipated \$83,603.58 2023 budget shortage and we may have a budget deficit going into 2024 of over \$100,000. “Additional income needed” line item has historically been put into budget, but it won’t be this year.

Recommendation by treasurer – Majority of budget is staffing which means this area is where we need consideration. Stewardship has immediately drafted an appeal letter to the congregation to address this deficit and it will be going out in the mail shortly.

Marla – coup against Dan Brum, lost 40 families. Bev Ammons took over the children’s ministry program and donated her time. We will need more volunteer time like this.

Need to have some type of forum that talks about money and volunteerism. Show people what the actual situation is. Agreed that January 7 following Sunday worship would be best day. Question: Have we ever combined need for money with “what does St. Stephen mean to you?” What would their life look like if St. Stephen wasn’t there? Any person could write the appeal letter that is more personal.

ACTION: Tonight’s exercise was to familiarize the council with the first draft of budget. Next month need to vote on budget that goes to annual meeting. Have a budget education session January 7 after Sunday service with the congregation. Continue to work on getting a renter.

Council Highlights:

- 1) The council approved the MET’s Ministry Site Profile at tonight’s meeting.
- 2) Approved combined Redeemer/St. Stephen CYF fundraiser selling pizzas.
- 3) Reviewed and discussed Redeemer/St. Stephen Partnership Agreement document.
- 4) We had preliminary discussion on the 2024 budget.

Communion signup list – ALL (Marla did not bring sign-up form. Will have sign-up via email)

Date	Server	Helper

Council Minutes
December 11, 2023

MOTION: A motion was made by Ted Field and seconded by Kathy Stickler to close the Council meeting. Voted on and carried unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 9:42 pm

Closed with the Lord's Prayer.

NEXT COUNCIL MEETING: Monday, January 8, 2024, at 7:00 pm

Respectfully submitted,
Betsy Clark
Council Secretary