

KVCC Church Council Meeting Minutes

November 28, 2023

Present: Pastor John Sampson, Debby Rice, Paul Osenbaugh, Linda Bogardus, Anne Runyon Hurd, Nancy McArthur, Susie Allen, Liz Jaques, Naj Wikoff, Charlotte Lichtenburg, Pam Gothner, and Deborah Mitchell.

Debby opened the meeting at 5:01 PM. This meeting was held at KVCC.

Opening Prayer: Susie Allen led us in prayer.

Determination of Quorum: We had a quorum at today's meeting.

Approval of Last Month's Meeting Minutes: Naj made a motion to approve last month's meeting minutes, and Susie seconded the motion. A discussion followed, and the motion was passed to accept the minutes.

By-Laws Review: The proposed revision of the by-laws were shared with the Council prior to our meeting. The revisions are proposed by Susie Doolittle, Pam Gothner, Nancy McArthur, and John Sampson for Council approval at the upcoming Council meeting. These draft by-laws reflect changes requested by Council members and Finance committee members who have reviewed them. Nancy made a motion that the Council endorse the revisions to the by-laws and that we bring it to the congregation for a vote at the next Annual Meeting. Naj seconded the motion. A discussion followed, and the motion was passed.

Accessible Parking Lot Update: The Accessible Parking Lot has been paved and is a welcomed improvement for those congregants who park there. The Council thanked Howard for his hard work and effort to get this project in place before the winter months.

Request for Funds from Annette Merle-Smith Fund: Approximately \$12,000 was used from our financial reserve to pay for the paving of the accessible parking lot. Debby and Nancy would like to replenish our reserve. Naj made a motion that we access funding from the AMS Fund to replenish the reserve. Anne seconded the motion. A discussion followed, and the motion was passed.

Compassionate Leave: Debby brought up the need for some sort of compassionate leave for the KVCC staff. She talked about times when staff might need some form of compassionate leave for various medical, personal or other situations that arise in their lives. There will be more discussion about this as we continue to support the needs of our staff.

Keene Food Mission: Deborah continues to check our mail each week for donations, record and deposit those donations, and provide a copy for KVCC. Deborah is currently hand writing thank-you notes to our donors, one of whom contributed a \$6,000 donation. Deborah works with the Valley Gro to maintain a positive rapport and problem solve. A member of our congregation was able to identify a family of 4 within our area who needed food assistance. Deborah worked with the Valley Gro to resolve a situation with this family and now they will be added to our families asking for gift cards.

PASTOR'S REPORT

Pastor's Report – November 28, 2023

Worship and Spiritual Development

- Leading weekly worship at the Neighborhood House. Members of the Neighborhood House have been attending Sunday morning worship at KVCC.
- Friday morning prayer group meets weekly in the VSR, sharing prayers, concerns, and joys of the community.
- The Centering Prayer Group (CPG) meets mornings @ 7 AM via Zoom.
- Planning group currently meeting to organize a celebration of the Winter Solstice on Thursday, December 21.
- Kelly Metzger of Adirondack North Country Gender Alliance gave a mission moment on Sunday, October 29.

Web Site

- Jimm Collin has agreed to help create the website.
- Met with Jimm to review content requirements.
- Jimm is reaching out to website builders to get a sense of their work and pricing.
- Jimm is taking pictures of church life to use as content on the website.

Confirmed Memorial Services and Weddings

- Puerner/Davison wedding scheduled for Saturday, December 16.

Pastoral Support

- Weekly office hours scheduled for Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1 – 3 PM. Other times by request.
- Provide ongoing pastoral support to the church community via Zoom, telephone, in-person meetings, and email.

Book Discussion Group – Tuesday Nights

- The group is currently reading *The Sabbath* by Abraham Joshua Heschel.

Community Support

- Working with members of the congregation on identifying neighbors in need, and supporting them through pastoral support and financial grants.
- Member of Keene Diversity Advisory Committee. Meet monthly with the group.

New York Conference

- Currently serving a 3-year term on the UCC NY Board of Directors.
- Attended a Board retreat November 9 – 11.

North Country Association

- First meeting of the new North Country Association was held on Saturday, September 30.
- Held installation for Rev. Bryan Bond on Sunday, October 29. Bryan was installed as the Pastor of the Elizabethtown and Lewis churches.
- Member of the new Association's Committee on Ministry.

Training/Education

- No training currently scheduled.

Scheduled Vacation

- November 14 – 27, returning on November 28. Rev Dawn Karlson will lead worship on 11/19. Worship leader for 11/26 will be Naj Wikoff.

Other Items

- Prepare content for weekly emails to church community.
- The group discerning how to apply the Annette Merle-Smith bequest has begun regular meetings. Interviews with the wider community completed. Group is currently creating a report for the Council with suggestions.
- Member of the group reviewing proposed updates to KVCC's by-laws.
- Hosted Halloween trick-or-treat at the church on Tuesday, October 31.
- Volunteered to be point person for collecting items for the 2024 White Elephant. Collection will begin in January.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Finance Committee Report

The Finance Committee met on November 15. Topics covered included:

1. October operating results and balance sheet cleanup. SVB's failure to fund the endowment draw in October was also noted. The Committee reviewed the forecast for 2023 also. Fourth quarter giving is extremely aggressive, and with some of the extraordinary charges incurred during the year, the committee recognized that the church will have a small operating loss.
2. The 2024 Budget is attached below for Council approval in advance of the Annual Meeting of the Congregation in January, 2024. Please note:
 - The grading and paving of the handicapped parking has reduced our reserve for repairs to \$2,000, and this reserve will need to be replenished. The Committee plans to request this funding from the Annette Merle-Smith fund.
 - Additional building charges will be incurred due to an insurance inspection which occurred recently. No action is needed until 2024 as a report has not been received to date.
 - All proceeds from the 2024 Bazaar are earmarked to offset operating expenses of the church in this budget and will not be available for other uses.
3. The performance of SVB, the church's investment manager, does not match that of other managers with ESG investments. At the December 14 meeting of the Finance Committee, Mike Onorato of SVB, will be addressing these concerns.

4. The proposed changes to the KVCC Bylaws were reviewed with several recommended changes. The Committee noted the requirement of an audit and plans to initiate an audit of church finances when a change in Treasurer occurs, now contemplated for 1/25.

Worship Committee

Worship Committee, November 3, 2023

Present: John Sampson, Linda Bogardus, Susie Allen, Anne Hurd, Martha Gallagher, Naj Wikoff

Longtime member Bernie Webb recently left the committee. Susie, reacting to this and to the few attendees at today's meeting, wanted to refresh her understanding and memory what is the spirit of what we are here for; what are John's hopes and intentions for the committee. Both Susie and Naj noted the loss to the committee of Bernie's thoughtful, probing questions.

John could not remember the committee's original reason, but the committee has come to have two purposes. One, it serves as a forum for talking through questions about services and making decisions, as we did with the bulletins. And two, the committee serves as a place for discussion of bigger, wider questions—sometimes brought to committee members by others—that don't need an immediate answer but might in the future guide a decision. John is grateful for this, and he personally feels that the committee is grounding and meaningful for him as a pastor and gives him a spiritual resonance. Various members said that the meetings are deeply spiritual and nourishing and provide a worship anchor.

John asked if what the committee does could be better or more productive. Naj suggested that it would be helpful to have new voices for strategic planning, maybe around a particular topic. He suggested outreach to augment our discussions, or even having a mission moment. Inviting Rob or Lynn personally might encourage them to participate. Occasionally asking a rabbi or Father John of the Catholic church to discuss their worship services in order to grow our understanding.

It was suggested that the word "committee" has certain assumptions and expectations that might scare people off. The committee may not be what people assume it to be. Even within this group some are more practical, others more spiritual. John asked us to think about what name we would give to eliminate the word "committee" and who we would want to strategically ask to join, whether for the short term or long.

About the paper bulletins handed out at worship services: In trying to balance our commitment to creation justice, John looked in the recycle bin and realized that a lot of the paper was bulletins. For a number of weeks no paper bulletins were handed out; the environmental goal was met, but maybe not the spiritual, where people used the bulletin as a guide to the service and readings. To address this, John tried something new: as they come in for worship, people are handed a yellow card-stock paper that has the order of service and is to be returned after the service, along with a paper insert of that day's readings and scripture that can be recycled or taken home. Feedback was mixed. Many in the congregation have liked the new system, but some members of the committee found it confusing to switch back and forth, and some did not feel they needed it at all. The cost of ink was also noted. Would worship leaders find it confining? John said that there will be special times that a full bulletin would be used. Candle-lighting ceremonies, Christmas and Advent for example. John said that we would continue the new system for a while longer, but he invited continued feedback and asked us to keep our ears open for comments. This is an opportunity to grow in a new way.

John is currently tweaking the readings and carols for the Advent/Christmas season, including updating the carol booklet. Rob has finished the music selections. Because Christmas Eve (Advent week 4) falls on a Sunday this year, we will have a 10 AM worship service as usual, then a 5 PM Christmas Eve service. Each week of Advent will feature a ritual: week 1, lighting of the star; week 2, the cleansing ritual; week 3, the pageant; week 4, TBD. The Sunday service on New Year's Eve will have a carol sing and the Magi. Epiphany, January 7, will be for us a new addition to the Christmas story:

Jesus' baptism. Throughout Advent the decorations inside the church will progress, culminating on Christmas Eve with lighting the tree. John is happy to enact all our traditions and expectations.

Next meeting: January 12, 2024

Submitted by Linda Bogardus

Mission & Social Action

The Mission and Social Action Committee supports the Families First Thanksgiving Drive, the Keene Youth Commission, Essex County Mental Health, and the Neighborhood House. Donations from the offertory from each Advent Sunday will be allocated to those four agencies.

Flower Committee

Christmas wreaths adorn our front doors and the flowers on the altar reflect the changes in the season.

Grounds Report

More raking has taken place and the pollinator garden was mulched with chopped leaves. Driveway markers will be installed soon to prevent damage to the lawns.

Buildings Report

Howard provided the Council with a Buildings Report citing each task/project, a description of that task/project, expenses associated with it, and estimated completion date. The Council found this format very helpful and informative.

Manse Discernment Group

Council: Please read ... we will ask for discussion and endorsement of the conclusions at the meeting.,

Group Members:

Elizabeth Davidson, Howard Husslein, Dan Mason, Fritz Sabbow, Larry Shipps, Liz Jaques, Paul Osenbaugh, John Sampson.

Nancy McArthur asked to step away from this group (she does so much!)

The discernment group met October 13, 2023. The following is excerpted from the minutes.

MANSE BUILDING—Apartment

- Team of volunteers completed the short-term goal (2022), where volunteers rehabbed the apartment. It is now rented (achievable housing)
- Group agrees to rent the apartment another year to the current tenants.
- **There is no interest in selling the building at this time.**

MANSE BUILDING—Office

- Liz Jaques worked with others on Spring Cleaning the major spaces(Flower committee, music director, children's area and others to clear the existing spaces as much as possible. Housekeeping task was very successful.
- The group agreed that the current church building spaces cannot house the Manse offices easily.

- **Group recommendation: Do not move the manse office space into the main church building.**

PROPERTY (land, beyond the building/manse)

The focus of this meeting was on the property.

- A **new draft survey** was completed of the approximately 1.38 acres to determine current borders, right of ways, utilities, etc. (Thankfully, Nancy McArthur led this effort)
- The group carefully considered possible options for land use.
- **Group recommendation: The group reviewed possible options and decided to DO NOTHING...no need to sell land, develop land either in pieces or as a whole.**
- **Rationale for the decision to DO NOTHING with the land right now.**
 - We do not seem to be in the same financial situation as one year ago.
 - There is agreement from each attendee to NOT change the current land use
 - The parking lot is needed as we continue to expand our outreach, John Phillip Newell retreat, fundraising dinners, fellowship gatherings and more.
 - On achievable housing, HAPEC and the Town of Keene seems to be much closer to developing the Little Peaks property (Both Way). This project is going to “break ground” and start the development of the houses in the Spring of 2024.
 - There are other achievable housing projects in discussion and in at least one case that involves a tangible offer to purchase the property for achievable housing.
 - Some in our group feel that achievable housing may not be a core responsibility of the church, but that individuals might participate/contribute as it develops.
 - The current Manse apartment provides one rental property.

Other Business: None

John informed the Council that he has been approached to determine whether the KVCC would like to take over Pat Hickey’s Christmas Drive and take the lead this year. There are four volunteers who have helped Pat with this drive but none of the Council members could take the lead this year. We will ask in our newsletter if there is anyone who can commit to taking the lead by Dec. 3rd. If no one volunteers, we will decline at this time given how late this request came to us with Christmas less than a month away. It’s possible someone within our community may like to take the lead for 2024.

The Council set the date for our Annual Congregational meeting which will be Sunday, January 21st, 2024. The Council’s January meeting is set for Tuesday, January 16th.

The Council decide whether we meet again on Tuesday, **December 26, 2023** (fourth Tuesday of the month) at 5:00 PM in person at KVCC or have a gathering at someone’s home in celebration of the Christmas season.

Debby made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:35 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Deborah Mitchell, Clerk