

## KVCC Church Council Meeting Minutes

March 22, 2022

**Present:** Debby Rice, Anne Runyon Hurd, Linda Bogardus, Nancy McArthur, Charlotte Lichtenberg, Susie Allen, Barbara Merle-Smith, Liz Jaques, Fritz Sabbow, Dre Roebuck, Pam Gothner, Naj Wikoff, Lorraine Duvall, and Deborah Mitchell.

**Absent:** Jimm Collin, Paul Osenbaugh, Erica Swift, and Pastor John (who had the day off),

Debby Rice opened the meeting at 5:02 PM (Zoom Meeting).

**Opening Prayer:** Dre read the Council a poem at the opening of the meeting.

Debby began the meeting with reading the Mission Statement of KVCC UCC.

**Approval of Last Month's Meeting:** A correction was made from 5/13/ to 3/13 for the Sabbatical meeting. Naj made a motion to approve the last month's meeting minutes, and Charlotte seconded the motion. A discussion followed, and the motion was passed.

### Pastor's Report – March 22, 2022

#### Worship and Spiritual Development

- Weekly meetings with Dave Craig regarding worship on the Zoom platform. Chris Blaicher is training to be Dave's back-up.
- The Centering Prayer Group (CPG) meets mornings @ 7 AM.
- The CPG weekly book discussion group has taken a break from *The Cloud of Unknowing* for a couple of weeks. During this time, the group will focus on viewing online videos of meditation teachers from other traditions as a way to deepen and broaden our practice.
- Friday morning prayer group meets in the VSR, sharing prayers, concerns, and joys of the community.
- Upcoming special worship:
  - March 20 – Vernal Equinox vespers service via Zoom
  - April 13 – Indoor labyrinth in VSR with electric candles
  - April 15 – Seven Last Words Good Friday service
  - April 17 – Easter – Lighting Paschal candle, sunrise service, 10 AM church service
  - April 22 - Earth Day service
  - May 1 – Arbor Day inspired worship informed by Celtic Christianity
  - May 5 - The Friday morning prayer group will sponsor a prayer meeting on Thursday, May 5 in observance of National Prayer Day.
  - May 15 – A Meditation focused worship service will be offered in preparation for World Meditation Day
  - May 20 - The CPG will be offering opportunities for our community to participate in World Meditation Day
  - May 22 - Soffiyah Elijah will be the guest preacher
  - June 5 – Pentecost
  - June 21 – Summer Equinox Vespers Celebration
  - July 17 – Preach at All Souls
  - July 31 - Celtic inspired worship informed by the Faith and Issues readings

- September 4 – Last Sunday worship before starting sabbatical
- Working with Nancy Emrich, Bill Serjak, and Liz Jaques to create the Summer Music program. Eight of fourteen slots confirmed.

#### Confirmed Memorial Services and Weddings

- March 19 – Memorial service for Mae Heald. Jenifer Deming leading the service.
- May 22 – Lewis wedding. Will be co-officiating with Soffiyah Elijah. Location TBD.
- June 18 – Robinson wedding. John will not be officiating.

#### Pastoral Support

- Provide ongoing pastoral support to the church community via Zoom, telephone, in-person meetings, and email.

#### Book Discussion Group – Tuesday Nights

- The group is reading *The Last Temptation of Christ* by Nikos Kazantzakis. After the book is finished a viewing of the movie and discussion will be offered.

#### Community Support

- Working with members of the congregation on identifying neighbors in need, and supporting them through financial grants.

#### Essex Association

- Black River – St. Lawrence Association (BRSL)
  - Members of the Essex Association continue to have discussions with the BRSL Association about merging. The discussions have been positive, and are moving forward.

#### Training

- Sexual Harassment Prevention Training - Lynn to provide documentation that he received the training through KCS in September.

#### Sabbatical

- Will be on sabbatical September 2022 – mid-January 2023
- Attending Michaelmas Term at Cambridge University, Cambridge, UK
- Sabbatical information session offered after worship on 3/13
- Requested that Council and Sabbatical Planning Committee identify all needs by March 31. Scheduled to meet with Larry S. to review the PDF process. Also requested to kick-off the 2023 Nomination process. No other request made at this time.

#### Out of Office

- No time out of office planned at this time.

#### Other Items

- Attend Spiritual Direction sessions for the development of my own spirit
- Became member of the Steering Committee of the Keene Diversity Advisory Committee (KDAC)
- KDAC will be sponsoring Keene Pride on Saturday, June 18. Invited members of the church community to be involved in planning ways our congregation to have a bigger presence at the event.
- Participating in monthly meetings of the Plattsburgh Climate Squad, a group comprised of members of houses of worship in Plattsburgh looking to become climate advocates in the North Country.
- Currently serving a 3-year term on the UCC NY Board of Directors.
- Beginning on 3/23 will participate in a UCC NY Board of Directors book group reading *dear white peacemakers: Dismantling Racism with Grit and Grace*, by Osheta Moore.
- The Fifty-Ninth Annual Meeting of the New York Conference of the United Church of Christ will convene at the Silver Bay Retreat Center, Silver Bay, NY, beginning at 2:00 PM on Friday, June 10, 2020, and will be in session until after the Closing Service of Worship on Sunday, June 12, 2022. Churches in the Essex Association will be called on to support the meeting.
- Member of the group planning the NY Conference Annual Meeting.

#### **Bazaar 2022 Report:**

The Bazaar planning group has met twice over the last 2 months. At this time it looks like the quilt sale, white elephant, jewelry sale, lawn games, creation justice info booth and a musical performance on Friday evening are a GO! Food, Baked Goods, and community partner involvement including kids activities are still up in the air at this time.

We still need a co-lead for baked and prepared goods, a lead for Lunch/Dinner food service, and I could use a right hand person in overseeing the big picture. The group has discussed alternative food plans in the event we cannot get someone to lead this piece such as:

- recruiting a couple of food vendors and charging a fee to them to sell food at the event.
- Another idea is to only do Lunch on Saturday and Baked goods and Coffee on Friday evening to make the load lighter on a new food team.
- Selling Pizza by the Slice.

Nancy McArthur and Peg Wilson - Quilts

Barbra Merle-Smith - Jewelry

Merle Tanis - Baked Goods (Needs a co-lead as she won't be in town to solicit prepared goods before the event)

Liz Jaques & Susy Dolittle - White Elephant

Linda LaBarge - Food (Needs a Lead/Co Lead). Deborah Mitchell volunteered to co-lead with Linda. Liz Jaques volunteered to help with food shopping.

Lorraine Duvall & Pam Gothner - Creation Justice Booth and Music

Save the Date coming soon.

## Treasurer's Report:

### Opportunities to Support Our Ministry

Throughout the last two years, KVCC provided for its community during the lockdown and the resulting social isolation. The church adapted its programs and worship to connect us and was able to do this through the talent of the staff and the resources of the church. Keeping KVCC strong brought us through the crisis and allows us to move forward as an even stronger force for spiritual nurture.

If you have an IRA and are required to take Required Minimum Distributions (RMD) before April 1, please consider giving directly to KVCC using a Qualified Charitable Deduction (QCD). These **direct gifts** maybe deducted from your adjusted gross income and reduce your tax bill. Your Required Minimum Distribution normally adds to your tax bill and may even bump you to a different bracket. Should you plan to make a QCD, remember that it must come to the church directly from the IRA. Check with your tax professional to ensure this strategy works for you and contact the church office to notify us of the gift.

We hope you will also consider joining the parishioners and community members who have included KVCC in their wills, trusts or beneficiary designations. Planned gifts are a wonderful way to plan for the ongoing support of the causes you care for most.

For more information, contact Larry Shipps or Nancy McArthur. Thank you for all you have done and for considering these requests.

### Minutes of Finance Committee Meeting

March 11, 2022

Attending: Nancy McArthur, Elizabeth Derr, Larry Shipps, Fritz Sabbow, John Sampson

The meeting opened with a presentation by Mike Onorato, MD, Boston Private, who reviewed the performance of the KVCC endowment portfolio and addressed current market conditions. Given the current flight to quality due to global instability as well as the impact of inflation, he characterized the individual funds as resilient following their strong performance against indices in 2021. Socially responsible investments (SRIs) account for 62% of the current endowment balance; given the current pressure on energy prices, SRIs may perform behind fossil fuel/energy related investments in the near term. No changes relative to our current asset allocation or investment selections were recommended by Onorato or the Committee.

The group reviewed a forecast of changes in the church's annual performance, and rather than submitting a modified budget, the forecast will be presented to council as guidance.

Fritz Sabbow reviewed the reserves on the balance sheet many of which are no longer appropriate for the church's needs. The net result of eliminating the obsolete reserves is \$13M, and the proceeds will be used to fund the Reserve for Repairs. Sabbow will also instruct our bookkeeper to clean up reconciliations required for payroll tax liabilities and banking accounts.

To bolster bequests and other financial giving, the committee recommended including information on planned giving periodically in our outgoing news pieces. Nancy McArthur to circulate language for comment.

The Finance Committee approved a motion to Council as follows:

"The Endowment of Keene Valley Congregational Church (KVCC) as represented by those investments managed by Boston Private will hereafter be termed the Reverend Frederica Mitchell Legacy Fund (FMF) and in accordance with the By Laws of KVCC will be transferred to the Adirondack Foundation in the event of dissolution."

Drivers of this resolution from the committee are as follows:

- The FMF is NOT currently a designated portion of the endowment; therefore none of these funds would honor the promise made to donors.
- The promise that funds will stay local will aid future fundraising.

The Committee holds that the real property of the church needs to be addressed similarly, but a By-Laws change will be required before the property provisions can be modified. The Committee will recommend that a portion of the proceeds from real estate liquidation go to faith communities with the remainder going to Adirondack Foundation.

The Committee recommends to Council that the Endowment be designated The Reverend Frederica Mitchell Legacy Fund in its entirety in order to ensure that the funds pass to the Adirondack Foundation for local use in the event of the dissolution of the church. Additionally, the Committee recommended upon the next review of the bylaws, the church's real property be included in the gift to the Foundation with stipulation as to use. All members voted in favor of this motion which will be submitted to Council for approval.

Following this motion, the group adjourned.

At today's Council meeting, Nancy made a motion that we accept the Finance Committee's motion in regards to the FMF as mentioned about. Fritz seconded the motion. A discussion was made, and the motion carried.

### **Committee Reports:**

#### **BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS**

There is no new information to report on this month. However, given our current tenant will be leaving, Pam would like the Council to think about how we will handle using the raised beds moving forward.

#### **Worship Committee**

The Worship Committee concerns itself with all aspects of the worship service. Also, we encourage any congregant to contact any committee member to share feedback or suggestions. After the minutes from our February meeting were posted on the KVCC website (where they remain available), we received some comments about the discussion, particularly about the Creation Justice banner, the length of the time of prayer, the new Celtic cross, the offertory, and the possibility of singing rather than speaking the Lord's Prayer.

We discussed the comments. The Celtic cross, which in general has been well received, will stay for the time being, and the offertory will be coming back. The coat vestibule was determined to be too small for the Creation Justice banner. Because those who had brought the issues up were absent, we put off further discussion of the banner, the general use of symbols, and singing the Lord's Prayer. During the Easter season the congregation will respond, "God in your mercy, hear our prayer" after individual prayers are offered.

The liturgy is moving to the Gospel of John. The church will hold an Easter vigil: out of the darkness of Good Friday, the Paschal candle will be lit on Easter morning, representing the Light coming back to the world. The candle will be lit at around 5 AM during a very short service in the memorial garden. This is a great expression of hope. KVCC's traditional sunrise service at the Keene transfer station will also be held.

After Easter we have a short time to breathe before the next events. We need to rebuild the church's membership, come back together and renew the connections that the Covid pandemic and social distancing weakened.

## **MISSION AND SOCIAL ACTION COMMITTEE REPORT**

Naj thanked Barbara for coordinating the successful hygiene kit event. Naj also suggested that KVCC participate in the 100 Anniversary event of John Brown at the farm in May 2022.

## **FLOWER COMMITTEE REPORT**

Easter Sunday is still a few weeks away and still too early to know what will be available for additional flowers. Early in April Easter lilies and other flowers will be ordered. A few flowers will be available (donations welcomed) to take home on Easter Sunday. There will not be any sign-up sheet posted. It is first come first serve on that Sunday. After Easter Sunday our flower group of volunteers will continue their regular schedule as posted. Questions: contact Charlotte.

## **RE-OPENING TASK FORCE REPORT**

- Group continues to monitor updates to health guidance, and the state of the pandemic.
- Full hybrid worship offered beginning July 4, 2021.
- Group meeting every week.
- Group submitted the following revised gathering guidelines to the Council, which approved them. These updates became effective on 3/10:
  - Masks are now optional for gathering in church buildings, and on church grounds
  - Groups meeting in the church, or on the church grounds, can serve refreshments
- Currently working with Rob H. and Lynn D. to review guidance related to the music program.

## **Sabbatical Committee Report to the Council – March 15, 2022**

This committee has met once since our last report

We welcomed Bernie to this group as a representative of the Worship Committee.

We are gradually filling up the slots for the 11 Sundays before Advent. We anticipate having this completed by the April Council meeting.

After the 11 weeks of guest Worship Leaders we will call for a meeting of the Congregation to give us feedback on what they have experienced. We will ask probing questions and hopefully have folks begin to examine what they believe and why as well as the in-church practices that they find enriching to their faith. We plan to have a similar event just before John's return.

We will have a Bon Voyage & Good Wishes cookout or the like after Worship on John's last Sunday with us – 9/4/22.

Below is the outline of the Congregational meeting we had after Worship on 3/13.

## **SABBATICAL PRESENTATION/Q&A**

John will be gone on Sabbatical for 19 weeks beginning September 5, 2022.

John say a few words about what he's doing.

Karen do story about what is "the church."

Naj: Theme: **Your Spiritual Toolbox: New Voices/New Perspectives.**

Barbara: The Plan to date

- Advent, Christmas & thru Epiphany – We are blessed to have Susie and Laurin
- For the 12 weeks before Advent we have asked people whom we don't normally hear from in the pulpit. They will share where they find their spiritual leadings/how they worship. So far we have: Martha Swan, Curt Stager, Dexter Criss, Dan Bergeron, Jenifer Deming, RL Stolz and Pete Nelson. There will also be a Congregation Sunday where those of you who would like to share from your Spiritual Core may do so.
- Church is much bigger than Sunday mornings. Pastoral Care is a vital part of the church serving our Community. Jenifer Deming has agreed to be the Pastoral Care person for us which includes holding office hours, visiting people in the hospital or in their homes as necessary, doing weddings and memorial services as requested.
- Larry Shipps will manage the Pastoral Discretionary Fund
- Naj Wikoff will be our Worship Facilitator. This requires coordinating between the person leading the service, Liz, Rob and Lynn and Dave Craig in order to produce a bulletin with images, identify readings and music and so on all in order to provide a unified hybrid worship service.
- Liz of course will remain the vital link behind the scenes, making sure that administratively things flow.
- Rob and Lynn will continue to do their important work of helping us to worship through music. The choir will be coming back from their summer break and we can anticipate a joyous reunion with live (we hope) music.
- All current groups, such as Faith and Issues, Meditation, Tuesday book group, Worship committee, etc. will continue to function as usual by selecting leadership from within for 19 months.
- If there are issues, questions that seem to fall through the cracks, Debby will address them and either take care of it herself or delegate to an appropriate person.

This brings us back to Karen's opening story. We – You – are the church. This committee can't do everything and you may be asked to volunteer from time to time. Please step up. From doing coffee hour to ushering to anything else that may be asked. We need to Be Community.

Also, please remember that things may be done differently. Please be flexible and gracious with each other. As questions arise for you, feel free to contact any of us. What Questions do you have now?

Respectfully submitted: Barbara, Bernie, Debby, Elizabeth, Karen, and Naj

## **Other Business:**

### **Manse Discernment Group Meeting**

**March 2022**

Group: Elizabeth Derr, Liz Jaques, Paul Osenbaugh, Derek Prill, Debby Rice, John Sampson

Advisor: Nancy McArthur, Treasurer

- Our current tenant will vacate the apartment by July 31 of this year or sooner.
- Our group toured the apartment in order to determine its condition and possible issues. The tour helped the group focus on what might need to be done to the apartment in order to rent it again, at market value.

- The group has met twice and compiled a list of options for the apartment
  - Each option is under evaluation in terms of improvements needed, timing and possible issues
  - A cost estimate is being developed
  - The group is considering a Near Term recommendation in order to provide time for careful consideration of any Long Term recommendation.
  
- By the April Council meeting, the Group will likely have a Near Term recommendation for the Council to consider.
  - New Creation Justice Group: The new Creation Justice Committee is in the process of forming under the Mission & Social Action Committee for this calendar year. M&SA has offered CJI \$1200 of their budget. We currently plan those funds for 1.) a celebration of becoming a CJC in conjunction with the church bazaar in August, 2022 2.) instituting a better recycling program at the church by using Casella 3.) working with students at KCS including the Green Team.
  - Fellowship Committee: Debby read the bylaws prior to the Council meeting, and noted we have room for a Fellowship Committee. It is hoped that this Committee can focus on increasing the Church's mission and focus outside of the building to include things such as outreach and the return of coffee hour. Debby, Dre and Deborah offered to coordinate the coffee hour on May 8<sup>th</sup>. Debby was excited to report we have six volunteers who would like to be a part of the Fellowship Committee and she will send out another invitational email to the congregation.
  - Organ: Dre led a discussion around thinking about what to do about the Church's organ. We reviewed the decisions and discussions thus far. The remains a passionate and controversial topic. Chris will be writing a letter to the congregation about the organ and its likely there will be another up-to-date information session in the near future. The Council agreed to talk more about this subject at the next Council meeting.

Deborah made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:15 PM.

Next council meeting is Tuesday, **April 26, 2022** (fourth Tuesday of the month) at 5:00 PM in person at the Keene Valley Library with a Zoom component.

Respectfully submitted,

Deborah Mitchell, Clerk