

Session – November 2023

The regular meeting of Session was on Tuesday, November 28, 2023.

Rev. William Meyer Meyer had distributed copies of his quarterly report prior to the meeting. He noted a calmer atmosphere but still some divisions and mistrust. He cautioned against moving too quickly without forgiveness and a clear vision. He expects the discernment process, to more clearly define our purpose and mission, to begin in earnest in January. He asked to establish a discernment team of six members. This group would not have any decision-making authority, but would provide a written report first to Session, then to the congregation. Support of the team's report will give strength to the Pastoral Nominating Committee as they resume a search.

Preliminary unaudited data through October 31, 2023: actual revenues \$408,476; budgeted \$385,891. Actual expenses \$408,743; budget \$494,479. Net (actual revenues less actual expenses) is a deficit of \$267. Pledged contributions are above budget, reflecting overpayments; nonpledged contributions are below budget. Personnel expenses are approximately \$67,000 below budget due primarily to the pastoral opening. Committees are still urged to watch spending; cash flow is a concern. The stewardship campaign and the proposed 2024 budget will be discussed next month.

Searches continue for a custodian and music director / organist. The railing still needs to be installed for the new retaining wall by the CE wing. Work continues on redesigning the church website. Other committee reports were also provided.

All Session members were encouraged to attend the presentations by the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center on December 1 and 2. Openness, honesty, togetherness, and sharing of responsibilities were noted as signs of a healthy family, and congregation. Two videos portrayed different reactions to a new pastor trying to implement a contemporary worship service. In the first, although worship approved the services, many operated in silos, sought to blame the new pastor and sought help from the prior pastor. There was no united vision. In the second, committees took responsibility for decisions, encouraged open communication, and had a "plan B" if problems were encountered.

Saturday sessions noted the differences between acute and chronic anxiety, and between an anxious and a responsible congregation. Just as individuals may deal with anxiety, so may congregations. Anxiety is a natural response to threat. But the response may become exaggerated. Baggage from prior experiences may trigger a current, perhaps exaggerated, response. What things from the past impact us in our present life? "Trauma is living your current life as if you are still in the past."

Ten triggers of anxiety in congregations were discussed. In worship, for example, is worship what I can get out of it or what I can give to God? Can we respond to societal and generational changes? Are there pre-conceived ideas of what others want or think? Differences between solid self and pseudo-self were discussed. Differentiation becomes harder when some act in opposition to others. Bullying may be enabled.

We live in an age of Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Anxiety ("VUCA"). I think this quote from Richard Rohr is correct: "If we do not transform our pain, we will most assuredly transmit it." The January session is intended to help equip leaders in their role as stewards of congregational health.

The next Session meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, December 19 at 7 pm (moved up 1 week).