

Session – December 2023

The regular meeting of Session was on Tuesday, December 19, 2023.

In November meeting, Rev. Meyer was authorized to contact individuals to establish a six person discernment team which will meet regularly and provide a written report to Session and the congregation. To date, the following persons have agreed to serve: Bob Carlyon, Kris Keller, Jennifer Vicarel, Madeline Wilson, and Alec Works. Rev. Meyer is awaiting a response from one candidate. The following discussion focused primarily on the proposed six month period for the process, what it was to accomplish and whether that is too long of a time period. Rev. Meyer noted that the goal is to use current anxiety constructively, to have a better plan for going forward. The team's focus should be on our strengths, assets and potential, the what and why of where our passions, potential and problems overlap, who we aim to serve. An elder from the Cuyahoga Falls church noted that they moved too quickly, and that we need to focus on what we need versus what we want. The discussion also included the status of the current Pastoral Nominating Committee (PNC). Given our current situation, it was agreed that the congregation should be asked to dismiss, with gratitude and thanks, the current PNC during the next congregational meeting. Current members of the PNC would still be eligible to serve when a new PNC is elected. That will likely occur after the discernment process is essentially concluded. Consensus was that the discernment team should target 4 – 6 months for their work, with regular reports to the congregation. The current focus should be on healing.

Preliminary unaudited data through November 30, 2023: actual revenues \$449,351; budgeted \$417,227. Actual expenses \$458,382; budget \$548,062. Net (actual revenues less actual expenses) is a deficit of \$9,031. Pledged contributions are above budget, nonpledged contributions are below budget. Personnel expenses are approximately \$70,588 below budget. \$75,000 has been taken from investment accounts to cover payments the past 3 months. Total funds collected for the Christmas food basket distribution were \$8,291. There was also a large turnout to help assemble and deliver the baskets. For the current stewardship campaign, pledge cards were mailed to 192 households; 65 have responded as of 12/18/23 (~30%), with pledges totaling \$215,998. The proposed budget includes \$213,498 in pledges. Treasurer Jim Cole proceeded to present the proposed 2024 budget. With \$412,743 in projected revenues (down from \$474,035) and \$653,791 in projected expenses (up from \$603,983), there is a projected deficit of \$241,048. This does represent a worst-case scenario (although it still excludes totally unexpected expenses such as emergency structural repairs). There are adequate funds in our Reserve Fund to cover this for 2024. Jim noted that committee budgets are as submitted by each committee. Historically, committees have projected expenses on the high side, covering any anticipated expenditures. We will need to be more realistic going forward, since the Reserve Fund is limited. Barry noted people have commented to him about the use of the Rowley Fund. It is from a one-time gift; Session has tried to use it only for emergency expenditures and special programs. Properties is doing more detailed planning of needed repairs, etc. Committees are urged to work together in planning. Session then approved the 2024 Operating Budget as presented.

The next Session meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, January 23, 2024 at 7 pm.