

A MESSAGE FROM THE OFFICE OF THE MODERATOR

March 16, 2020

Dear Members and Friends of the Hills Church,

RE: Mini-Minutes from Church Council Meeting (3/10/20)

This has been an unprecedented chapter in our community and the life of the Hills Church. Despite the cancelations of events, alterations in plans and habits, and adaptations to new circumstances, life goes on and things get done. This is true of the Hills Church as well. We continue to be the church in large ways, like our videostreamed worship service this past weekend, and small.

Among the small ways the church continues to be the church, we bring you here the 'mini-minutes' from the most recent meeting of Church Council which occurred last week (3/10/20). As mentioned in last month's message (2/29/20), Church Council has begun the practice of sending out brief summaries from its meetings with the goal of making our governance a little more transparent to the membership.

The meeting started as usual with reports from the ministers and the liaisons to the four Support Boards: Christian Service, Faith Formation, Spiritual Care (Deacons), and Stewards. Some of the items mentioned were:

- Matt Wooster is considering postponing his sabbatical due to the extent of the COVID-19 epidemic in Italy where he would be spending about two months
- Anne Marie Holloway reported on a successful Valentine's Day Family Fellowship Event (Chocolate Bingo) and attendance at a fruitful conference on intergenerational worship with members of a "Pop-Up" Ministry Team.
- Judy Swahnberg commented on the possibility that there may be an increase in the need for pastoral care as COVID-19 spreads through the community, and that our pastoral care practices might have to be adapted to meet requirements for social distancing and quarantining.
- Christian Service – Doug Eisenhart reported that the Easter Offering will be used to support Puerto Rico earthquake relief and Heifer International, both of which we hope will be the subject of Mission Moments during Sunday morning worship on March 29.
- Faith Formation – Tina Andersson reported that they have three people who are considering joining this Support Board, and among other proposed programming changes, they are considering adding more times for meditation.

- Spiritual Care – Susan Walton reported that the Deacons have been running “listening sessions” to show the congregation some of the options for Wallace Chapel, i.e. just putting the pews back into the Chapel following this summer’s planned construction work in there vs. purchasing modular seating (chairs) which can be configured flexibly. The Deacons are collecting input so that we have a clear sense of what the congregation as a whole wants to do.
- Stewards – Tia Pinney reported that the Stewards Support Board has identified chairs for the next two years, and in addition, will go to work on the charge from Church Council to help us understand the nature of the church’s persistent operating budget shortfall.

Steven Patrick sent in a report on the Capital Campaign which, as of March 5, had received pledges of \$5,449,427. Since the Commitment Sunday event planned for March 8 could not be held, the campaign is now planning to move to the phonathon and reminder letter phases.

Some of the key agenda items discussed at the meeting were:

- **COVID-19** – The discussion planned for this meeting about how to prepare ourselves and the congregation to deal with COVID-19 was instead held over the weekend of March 7-8, when we learned that a member of the congregation had been hospitalized for a respiratory illness consistent with COVID-19 infection. Although this individual thankfully tested negative for COVID-19, we did not have that information until Sunday afternoon by which point we had already cancelled several events including the March 8 worship service.

The Moderators’ Message which went out on Saturday March 7 contained guidance about how to minimize exposure to and spread of COVID-19 (and most respiratory infections) and reliable sources of information (including links to websites). If you have not seen that message, then please do take a moment to review it.

Since the Council meeting last Tuesday, the COVID-19 situation has continued to evolve rapidly. A teleconference of church leadership including the clergy, the Moderators, the Senior Deacons and members of the Safe Church Ministry Team was held on Friday, March 13. During that call, a decision was made to cancel all gatherings at the church, including those of the community groups that use our facilities, for two weeks. This decision is consistent with similar closures and meeting restrictions in the public schools and other local houses of worship, as well as with guidance from the Southern New England UCC. Such mitigation measures are intended to slow the spread of COVID-19 in our community, in addition to keeping ourselves healthy.

- **Proposal for Videorecording/Streaming Worship Services** – Bill Spencer made a presentation to the Council about the possibility of videorecording all or parts of our worship services. This would allow us to make them available on the website for later viewing, and/or in real time by streaming. A number of churches already do this, including Old South Church and

Hancock UCC in Lexington, primarily for the benefit of people who can't get to church for one reason or another, but also to help people who are "shopping" for a church to get a sense of what the services are like. Privacy concerns (e.g. Celebrations and Concerns, the childrens' A Word for All Ages) were discussed, and how to mitigate them (e.g. either don't record or edit out those parts of the service, or only make the recording accessible by password). Bill and his "live streaming working group" will address finances with Stewards and were planning to look into a pilot project.

However, last Friday's decision to suspend services for two weeks greatly accelerated that pilot project so that we could provide a way for members to participate in a worship service. This tour de force was pulled off by Bill Spencer, Rob Andrews, Ted Garland, Ken Goshgarian, Matt Wooster, John Finney, Judy Swahnberg, Anne Marie Holloway, and our four choir soloists, Laurie Stewart Otten, Christian Figueroa, Shannon Lebrón, and Garrett Murphy.

- **Update on the Phase 1B Renovation Project** – Chris Stowell reported that the permitting process is underway.
- **Governance Assessment** - Mary Canavan reported that she and her workgroup, which included Sarah Pedersen, Susan Walton, Tia Pinney, Doug Eisenhart and K.C. Kranker, reviewed the responses we received from a survey of church leadership about the current governance structure and summarized it for Council. After considerable discussion, it was decided to ask all members of Council to reflect on the survey comments and the workgroup's summary and respond in writing to Mary by March 31. Mary will bring these collated comments to the next Council meeting which is planned for April 14.

Between COVID-19, the stock market and gyrations in the Democratic primaries, it has been a challenging month for all of us. This may be the only time in our lives as New Englanders where the weather in March has been good news! The way through our troubles, as always, is with each other. Even if we have to bump elbows instead of hug, talk on the phone instead of face-to-face, stay home instead of race off to the next event, let's remember that we are here for one another.

As always, if you have questions or comments, please contact us individually or at: officeofthemoderator@hillschurch.org

In service and faith,

Christopher Stowell Sarah Pedersen Mary Hill Canavan

Wellesley Hills Congregational Church