

A MESSAGE FROM THE OFFICE OF THE MODERATOR

April 15, 2020

Dear Members and Friends of the Hills Church,

RE: Mini-Minutes from Church Council Meeting (4/14/20)

This past month has been a story of adapting our lives to the presence of COVID-19 and trying to do what we need to do, despite the challenges. Untold millions of Americans have learned how to use Face Time, Zoom and the remote controls that came with the TV they bought two years ago. We are all discovering how much work we can get done in our bathrobes and how well we can collaborate online while wearing sweat pants and a nice button-down shirt. We've also discovered that, through the use of technology, we can have meaningful and moving worship experiences together, as the services during Holy Week showed us. We have our ministers to thank for crafting services which not only adapted to the on-line medium but took advantage of it by combining live and recorded video, still photography, and audio. Thanks are also due to Bill Spencer, Rob Andrews, Ted Garland, Ken Goshgarian, John Finney, and our choir soloists for creating such wonderful worship services.

Among the ways that the church continues to do what we need to do, Church Council met this week by Zoom on Tuesday, April 14. A brief summary of the meeting follows:

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

- **Matt Wooster** will be postponing his sabbatical leave until May-July 2021. He is also becoming adept with video editing software, as are our other ministers, and is making greater use of social media to connect with members of the congregation.
- **Anne Marie Holloway** reported that she is making extensive use of Facebook and Zoom to stay in touch with families, the Youth Group, and the Confirmands, including leading Youth Group gatherings, Confirmation Classes and Prayerful Parent check-ins. She and Sally Tomasetti have developed opportunities for young children and their parents to practice Faith at Home via newsletters, virtual gatherings and online videos. The highlight of Easter weekend for many of them was the appearance of the Easter Bunny, with Sally as chauffeuse!
- **Judy Swahnberg** commented that the presence of COVID-19 in the community has made the stresses of illness and the loss of loved ones even greater by depriving the worried and grieving of the comfort and support that the contact of family and friends usually provides. This has made pastoral care all the more needed, and all the more difficult to provide.
- **Christian Service** – Doug Eisenhart reported that some of this Support Board's activities are on pause (e.g. book and kitchen gadget drives, Mission Moments) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Harold Wilkinson, chair of this Support Board, attended the meeting to discuss some budgeting issues and to

clarify the situation with respect to the three different funds that provide part of their annual budget for outreach.

- **Faith Formation** – Tina Andersson reported that they will be meeting this week via Zoom when they will be discussing ways to engage the congregation in faith formation at home during this period of social distancing.
- **Spiritual Care** – Susan Walton reported that the Deacons' greatest concern is how to care for our members during this difficult time, especially those who are particularly vulnerable due to age, isolation, illness or loss. The Deacons are developing a "buddy system" for pairing a parishioner with a Deacon and are working on a tracking system to help them stay in touch with these church members.
- **Stewards** – Tia Pinney reported that Stewards will be holding its annual meeting with Birch Hill (our investment advisor) later this month for purposes of reviewing the performance of the church's investment portfolio. .

After getting the approval of Church Council at a special meeting held on Thursday, April 2, a group including Steve Hansen, Phil Laughlin (from Stewards), Nancy Simons (Treasurer) John Dooley (CFO), Carl Novotny (small business advisor/consultant), and Chris Stowell (Moderator) submitted the church's application to Wellesley Bank for a short term loan through the federal Paycheck Protection Program. This program, which is administered by the Small Business Administration, is intended to help smaller employers, including churches and other not-for profits, cover their payrolls for approximately two and a half months during the COVID-19 economic crisis. The intent is to keep people employed, which is good for them and for the economy. The hope is also that the economy will rebound more quickly if small businesses do not have to find and train new people to replace those laid off. Although the funds are made as a two-year loan (at 1% interest), the full amount will be forgiven if 75% of the funds are used for payroll.

Steven Patrick sent in a report on the Capital Campaign. He has just received a proposal from Walsh & Associated, our campaign consultant, for resuming the campaign after COVID-19 and will be reviewing it with Matt Wooster.

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

- **COVID-19** – The church will continue to observe the social distancing guidelines recommended by public health officials. At this point, it is not clear when they will be relaxed and we will be allowed to gather face-to-face again. However, we will be tracking the guidelines and following the recommendations of public health agencies.
- **Update on the Phase 1B Renovation Project** – Chris Stowell reported that the Notice to Proceed (NtP) has been issued to the primary contractor, Consigli. The NtP permits Consigli to begin lining up sub-contractors, and also to order equipment and materials. Because of the uncertainties in the supply chain created by the COVID-19 situation, it will be to our advantage to get our equipment and material orders in early while inventories are still good, which will reduce the chance of construction delays due to shortages.
- **Proposed Review Process for Major Renovation Projects** – Chris Stowell reported on this proposal which was put together by a group led by him – and including Alex Kolb and Andy Wilson (Co-chairs of the Property Maintenance Committee), Al Persson (Stewards) and Judy Swahnberg. The intent was to develop a process which entailed wide input from the congregation, Property Maintenance,

Stewards and Council, but was straightforward. Council plans to vote on the proposal at its next meeting in order to give people a little more time to digest the details.

- **Governance Assessment** - Mary Canavan reported that council members reviewed the responses we received from a survey of church leadership about the current governance structure and identified three areas as priorities to address in the coming year in order to strengthen our church:
 1. Understanding of the Governance Structure
 2. Succession Planning and Recruitment
 3. Communication

They also outlined the next steps in this process, namely identifying a group of people to work on these issues, and charging them with developing a work plan that will address goals, outcomes and the timeline. Council will consider these next steps and address them at the next meeting.

Even though we have been carrying out our lives very differently these past weeks, the essentials remain intact. We are a community that cares for one another, and cares for those around us. Even if the connections between us are electronic, the bonds are real. Be safe, stay well and reach out. Someone will be there!

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

In service and faith,

Christopher Stowell Sarah Pedersen Mary Hill Canavan

Wellesley Hills Congregational Church