

A Message from the Office of the Moderator

September 16, 2020

Dear Members and Friends of the Hills Church,

RE: Mini-Minutes from Church Council Meeting (9/8/20)

Summer is drawing to a close. This is usually the time that many activities ramp up again for the year, not the least of which are church and school. But this feeling of making a new start pervades other areas of our lives as well, even those which are not strongly seasonally-based like most of our jobs. This year, the fresh start is unusually anxiety-provoking because in many cases we are going back to something which, if not entirely new, is at least unfamiliar. We are out of our comfort zones, and not sure what the next few months will bring us. How are we going to navigate these next few months? We certainly will need to be flexible, and careful! And we need to reach out to one another, to offer support and to seek it. We're a community and as a community, we are stronger and more resilient than we are as individuals. In counting our blessings, we should remember the very great blessing of community!

The Church Council is a mini-community within the larger WHCC community. The Zoom meeting last week was as much about connecting with one another as it was a discussion of the business of the church. Some of the main topics discussed at that meeting follow:

- Matt Wooster has met with the original leaders of the Racial Justice Working Group, and worked with them to invite additional members to join the group. He and the other ministers have also begun a program of reading in preparation which is focusing on issues of racial justice, history, and faith. In addition to pastoral care and creation of virtual worship services, much of his attention lately has gone to the church's preschool, the Wellesley Nursery School in the Hills. (See report below.)
- Anne Marie Holloway, in collaboration with Elaine Vildzius, members of the Re-opening Task Force, Faith Formation Support Board Chair Suzanne Bossert, and K.C. Kranker (member of the FFSB), developed and issued the WHCC "Comfort Check," a survey of church members about their level of comfort with resuming in-person worship services and other in-person meetings. A full report will be issued soon, but it was clear that there is a group of people who are interested in resuming some in-person events with limited numbers of participants and appropriate precautions. One of these will be an outdoor Confirmation Class Celebration Service on 9/27.
- Judy Swahnberg In addition to a number of on-going programs like *Tuesday Morning Meditation*, and the "Can One Life Make a Difference?" series, Judy has also been working with the other two ministers to plan virtual teas and in-person services beginning this Fall.
- Christian Service – Doug Eisenhart reported that the Board will begin reviewing the applications it has received from the 17 organizations which were invited to apply for WHCC Outreach donations for 2020. They have also scheduled another Mission Moment for a service in September.

- Spiritual Care – Susan Walton reported that the Deacons have been working with the clergy and the Re-Opening Task Force on in-person worship services.

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

- Financial Oversight – John Dooley reviewed the WHCC balance sheet and the Stewards Management Report through August. Contributions are on track for the year. He noted that in September we began receiving large invoices from the contractors for the Phase 1B renovations for which we have begun to make further draws on the line of credit loan from Wellesley Bank (now Cambridge Trust).
- Phase 1B Renovation Project – The Moderators issued an update to the congregation on the construction project on 9/13/20. In brief, the project is approaching completion and still anticipates getting a Certificate of Occupancy in mid-September. At this point, the work remaining is to finish up some details, go through the punch list, complete the painting, and do a final cleaning. We have hired a commissioning firm, a third party which will come through to inspect and to verify that all of the systems are working as they were designed, after which the project will be inspected by the Town of Wellesley. Once all of the work is complete, the organs will be unwrapped and checked to be sure they remain in good working order. A Committee chaired by Jim McKinney is investigating new seating for the chapel, which looks gorgeous with its new wood floors. Some work will be completed after we re-occupy the buildings - installation of UVC filtration units in the Sanctuary and replacement of the stairs and banisters at the east entrance – but neither will limit our ability to use the buildings.
- Re-opening Process – The Reopening Task Force has developed guidelines for a phased approach to re-opening the church which was described in a report to the congregation on 9/14/20. The guidelines apply to in-person worship services and other church activities, including small ministry and committee meetings, use of the church by outside groups, the Nursery School, Sunday School, and other children and family ministries. In addition to information available through the CDC and SNEUCC, input was solicited from the clergy, the Ushering Committee and the Spiritual Care Support Board. Each phase of re-opening is contingent on the achievement of certain COVID-19-related public health milestones which are available from the MA DPH COVID-19 dashboard. Until it will be possible to resume operations as they were pre-COVID-19, the Reopening Plan calls for:
 - Continuation of the recorded Sunday morning worship service
 - Implementation of an additional in-person worship service which would include many precautions to minimize the possible spread of COVID-19, such as limiting the number of people in the Sanctuary, distanced seating, masking, controlled entry and egress, etc.
 - Limitation of attendance at in-person meetings (e.g., support boards and committees) to five people and restricting those meetings to the Reception Room and the Board Room
 - Continuation of ‘virtual’ Sunday School
 - Limitation of the use of the church building by outside groups to AA and the Food Pantry, which are considered essential services

- Re-opening of the Nursery School but with smaller classes which will be segregated from one another, increased “square footage per child,” masking, distancing (insofar as is possible with small children), enhanced cleaning protocols, etc.
- Strengthening Governance Task Force – Doug Eisenhart said that the Task Force met in August at which time they reviewed the context of the church’s realignment process, discussed a timeline, selected background documents, and discussed task force schedule, deliverables, and work plan to consider the three identified priorities: 1) awareness and understanding of governance structure and process; 2) communication; and 3) recruitment and succession planning.
- Wellesley Nursery School in the Hills – Matt reported on the status of the Nursery School. He commented that in many respects, the challenges for this school are similar to the challenges facing schools for all ages, both private and public. He made the observation that there are competing priorities that include new regulations and guidance on safety protocols, the value of in-person education, budget concerns, and the interests and preferences among parents and teachers, and that no solution for opening any school right now can solve for all of these.

Amid these challenges, on August 17, he received a notice of resignation from the school’s director, Heather Baranick. Two weeks later, he extended an offer to a new director, Melanie Dawson, following an intensive search. Melanie comes to us with 20 years of experience as a teacher and director, most recently of very successful programs in Medway. The school year will begin on September 21, a week later than scheduled, in order to implement all required safety protocols, and to allow our new director to be more firmly settled prior to the first day of the WNSH’s 2020/2021 academic year. The school will also begin the year with a limited capacity, in order to promote physical distancing and the enhanced safety regulations, but with the intention of expanding capacity when it is safe to do so.

The Nursery School will continue to need support and attention. The school is valuable to the congregation, as both a priority in relationship to our programmatic mission to care for our neighbors, and as an important source of revenue for the church from an economic standpoint. The new director will need our support, and the school year ahead is unpredictable to the degree that the course of the pandemic is unpredictable.

- Stewards Financial Analysis – The discussion of this report from the Stewards was carried over from the previous meeting. Most of the discussion concerned how we go about plotting a way forward to strengthen the management of our operating budget both short and long term. Chris Stowell was asked to develop a set of charges and proposed membership for a group to address these financial management issues and the chronic budget operating deficit.

We hope that you are enjoying these beautiful September days!

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