



A Message from Office of the Moderator "Mini-Minutes" from the November 10, 2020 Church Council Meeting

Dear Members and Friends of the Hills Church,

RE: Mini-Minutes from Church Council Meeting (11/10/20)

November is here and already making promises about the Winter which we can feel in the chill when the sun sets, in what feels like mid-afternoon! It's been an exciting and nerve-wracking Autumn, with an unprecedented election carried out in the midst of a pandemic - early voting, drive-through voting, mail-in voting, suspenseful counts, and race outcomes that seemed to switch by the hour! This year's election showed us that when we as a nation are faced with a challenge, we know how to step up our game. We pulled off an election that was remarkable for the extraordinary turnout of voters across the political spectrum, the rigor with which it was conducted, and the absence of external influences that so many had feared. Now we are trying to figure out how to celebrate Thanksgiving and Christmas in the face of the escalating pandemic. Like just about everything else this year, the holidays will be different. Instead of worrying about who will be relegated to the card table for dinner, or about getting the gifts wrapped before dawn on Christmas, we have to work out the logistics of testing and quarantining before we can safely gather with our loved ones, and figure out how to downsize the must-have Thanksgiving recipes. We are all going to miss the usual mayhem of the season, and especially the friendly chaos of gathering together. The coming holidays will be different for sure, but maybe in a good way. Instead of scurrying around trying to keep to an impossible schedule of festivities and chores, we'll be able to sit quietly after our holiday dinners or in front of the Christmas tree and think about how the blessings in our lives are present even during a pandemic. On a cold, quiet winter's night in Bethlehem, the angels announced to the shepherds, "Peace on Earth and Good Will towards Men." Our hope for all of us is to find the Peace of this coming holiday season; the best Christmas present imaginable.

Speaking of mayhem and chaos naturally brings up the topic of the Church Council Zoom meeting last week. Some of the major topics discussed are listed below:

Matt Wooster

- Along with members of the Deacons, Matt worked to revive a membership program during the pandemic, with a virtual Inquirers Gathering scheduled for November 15.
- He was also involved with interviewing prospective applicants for the Interim Administrator position, and has been working with the new Administrator, Susan MacDonald, to provide ongoing orientation in her new role.
- On November 3 and 4, Matt organized evening prayer services for election day and the day after.
- In preparation for Advent, he held a meeting with the clergy and director of music to plan for virtual services, and consulted with Kevin Groppe about a series of video Advent devotionals.
- For a sermon series on "Pilgrim Legacies," recognizing the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the Mayflower, Matt has been researching the legacy of the Pilgrims for Congregationalists and in a broader context.

Anne Marie Holloway

- This past month the church school hosted a "Trunk or Treat" socially distanced fellowship event. Registration filled up quickly for this event and the invitation was shared with our NS preschool families.
- This upcoming month our teens will gather together to create Thanksgiving Food Baskets for Family Promise.
- High School Youth continue to participate in various service projects including: the Dan McCabe Memorial Blood Drive with the American Red Cross on November 25th; collecting used clothing for Second Chances (organized by Tina Andersson); participating with backyard ministries that support the much needed work of the Outdoor Church and Common Cathedral by providing freshly baked cookies and homemade sandwiches for those experiencing food insecurity and homelessness.

Judy Swahnberg

- In addition to her on-going programs (Weekly Morning Meditation Tuesday mornings; Weekly Facebook Live; Noontime Prayer;

Caring for the Caregiver; Connections; Seniors Ministry Team; Luncheon (via Zoom), and Seniors Tea Party Oct. 20: focus on Poetry; Care Team assignments), she planned the service and preached on November 1, All Saint's Sunday.

- In terms of Pastoral Care, Judy continues to support a number of individuals and families and conducted a graveside memorial service.

Christian Service Support Board - Doug Eisenhart reported that the CSSB has reviewed the applications it has received and is reviewing this year's funding for several partner organizations including new partners, Wellesley Food Pantry and Wellesley Friendly Aid, as well returning partners AIA (plus Pash's stipend and travel), City Mission, Common Cathedral, Community Chaplaincy Council, Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries, Family Promise, Friends of Boston Homeless, Grace House, Habitat for Humanity, Honduras Hope, and New Beginnings.

Spiritual Care Support Board - At their November meeting the Deacons heard a report from Susan Walton about Stewardship 2021. She introduced the theme, 'Look to the Rock', and described the critical financial needs of the church, particularly the need to establish a balanced budget and the impact of the pandemic on our nursery school revenues. Susan reported that the Deacons decided to resume responsibility for Membership and have begun to plan for an Inquirer's Gathering in November.

Faith Formation Support Board - Tina Andersson reported that the board has been busy creating a list of recommendations for the season of Advent, which the ministers are reviewing. They have researched some low cost Adult Education programs led by other faith traditions and plan to cover the cost for participants. Reverend Anne Marie Holloway plans to lead a traditional Bible study and a book study is also being planned. Sally Tomasetti and Anne Marie are planning an Advent drive through, where families can collect Gingerbread houses to make at home as well as Advent Boxes. These boxes will contain weekly Advent activities for families.

Stewards Support Board - Tia Pinney noted that the Stewards report would be covered in the Financial Oversight item on the agenda (below).

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

Financial Oversight-John Dooley and Steve Hansen (Stewards) updated us on the Line of Credit with Cambridge Trust (formerly Wellesley Bank). We will be conferring with the bank during the week of 11/16.

Budgeting 2021 - Steve Hansen, chair of the Stewards Support Board, said that the stewards have begun to reach out to various boards and ministry teams to develop a budget for 2021. This year will be especially challenging both because our stewardship contributions most years only cover about half of our expenditures, which puts undue pressure on the Endowment, and also because a major source of revenue, the Nursery School, will be decreased due to lower enrollment as a consequence of Covid-19.

Paycheck Protection Plan - Last Spring, the church applied for and was awarded a loan of \$226,000 (based on 2.5 months payroll) from the Small Business Administration under the Paycheck Protection Plan (PPP). This loan program is intended to help for-profit businesses and not-for-profit organizations, like churches, weather the economic uncertainties of the Covid-19 pandemic. The intent of the loans was to make it possible for organizations to keep their employees on the payroll and mitigate the financial consequences to those people specifically, but also to the US economy as a whole.

A unique feature of the PPP program is that there is a provision to request forgiveness of the loan. The key requirements for forgiveness are: 1. that the organization faced significant financial insecurity due to the pandemic; and 2. that most of the money was used to maintain payroll, while the remainder could be applied to certain specified areas including benefits, rent and utilities. This semester, and most likely the next, the Nursery School will be operating in the red rather than contributing to the church's revenues due primarily to the reduction in enrollment required to maintain small class sizes and to permit social distancing.

Council reviewed our financial situation, the provisions of the PPP, and the way that we used the loan, and voted to apply for forgiveness. The group of people who put together the original loan application will also submit the request for loan forgiveness.

Capital Campaign - Matt reported for Steven Patrick that the Capital Campaign, "Generation to Generation: One in Spirit" wrapped up in October with \$5,159,977 in pledges plus \$585,000 in deferred (testamentary) pledges, for a total of \$5,744,977. Considering that

our aspirational (highest) goal was \$5MM, we greatly exceeded even our most ambitious expectations! The council expressed its heartfelt thanks to Matt, Steven Patrick and our consultant Melanie Haddock for leading this extraordinarily successful effort, and to the many, many members who worked on this campaign.

Stewardship Campaign 2021 - Linda Wilkins and Susan Walton made a presentation about this year's campaign, which is titled, "Look to the Rock". They reviewed the critical financial needs of the church, particularly the need to establish a balanced budget and reduce our annual draw on the Endowment to a sustainable level, and the impact of the pandemic on our Nursery School revenues. They have set an ambitious target of \$1,300,000 in pledges to achieve this end. Current pledgers are being asked to increase pledges by 18% and new pledge units, some of them new or younger families, to make a beginning pledge of at least \$200 per month. Susan and Linda have asked the Council members and Deacons to each consider making an advance commitment at the 18% level, and many have already made this leadership pledge.

Financial Governance and Management Task Force - Chris Stowell reported that Andy Wilson has agreed to chair this task force and that he, Matt, and Andy have begun to recruit members.

Strengthening Governance Task Force - Doug Eisenhart said that the Task Force has now met five times. In addition to context-setting and discovery meetings at the beginning they have now discussed all three priority issues presented to them by Council. They hope to present their report to Church Council at the meeting on 12/15.

Racial Justice Working Group - Matt and Anne Marie reported that they are making arrangements to have Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Consultants/Trainers from Wayside Youth and Family Support Network conduct a series of three training sessions (11/22, 12/6, and 1/10, all 1-4 p.m.) and one workshop (in February). They will lead us towards the prayerful development of a 1-5 year diversity, equity, and strategic plan. The consultants/trainers, Guimel DeCarvalho and Amy Hogarth, will walk with our community as together we focus on the work of building an antiracist community.

Re-opening Process - Chris Stowell reported that, due to the significant increase in new Covid-19 infections nationally and in MA, the Task Force decided to delay indoor gatherings for worship until after Thanksgiving at which point it would review the latest public

health data and make a decision about in-person services during Advent. However, it is likely that there will be no in-person services over the holidays. Instead, plans are being considered by the SCSB (Deacons) for pre-recorded worship services and the placement of holiday decorations by a small group to include the ministers. The current guidelines for gathering at the church were communicated to the congregation in the 11/5/20 issue of Events at the Hills.

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

In service and faith,

Mary Hill Canavan, Sarah Pedersen, Christopher Stowell
Wellesley Hills Congregational Church

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