

First Lutheran Church
Blair, Nebraska
Church Council Meeting
Fellowship Hall
7:00 P.M. April 8, 2021

Members in Attendance: Tracy Gross, Rhonda Matney, John Mark Nielsen, James Peterson, Rex Pfeil, Judy Thompson, Denise Work

Staff Present: Pastor Scott Frederickson, Erika Cada, Vince Krysl, Dawn Andersen

Guests: Glen Andersen, Reopening Committee Members: Amy Mommsen, Charlie Rohlfing, Deb Katt, Shelly Schwedhelm

Council Members Absent: Chad Leggott, Joe Bush

- I. Meeting called to order at 7:03 P.M. by John Mark Nielsen
- II. Council member devotions: Rhonda Matney read devotion by Andy Santos regarding the celebration of Easter and all that Easter signifies. Because we are Easter people, there is hope on the horizon whether it is related to the changing of the weather, our faith journey, or moving through the pandemic and vaccinations. As the angel said to the women searching for the body, "He is not here, He is alive. He has risen." We can have hope and shout, "Alleluia."
- III. Minutes of the March 11, 2021 Council Meeting: Rex Pfeil moved to approve the minutes; Judy Thompson seconded the motion; the motion was approved unanimously.
- IV. Financials: Chad Leggott, Treasurer, was excused from the meeting but sent an email to John Mark Nielsen. Analysis of the balance sheet shows general fund checking account balance of \$66,003 and building fund balance of \$24,513. The building loan balance is \$486,000. Budgeted revenue for March was \$37,000 with actual revenue \$43,000. Budgeted expenses were \$44,000 with actual expenses of \$17,000 (the difference being due to the PPP loan that reduced salary expenses). We are currently \$52,000 ahead of budget YTD, but this includes \$27,000 from the PPP loan. Jim Peterson moved to accept the financials; Tracy Gross seconded the motion; the motion was approved unanimously.
- V. Reopening Status: John Mark welcomed members of the Reopening Committee and thanked them for their thoughtful work since the fall, developing protocols to allow us to reopen church for in-person services, and making difficult decisions. He observed that this was the first time that the Church Council, committee members and the staff had had the opportunity to all meet together. While no changes may be made at this time, meeting together offered the opportunity to learn where we are and discuss possible benchmarks for reopening more fully.

Shelly Schwedhelm, who is a member of the committee and the Executive Director of UNMC's department of Emergency Management and Biopreparedness, reported only 26% of Nebraskans have been vaccinated at this time and many are refusing to get vaccinated. Viruses are constantly evolving and adapting. Currently, the UK variant is the most prominent and concerning of the new variants although all are more transmissible than the original virus. The UK variant is now evident in Washington County.

The Omaha metro regions, Shelly reported, which includes Washington County, has seen significant increases over the past several days with 30 additional hospitalizations over the past 24 hours. The cases now are among younger people with the virus affecting sense of taste and smell in some cases and in other cases causing critical illness including long-term effects.

Shelly stressed the importance of continuing public health measures such as masking, social distancing, washing hands, etc., which are proven to work and we need to be patient and continue these practices for the time being. We all want the same thing; to be back to 'normal' as soon as possible.

Shelly is confident in the rules of engagement we currently have in place at FLC. However, we can brainstorm ideas to do things differently which may be more personal and meaningful. It is important that members have information and clarity as to what we are doing and why. Ultimately, managing risk is what is important.

Glen Andersen and Deb Katt shared comments and suggestions regarding different methods to distribute and partake of communion to make this a more respectful, meaningful, and personal experience. Because the virus is airborne, however, Shelly advised any time the mask is removed there is a potential for exposure. There was brief discussion about singing with masks on, however, any time the mask has movement there is potential for exposure.

We recognize we have many members who are unhappy with the current services and are vocal about it; we also recognize we have many more members who are not yet comfortable returning to services at all.

The staff is planning to move services outdoors as soon as possible since being in the open air helps to mitigate risk. Tents have been purchased using funds from "Gifts and Memorials" to allow this as well as confirmation activities. While the fresh air disperses the virus, masks will still be required. Shelly advised that it is appropriate in the "Worship Center" for readers and singers to participate in the service on the stage as long as they remain behind the plexiglass.

Glen Andersen requested the use of the library for the men's Bible study group. While the majority of the men are vaccinated, they could meet in the small space, however, we would then need to allow other groups to meet in the library or similar spaces. This could potentially become a challenge for staff to track, monitor and

clean. The men were encouraged to continue meeting in the Fellowship Hall as the air handling system is better there than in the enclosed space of the library.

Rex Pfeil made a motion to thank the Reopening Committee for all their work over the past many months and move the responsibilities to the Council. Judy Thompson seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

The Council felt it important to communicate to the congregation the challenges and evolving solutions the Reopening Committee and the Church Council have been considering and what our thinking is regarding in-person services, meetings, and other gatherings. These include the possibility of moving worship outside soon. John Mark and Pastor Scott will draft this communication and seek Council approval prior to sending. All present agreed that it was important the Church Council encourage members to be vaccinated when they have the opportunity.

Rhonda Matney made a motion that the church continue to proceed under current guidelines until further notice. Jim Peterson seconded. Rhonda Matney amended the motion to proceed with current guidelines until further notice, however, we will review these guidelines on at least a monthly basis. Jim Peterson seconded. The motion failed to pass.

Though the motion failed, the Council recognized that this meant there was no change in our current COVID-19 protocol. Members felt, however, that with increasing numbers being vaccinated, reviewing the situation on “a monthly basis” was too long. Rather the Church Council needed to be open to possible changes occurring more quickly and consequently updating the guidelines. In response, John Mark asked that an “ad hoc committee” be formed to monitor the situation and advise so that the Council might act between meetings. Rhonda Matney and Tracy Gross volunteered for this “ad hoc” committee as long as they could turn to former members of the Reopening Committee for advice as well.

Glen Andersen again asked about the men meeting in the Library. After lengthy discussion, Pastor Scott requested everyone remain patient for another 60-90 days, and he will encourage the men in the Bible study to come up with a temporary solution until such time as they can return to the library.

- VI. Status of the FLC Website: With our website having been down for quite some time, Denise Work suggested we design a timeline as to when we will be back up and running. Tracy Gross commented that all current links in emails, etc., take the viewer to outdated information. She suggested these be removed to avoid confusion.

Vince shared that American Broadband had been hosting our website and domain. We asked them to update the PHP (language of the programming) which locked up our programming. We have moved to GoDaddy so we can maintain all aspects of the website ourselves. We had to wait for coding, then ACS which handles our online giving. Yesterday we heard from ACS they have a timeline of April 19th. This

process should be complete by April 21st at the latest which will provide us full access to all email accounts, website, online giving, etc.

- VII. Committee Reports from Staff: Erika Cada shared she is planning an in-person Vacation Bible School in July. Publicity will be forthcoming in May. Confirmation will be held May 2nd at 2 PM outside to allow students, their families and friends to gather with masks, socially distanced to celebrate their confirmation. A confirmation banquet will also be held outside with confirmands sitting with their family groups at tables. These events and processes have been reviewed with Shelly Schwedhelm. Pastor Scott shared the Second Gentleman of the United States toured our facility and observed the vaccination clinic and process.
- VIII. Committee Reports from Council Liaison Members: Rhonda Matney shared the Worship and Music Committee will be soliciting for additional members. John Mark Nielsen advised the Council we will continue in May our work on key issues presented by the Personnel committee.
- IX. Adjournment. Rex Pfeil made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Denise Work seconded the motion; the motion was approved unanimously and meeting was adjourned at 9:06 PM. The next Church Council meeting will be held in the Fellowship Hall at 7:00 P.M. on May 13, 2021.

Respectfully submitted,
Rhonda Matney, Secretary