

## **Common Table, June 18, 2018**

**In attendance:** About 30 members of the congregation, with Brad and Joe facilitating, and David Plowman, Melinda Lilley, and Brad Beeman presenting.

After a delicious meal of broccoli soup, bread and salad (thank you, Laura, Patty, and who am I missing?), Brad opened the meeting in prayer.

**Scouting at Aldersgate:** David Plowman talked about the challenges and opportunities facing the Boy Scouting program that Aldersgate sponsors. Last month we celebrated 50 years of scouting at Aldersgate, and we have opportunities to continue this long-standing and valued commitment.

First of all, the current Boy Scout troop at Aldersgate has been dwindling, in part because it doesn't have a feeder Cub Scout troop; Cub Scouts tend to want to go on to Boy Scout troops with their friends, and so they tend to feed into specific Boy Scout troops. Also, we have fewer scouts coming from inside the church congregation, so our current troop is down to four scouts, just under the minimum of five scouts (we received a special exemption to keep going).

But scouting is changing, too. Girls are now allowed to join the Cub Scouts (with dens separated by gender), and the Boy Scouts, which will now be called Scouts BSA. Aldersgate has been offered an opportunity to sponsor a girl's troop at Aldersgate, and we would be the first in the area.

David has been putting out feelers and getting good response to this idea. Several folks in the church have shown interest in helping out. We are also seeing interest in sponsoring a Venturing Crew, which is a co-ed scouting opportunity for 14 to 22 year olds, at Aldersgate.

So scouting at Aldersgate is evolving. If you have an interest in more information, or would like to help with these new opportunities, please contact David Plowman.

There was a final point of clarification: Aldersgate sponsors the troops at our church, but we do not provide financial assistance; we support them in other ways (use of our facility, etc.). The troops provide their own financial support.

**Finance Report:** And speaking of money, Melinda presented the finance report, which I am sending along with these minutes. We are two weeks from the end of our fiscal year, which goes from July to June. Unfortunately, we are down in expected pledges by \$30,000. If you made a pledge last year, and you have a bit of catching up to do, please get that taken care of. Our giving is an essential part of what supports the church we love.

We are also looking at the next fiscal year. So far we've heard from 74 pledging units. We have 10 new pledges and 18 increased pledges this year. 39 pledges have remained the same, and 6 have decreased. If we were to get pledges from everyone who pledged last year, we would have 107 pledging units. We're not there yet, though, so if you've

been meaning to get that pledge card in, or if you're thinking you could increase your pledge, now's the time! Pledges make it easier for the church to plan and move forward with the projects we want to see. Pledges made it possible for us to hire an Assistant Pastor and a Youth Ministries Assistant, and we're benefitting tremendously from having Laura and Griffey here.

Right now, we're short about \$50,000 in projected funding for next year's proposed budget (which is only a \$5000 increase over last year's budget), and it doesn't include raises for staff. Our staff works hard to keep costs down and strives to use funds responsibly. The Finance Team is working to make sure we go into our next fiscal year with a balanced budget, so prayerfully consider how you might be able to help.

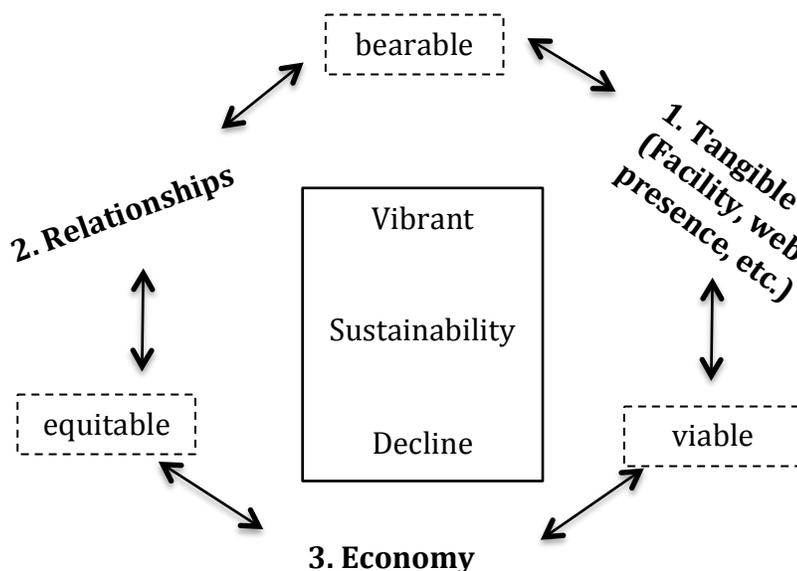
In other budget news, we have \$52,000 left on our Kitchen loan to pay off, and currently have \$22,000 in pledges dedicated toward it. A fundraiser is being planned to finish paying off the kitchen. If you'd like to help plan this fundraiser, contact Melinda Lilley.

**Brad's Sabbatical: an Overview:** Brad handed out a two-page general summary of his sabbatical. His focus was Aldersgate: where we are at risk, where we are thriving, and what our demographics say about us. He listed fifty strengths that we have and compared them to the needs he found beyond our doors.

Brad also emphasized that he is providing information, but where we go as a church is up to us. He has a lot to share, but as the church community, we need to prayerfully decide how we want to act on it.

Before becoming a pastor, Brad's work involved looking at at-risk factors for youth, and he used a similar framework for his sabbatical: what are the at-risk factors for churches in decline, and what are the factors that lead to sustainable and vibrant churches?

Brad also shared a visual that he adapted to illustrate the factors critical to demonstrating a church's vibrancy or decline. It looked something like this:



Brad gave a number of examples of factors in each of the three areas. For example, if a church's facility is weedy and showing signs of neglect, if relationships in the church are fraught with serious tension or division, if a small number of people make all the decisions or provide all the financial backing and do all the work, these can all be factors in decline.

Another risk factor is a changing neighborhood where the church no longer reflects its surrounding community. It was observed that this is the case at Aldersgate, and we need to look at how we welcome our neighbors when they visit. Churches no longer just organically change as their communities do; more deliberate action is often required.

Brad compiled a list of risk factors, which is available upon request; just zap him an email if you would like a copy. It is important to know that not all of the risk factors apply to Aldersgate; Brad was trying to come up with a thorough list that he observed in his investigations.

Brad also did intensive Bible study and discovered three key factors in Christ's teachings:

- Christ was all about transformation.
- Christ was all about healing and return to community.
- Christ was all about the power of small groups.

Interestingly, these are also the three factors that are generally considered important to vibrant churches:

- Consistent, multiple opportunities for personal spiritual transformation,
- Multiple opportunities for healing and healthy growth (People want to explore what God, Jesus, and Christianity mean, rather than experience dogmatic worship.),
- Opportunities to explore in small groups.

Aldersgate has many small groups, but they can be hard to break into. It was suggested that if we open new, high quality groups each fall, when new people often visit, it might provide more opportunities for people to feel included and stay.

Brad reminded us of another risk factor, having a few people in a church doing all the work, so we would need to think about how we would share the effort of starting such groups.

Brad emphasized that the number one problem in our area is loneliness, and it can be a challenging problem to address.

Brad also mentioned one final risk factor: not having a uniting mission at a church. He suggested that we could become the church that really accepts everyone, no matter what their ethnicity, gender identification, or, yes, even political party! We could move beyond inclusion to belonging.

The conversation turned to United Methodism, and the observation was made that strong and obvious connectivity between UM churches is fading. In some places, the cross and flame are seen as too conservative, in other parts of the country they are seen as too liberal. In any case, there seems to be baggage that some churches are trying to keep at a distance. There was some discussion of what our brand is and how we want to be seen.

As we talked more about inclusion, belonging, and how we represent ourselves as a church, Colleen mentioned Melissa Pierce and how she wrote letters to church families inviting them to the Lazy F Mission Trip. What a beautiful way to let people know they are valued. Thank you, Melissa!

Talk of belonging led into the final item on the agenda, which is necessarily folded into our discussion of inclusion, belonging, and what we might want to be as a church.

**CRC (Considering Becoming a Reconciling Congregation) Update:** The CRC team is undergoing a strategic restart. They want to allow discussions to unfold in safety, so that everyone feels comfortable sharing their views. And they want to create a dynamic opportunity to look at and understand the language of inclusivity and belonging. People need to feel comfortable asking questions and not feel judged. Putting aside assumptions and judgments and instead listening as a caring community is not an easy thing to do, but it is what we are called to do. So we will learn together as a church, and decide what we want to be.

Joe closed the meeting in prayer.

These minutes respectfully submitted by Robbin Price. All mistakes and omissions are mine, and corrections are gratefully accepted.