

## Hilltop United Methodist Church

### Church Council Meeting Minutes

Thursday, August 20, 2020 at 6:30 p.m.

**Present via video conference:** Matt Sipe, Don Putzier, Derrick Galinat, Kerry Rausch, Paulette Adams, Karla Lassonde, Jocelin Reynolds, Stacy Vanderwerf, and Michelle Behsman.

Don Putzier opened the meeting with the Lord's Prayer. Stacy Vanderwerf will be staying on council as an at-large member. Mark Wright will not be attending due to vacation.

**Approval of minutes:** Church council reviewed the minutes from June. Karla made a motion to approve minutes, with a second by Paulette. Motion passed. No additions to the agenda.

**Bible Study:** Pastor Matt read Colossians 1:15-23, which this Sunday's message will be based upon. He saw that this scripture reading was a great summary of what the Gospel is – a great summation of what the death of Jesus means for Christians. He is already thinking ahead to Christmas looking for the hope that Christmas brings. The first verse tells us that thrones, dominions, powers, and rulers were all created by God, but through Christ these are placed below Christ – Christ has the final say. Matt shared that we are created good, but we are also sinful and broken so healing is a need in this world. He points to verse 23, which states the importance of being securely established and steadfast in the faith; faith being a relationship with God and one another. Matt was reminded by last week's sermon reflection on *12 years A Slave* that it's not the gospel if it is not the gospel for everybody. Verse 23 reminds us the gospel has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven.

**Calendaring:** Annual Conference is next week and will be attended by Matt, Don and Paulette Booker (equalization member). Don said that he will share information about the conference to the council in September. Paulette Adams asked if there were any objections to hosting Operation Christmas Child November 16-23. She expects changes in the drop off process to ensure social distancing. Council was in favor of continuing this ministry. Kerry Rausch has scheduled a Red Cross blood drive at Hilltop on Oct. 1. Derrick has a fall work day scheduled Sept 12, primarily to remove dead trees on the West side of the property.

**Finance Report:** Don shared information that was sent by Mark Wright. May and June plate giving was strong, but July giving is below average. The PPP loan has not yet been used. The finance team discussed whether in-person versus online worship affected giving. The Finance team will meet Sept. 3 to review August income, but will not project year end revenues until after September. They plan to mail pledge statements to members. There was further discussion by council on correlation between worship service style and giving. There was a specific concern about a decrease in online views and how worship is impacting young families. It was suggested that we survey members to find out why they are not returning to in person worship. Matt shared that he has spoken to those that responded to earlier survey and overall members were less comfortable returning to worship than they first stated. Matt shared that our YTD giving is higher than the previous four years at this time of the year. He attributes the July decrease to three specific families who are no longer giving – two moved and one has reduced level of giving. Matt also pointed out that we have not used the increase fund this year, as planned. Stacy made a motion to accept the finance report, Karla seconded. The motion passed.

**Committee Updates:** Jocelin shared that the Children Youth and Family MCCI team is meeting August 26 to brainstorm and discuss fall programming. Derrick mentioned a missing item in the Trustee report, a hydraulic door closer on the main door is leaking oil and will be fixed next week. Michelle provided an

update on Realm, pointing out features that will promote connection. We have a new Vanco merchant account with Realm and the previous account will be closed in September. Vanco givers were notified that their account will be closed and were directed to the new Realm site to set up their automatic giving. Members will be able to see pledges for 2020 and progress in giving. Live sign-up will launch on August 30th.

### **Visioning:**

Pastor Matt referred to his earlier email about future worship plans and opened for discussion his proposal on suspending in-person worship and establishing a new “care group” ministry. Matt reiterated the reasons for the suspension; low attendance at the 9:00am service is not welcoming to new visitors and is a poor use of staff resources. The average attendance at the 9:00am service has been 13-15, which includes staff. The highest was 19, but now we are closer to 12. Derrick shared that his family has not returned due to mask requirement and expects difficulty trying to keep masks on his young children. Matt has followed up with those who submitted a survey prior to our re-open. He found that many who said they would attend have changed their minds. Some expressed that they are not comfortable sitting with masks for an hour. Paulette also agrees that mask wearing is an issue and she asked whether people could remove their masks once seated. She shared that in-person worship is valuable to her personally.

Matt does not anticipate people flocking back in the fall either. You Tube analytics indicates a change in how the online worship is being viewed. There are fewer views on Sunday, with more views later in the week. It was noted that the number of views does not indicate the number of people viewing. Matt sees that worship is not vibrant in its current state and it impacts our ability to reach new people. He stated the importance of moving together in mission to reach people. Don commented on mask removal and the style of service. Paulette said that we should start now envisioning what in-person will look like in the future, assuming that we will continue to have online moving forward. She posed the question, “what are we working towards?”, with the idea that worship will not be *either* in-person *or* online but rather *both* kinds of services will be offered.

Jocelin asked whether we had the ability to offer worship programming for children/youth. Matt felt that engaging children on Sunday morning is not likely to be fruitful in an online format. He suggested videos that can be shown later in the week or viewed when children are ready to be engaged, but he also stated that kids are already facing a lot of online learning and it is not the best way to engage their hearts.

Karla shared her sentiment for the class meeting culture as being the church. Michelle echoed Karla’s thoughts, stating that real connection takes place in small groups rather than worship.

Returning to the topic of worship, Paulette asked what metrics we would use for returning to in-person worship. Do we wait until masks aren’t mandatory? She doesn’t believe that singing is necessary for quality worship. Don said from a health standpoint, he doesn’t expect the situation to change until a few weeks after vaccine is available which may come in January. He expects more cases once school starts and anticipates more restrictions. Matt shared that most churches our size are not meeting through the end of the year. He said the uncertainty is emotionally uncomfortable for us all. Stacy offered that there was value in simplicity. She stated the importance of establishing family traditions that offer consistent worship. Most families are feeling the wear and tear of the new online digital world, but it is the single people who are not connected that we must think about. What can we do to help those who may be feeling anxious or isolated? Matt added that just by being open and offering in-person worship has caused anxiety in members because they feel they should be in church but are uncertain that it is safe.

Matt made a motion to halt in-person through the end of the year. This will allow people to plan, provide stability and offer the best we can in ministry. We will offer one blended online worship service and great online content. We will use our resources to offer a new connectional ministry. We will communicate a clear path forward in a letter to the congregation. If the pandemic situation changes, we can pivot. Jocelin seconded. The motion passed, with one abstained.

Paulette asked if meetings can still take place in the building. It was agreed that groups of 10 -20 people can meet in person. It was also noted that in-person worship will continue through August, the next two Sundays.

Matt closed in prayer. Meeting adjourned at 8:15 pm

Respectfully submitted, Michelle Behsman