

**BETHEL COLLEGE MENNONITE CHURCH**  
**Congregational Meeting**

**Sunday, Oct. 11, 2020 – 1:30 p.m. -- online via ZOOM or livestreamed on YouTube**

43 screens were viewing via Zoom. With multiple family members on the same screen at times, an estimated 65 attended. A quorum was present. Pastor Renee Reimer served as webmaster. Technical difficulties were encountered with livestreaming. The meeting was recorded and posted via YouTube later.

**1. Call to order, Welcome, and Opening Prayer—Patty Shelly, moderator**

**2. Minutes of the January 26, 2020 congregational meeting as posted on church webpage.**

No corrections have been received and the minutes were approved by consent as distributed.

**3. BCMC at Work: Faith Formation Activities—Pastor Renee Reimer and others**

Children and youth have been meeting outside since Labor Day, rain or shine. All wear masks and the outside air flow is a safety measure. Wednesday activities have also begun. Senior High youth volunteered at MCC Center. A Sr. High Retreat last weekend, with each in tents, was fun.

Agape Sunday School class, Heather Zerger reporting. This class has been meeting since March: first months were online via Zoom and since June meeting outside on the church front lawn or shady playground Sunday mornings after the worship livestream has concluded. We meet, as usual, for an hour sharing individual concerns, reflecting on current events, and how to adapt and witness in our daily life. We conclude with sharing joys and concerns and a common prayer. In colder weather we will return to Zoom.

Mosaics Sunday School class, George and Jeanette Leary reporting. Social media connections were the first way we connected in the spring. This class started reconnecting in-person mid-summer with a barbeque. Since Sept. they have been meeting twice a month in-person to stay connected, outside at the church or someone's home.

Bible Study class, Norma Johnson reporting. This 13-member class has 12 members living in North Newton, some in Independent Living and others in Assisted Living at Kidron. Early on we had Zoom calls twice a month on Wednesdays. We shared personal updates on health, family news, what we're reading, and prayer requests. Pre-Covid-19 we had a practice of reading lectionary texts; we are continuing that practice. Our group was started by Dottie Janzen and her husband Heinz and we sent cards to her on her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Fellowship class, Karen Ediger reporting. The women have continued their monthly Monday social gathering outside at either member's yards or the church outside playground. We start with personal sharing and it is meaningful. Glenn Ediger meets with Youthful Men regularly.

Sojourners class, Pastor Renee shared report from Rosalind Andreas. Rosalind collects personal updates and reflections from members, compiles them into a text document, and Monica helps distribute that update by mail to members once a month.

Patty Shelly expressed thanks and gratitude to Pastor Renee, Faith Formation Commission members, and Sunday School leaders for their dedication and work to keep us together.

**4. Report from Task Group on Re-opening the Church—Elizabeth Schmidt, moderator-elect)**

Elizabeth Schmidt chairs this group at the behest of the board to help us plan and guide our reopening efforts. Members are Pastor Renee; Pastor Nathan; Pastor Dawn, Monica Lichti, Office and Facilities

Manager; Barbara Thiesen, Music Coordinator; Susie Swartley, Worship Commission; Jeanette Stucky, Faith Formation Commission; Doris Whillock, Hospitality Commission; and Jim Robb, Deacon representative. We are aware that Covid-19 disproportionately impacts people of color, indigenous peoples, those with medical conditions, and older adults. We are mindful of our church vision to follow Jesus and live with mercy and justice as we learn about safe ways to continue to show God's love to our neighbors.

Initial work focused on supporting the implementation of livestream worship. Support for grieving families, and pastoral and office staff followed. Guidelines for funeral and memorial services, for worship teams, and church facility use by outside groups were developed and approved. At the request of the church board the Task Group extended outreach to Bethel College before the start of fall semester regarding classroom space needs. Although not needed at the time, it was received with appreciation. To support small group and outdoor activities, ways to provide a sound system outdoors were provided. To publicize what is happening at church during the pandemic they oversaw adding a tab on the church website.

We look forward to completion of the renovation of Fellowship Hall which will give us additional indoor space with room for physical distancing. We will be developing guidelines which consider ventilation and air circulation as we enter cooler weather.

To help the Task Group design what to do next they are looking forward to receiving survey responses from congregational members which was emailed this past week. The survey is also available on the church webpage.

Elizabeth closed with words of a survivor from the 14<sup>th</sup> century pandemic known as the Bubonic Plague. Julian of Norwich lived in prayer and devotion isolated in a cell attached to her church parish. "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and every matter of thing shall be well."

Patty responded that it was reassuring to know that Christians throughout history have survived pandemic like the one we are experiencing.

A recent Sept. information item to report has been publicized in the local newspaper. Harvey County has almost \$7million from the national CARES Act to distribute in six different grant programs; in one of the grant programs, \$750,000 is available specifically to public and private entities, both non-profits, small business, and churches in Harvey County. Some of the items for reimbursement include IT equipment, hardware and software platforms that support online services access. We have incurred unexpected expenses these past six months as we purchased a high def camera, and other equipment and licensing fees. Thanks to Elizabeth for coordinating our grant application on a tight timeline, due this coming week Oct. 14. She has been assisted by Mike Claassen, Financial Manager and Dorothy Nickel Friesen.

## **5. Update on Abuse Prevention and Response—Pastor Renee Reimer**

Last April the church board released the previous Task Group that had been working on the policy update for 18 months and has now appointed an Abuse Prevention and Response Committee to continue the work on a more permanent basis.

In March we paused in-person worship before concluding the congregational conversations on our Abuse Prevention and Safety policy. In late March, Faith Trust Institute finally issued a review of our Policy Draft

with suggestions including creation of a permanent Abuse Prevention and Response committee. The Goals now are:

- Oversee Safe Sanctuary, focusing on preventative work for volunteers.
- Work on trauma-informed ed for the committee, and later for the congregation.
- Be “ears” of the congregation: To become more trauma-aware of what may be triggering for some in the congregation.
- Issue Policy Updates for congregational review early in 2021. This reflects a slight delay in our timeline because of Covid-19 delays.

The members of the committee will include representatives from: deacons, church board, parent / guardian of a child, congregation at large, professional social worker or therapist, and the pastoral liaison for Faith Formation.

Pastor Renee is currently auditing a seminary class on this initiative.

Patty Shelly expressed gratitude to Pastor Renee and the committee for taking up and continuing our study and work on this topic.

Comments were invited. None were received.

## **6. Update on remodeling Kitchen and Fellowship Hall—Facilities Committee**

In January and February Patty Shelly remembers how we were all wondering how we would manage with the church renovation closing off basement and meeting space, and then Covid-19 appeared! Then the elevator needed repair in March, and it is now completed. Soon the major renovation of the kitchen and Fellowship Hall spaces will also be completed. By July the asbestos floor replacement was completed. Plumbing for a stackable washer/dryer in the new family restroom was added, for washing face masks and kitchen linens. Water fountains in the basement and the Gathering Place were changed to stations for filling water bottles, recommended for Covid-19 safety.

Community Playschool delayed opening in the fall and church was still not meeting in-person so work slowed to allow Regier Construction to prioritize other projects to help schools prepare for their fall openings in this Covid-19 season. Now, electrical work is complete and the drop ceiling is in. In November carpet tiles and final painting is set to be completed.

Annette Lamp has been the project coordinator, Patty Shelly thanked her for her work planning and coordinating work by Regier Construction, working with their representative Krista Jahay, and reporting monthly to the church board. Patty Shelly expressed thanks to Annette and the Facilities Committee -- Doug Harms, Ron Preheim, Steve Schurr, Ron Peters and Monica Lichti --for their work on this project.

## **7. Information on annual budget pledge drive—Finance Committee. Al Peters, reporting.**

Patty Shelly reminded viewers that an initial informational video on updates in the annual pledge drive was posted this past Wednesday.

Al thanked the congregation on behalf of the entire Finance Committee – Judy Friesen, Paul Harder, Gwen Neufeld and Lavern Stucky -- for their faithful giving these past Covid-19 months.

A shortfall remains for \$24,449, \$15,000 for the elevator repair, and \$35,000 for the renovation project.

There will be no more “ponies” in the title of our pledge drive. This decision reflects our desire to live out our church vision statement and turn away from a name evoking the historic period of much genocide to

indigenous peoples in our national history. Also, this year we will not have door-to-door passing the envelope as in the past. Envelopes will be coming by door delivery or US mail.

“Where your treasure is, there is your heart.” Matthew 6: 19-21 is this year’s theme.

**8. Financial Report—Mike Claassen, Financial Manager**

A Powerpoint graph was shared on the Zoom screen. Mike’s data was as of Sept. 30, 2020. Income was 65% of budget (\$326,680); Expenses were 70% of budget (\$352,897). This mirrors the same trend as last year. Still needed: \$25,217. This October we hope to see some headway in addressing this deficit.

As a result of Covid-19 this year, some budget line items have changed. Bank charges have increased because they are linked to our online giving fees when using a credit card. Those fees would not be charged if you did a direct deposit from your checking account. Mailing charges have increased because fewer people are picking up from mailboxes in the church building. Paper expense is reduced; we are not printing bulletins. Facility expenses are reduced because the facility has reduced usage.

**9. Other. Comments were invited online by Patty Shelly.** Arlo Kasper, viewing online from Paraguay, commented that the entire morning service was beautiful to watch. Arlo also asked when the grant money would be distributed. Patty and Elizabeth explained that the expenses needed to be encumbered by the end of 2020 to qualify for reimbursement.

**10. Closing Prayer—Pastor Nathan Koontz.**

“We thank you God for gathering us together in this virtual space, this sacred space as we attempt to find our way through this time of separation, wondering and waiting. . . . Guide us as we continue to discern and adapt; as we continue to seek and receive grace, as we become aware of new opportunities to do justice, love mercy, and to walk humbly with You. . . . May we leave this space assured that Your love enfolds us and that Your spirit ignites us. Amen.”

Meeting adjourned: 2:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Pat Friesen, clerk