

# BCC Cabinet Meeting Minutes

**Date:** 12/13/2020

**Submitted by:** Sanjay Cherian

## **In Attendance (via Zoom videoconference):**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Voting?</b>
Catherine Merrill	Minister	N
Ann Desrochers	Moderator	Y
Carol Cherian	Fundraising/Deacons	Y
Sanjay Cherian	Clerk	Y
Susan Haight	Trustees	Y
Amy Razzaboni	Outreach	Y
Bill Dunbar	Finance	Y
Rena Duncklee	Treasurer	Y
Candy Tiner	Publicity	Y
Jill Aitken	Deacons	Y
Megan King	Fundraising	N

The meeting started at 8:01 am with a prayer from Rev Cath. We had a quorum.

## **Review of Prior minutes**

- Bill moved to accept the minutes, Rena seconded; the motion passed unanimously.

## **Action Item Review**

- Holiday lights: the expense for the church was zero. Peter & Susan Haight got the lights up. Carol was thanked for lighting the trees with Linda Ashton.
- AA: has not requested to use the building
- BSA bankruptcy filing
  - Cath: paperwork is in, only waiting on a document from the court confirming that it's been added to the docket.
  - We filed by paper and the lawyer filed again for us electronically. If we get mail notification that we filed twice, we're supposed to let the lawyer know so anyone who receives such mail should tell Cath.
- Stewardship mailing: Ann never received one. Candy had two that she was sending separately and found they hadn't been sent.

## **Budget**

- Bill: the budgeting process is a bit different this year. He presented the following information:
- Revenue
  - Last year, we had about \$40k in pledges. This year, we have \$30,871.

- We usually get loose collections, unpledged givers, Christmas & Easter givers but we have not received much of these this year. Our current total support received from donations is about \$34k.
- After looking at last year's expenses, we are \$42k short.
  - For employee compensation, Bill planned for a 1.2% cost of living increase.
  - Cath was compensated according to conference recommendations but we moved more cash to the housing allowance for tax benefit, which is ok if the finance committee agrees. We have a document signed by us and Cath confirming.
  - Looked at all our fixed expenses and kept them.
  - Took other expenses and halved them, assuming we wouldn't be back in the building until June.
  - Even with these cuts, we're \$35k short.
- How to handle next year? Including all our money other than dedicated funds, we have \$71k available for bills. There is no way to get close to a balanced budget without wiping out a lot of our assets.
  - Finance's recommendation: if we have to, use general funds to offset our shortfall until we're fully open. If we're back earlier and income returns, we can start replenishing what we spent out of general funds.
- Things that helped us in 2020: unexpected \$20k donation, over \$6,000 raised by Take-Home Meals.
- Ann: how many pledges did we have in previous years and this year? Rena: this year 22, last year around 32.
- Bill: some people have set up EasyTithe, which helped a lot. He thinks having people in the pews makes a huge difference to how much income we receive.
- Sanjay: is it time to have a meeting about what's going on? It seems like we have some fundamental issues to address.
  - Bill: 2020 is a special case. Until we see what things are like when we get back together, it's too soon to know. He would rather wait until June to make big decisions.
  - Rena: hopes money will come in when the Christmas letter goes out.
  - Ann: was there an Easter letter? Rena: no. Bill: we received \$400 for Easter.
- Bill: for 2021, we've planned to have breakfast fundraisers but only one after June. We're hoping the Christmas Faire returns. Take Home Meals are budgeted at \$4,500 and we're hoping they can keep going. The Spaghetti Supper is back in the plan.
- Cath: if we're \$35k short, are we only talking about people who had pledged before but not this year? Bill: yes, \$15k is coming from that. Cath: we can explain our shortfall with things like Christmas and Easter but if it's pledges, we need to face it.
- Bill: fuel oil is prepaid.
- Sanjay: we shouldn't wait for June to talk about the situation because a significant portion of our operating income comes from earnings on assets. If we spend down our assets, we will have a ripple effect on operating income for subsequent years.
  - Susan: thinks the issue is bigger than our church. It's happening everywhere.
  - Sanjay: pushed hard for starting the conversation believing there's something happening here beyond secular trends.
  - Cath: there is a process we have to go through. The financial situation wakes people up. A first reaction is a tactical response to shuffle things around to make the problem go away. It's clear that even after the great work Bill & Finance have done, the cleverest things we can do won't solve the whole problem. But things weren't great before Covid so we need to let people see the reality of our current situation and feel the moment of shock without leading them to despair. We have to be ready as a leadership team to help people through it so we can get to the longer-term conversation of how to be a viable church. Cath is willing to take the lead on that. Some of what needs to be done is invitation.
  - Amy: agrees with everybody. Finance can only do what they can with the money they have. We were struggling before this. Bill is right that a part of it is physical presence together in the church – people forget when they're not together regularly. Even with fundraisers, etc. it's going

to take a while to get back to normal and may take another year. She doesn't know the answer but thinks we need to start the conversation before June or whenever we think we will be able to be together again.

- Bill: was meeting with late comers for THM pickup yesterday and they asked about our next meal and for us to please keep things going. It's been a huge positive for this church.
  - Sanjay: that reaction represents THM being a hidden source of value, not evidence of the viability of our core business.
  - Bill: that wasn't what he was saying. He sees it as a PR opportunity because people had said that they were thinking of coming back to church.
  - Susan: the message is not "I don't have to cook tonight" but a bigger one sent by the church and the THM crew that the church is reaching out at a difficult time and really cares about the community and where people are at.
- Cath: part of this discussion is what are we going to do about the 2021 budget for Annual Meeting. If this is our last meeting before then, where do we want to go?
  - Ann: believes the bylaws say we have to have balanced budget within 10% margin. Bill concurs.
  - Cath: We may need to have a number-crunching meeting to figure out how to do that. Do our bylaws support changing the 10% requirement? Sanjay: yes, but he would object strenuously if it was proposed. This may be the time to say we can't do a balanced budget without radical action.
  - Bill: if we zeroed out a bunch of stuff and only kept church maintenance, insurance, and employee benefits, we would still not get down to a 10% shortfall. Sanjay: it's important to hit people in the face with that rather than offer them heroic illusions. Ann & Amy agreed.
  - Cath: most of our expenses come from Cath's pay and benefits. Do we want to propose reducing her hours further? This would basically get down to only doing services on Sundays but she honestly doesn't know how to do a lot less than she does now. Should we have Bill prepare a proposal for cutting her hours down? Sanjay: not a proposal but information to spark an emotional response.
- Bill: building expenses are only \$17k.
- Bill: thinks we on Cabinet are going to be the decision makers at Annual Meeting. Cath: thinks people not in the Cabinet will be very interested in being part of the conversation. Susan: we need answers or at least suggestions for Annual Meeting.
- Cath: if we went down to a quarter-time pastor, she doesn't think she could personally afford to keep working here. How could she say that without it sounding like a threat when it's just a reality not a threat? Even if she could handle it, we would need lay people in the pulpit and Jill can tell us how hard it is to find that just for Cath's knee surgery recovery. How do we want to have numbers drive reality but have the fuller conversation be available?
  - Sanjay: we need to have a moment of disclosure and invitation to let everyone know what's going on.
  - Ann: is willing to take a first pass at drafting invitation but would like a lot of feedback from the Cabinet before sending it out. She took the action item.
- Cath: we scheduled Annual Meeting for January 10<sup>th</sup>. Her surgery is still scheduled for January 14<sup>th</sup> but it's possible that surgery won't happen that day. Do we want to postpone Annual Meeting? She might be able to participate via Zoom while on drugs.
- Candy: we have this conversation about every year. With the pandemic going on this year, she doesn't want us to do anything to frighten people away and say that church is over too. She doesn't know if people would react that way but it's what comes to mind during this conversation.
  - Bill: agrees. If we're going to scare people away, why bother saying these things? Revenues would go down even more. We have to be the positive light in this whole thing. That's why finance looked at just how to make it to June and then maybe they can look at contacting THM customers and others who are developing a positive view of the church and build on that. Is

afraid that if we get too deep into this discussion, we will scare people into looking for another church.

- Cath: we'll also scare people away if we don't look at reality at all.
- Bill: we may not have to use this money from the general fund.
- Amy: agrees with all this but at Annual Meeting, what do we come in with? Won't it start this conversation automatically if we don't come in with a balanced budget?
- Bill: that's why we come in with a plan for spending down our assets – here's where we are, here is our backup plan for if we don't have money start coming in in June.
- Amy: can we do this while honoring our bylaws? Bill: yes.
- There was discussion about our approach in prior years of having a balancing line on the budget to draw from our financial assets to achieve balance.
- Bill: if we had a repetition of the gift from our surprise giver, we'd be within \$15k. Ann: and if pledges come back, we're good.
- Cath: we need to talk about what it takes to be a viable church. If we've taken things like a quarter-time minister off the table, we've already made a decision about what a viable church looks like.
- Ann: do we want to keep 1/10 as the date? Bill: there's no reason to move the date. Not much is going to change between now and then. Amy: if we keep 1/10 and people see what we're dealing with, maybe it will spur them on to give.
- Bill: we can wipe out lots of budget items to get us down to 10% to show what it would take. Ann: we should have this in our back pocket as data but not as the plan we're working towards.
- Jill: do we need another meeting to strategize about how to have Annual Meeting be led? Do we want it off the cuff or to think about some bullet points to make the qualitative points more concrete? What we're thinking of doing is very delicate. Do we need to talk it through some more before Annual Meeting?
  - Ann: is planning to frame conversation with slides with Cath like she's done in prior years.
  - Cath: do we think we can get a slide deck together by 1/3? Ann: once she has all the reports, she can put slides together more easily. Hard to get done much earlier.
  - Cath: if we could get the deck in front of the Cabinet before Annual Meeting, we could get confirmation that it's good to go. Would the Cabinet be willing to review it quickly and say yes/no to another meeting? Jill: think having slides would be a great starting point. Would be happy to look it over quickly.
  - Cath: let's schedule a meeting for 1/3 and cancel it if needed.
- Bill: did a budget rev C wiping out all expenses other than essentials and keeping Cath at current level. We are \$27k short, which represents a 32% deviation from balance.
- Ann: will tentatively schedule a meeting for 1/3, try to get slides out a day or two ahead, and hold the meeting if needed.
- Ann: Is the Annual Meeting quorum requirement 9? Sanjay & Cath: yes, based on current partial data. It will go down from here. Carol: 9 is a low number. Do we have to put it in the meeting invitation? It may have an effect on people coming. Ann: we've done it in the past when it's a large number to get people to come. Cath: is the Cabinet willing to commit to attending to make quorum? Everyone agreed.
- Ann: the meeting will be at 10 am. There was discussion around whether we should do it earlier. Consensus was to keep it at 10, and definitely no earlier than 9. Candy will put 10 am on Calendar.

### **Coverage for Cath's time away**

- Jill is talking to members of the congregation about pulpit coverage. She has gotten one "if you need me to, I can try" response. The rest have been people who don't have time to pull it together.
- Assuming 2/7 is our only Communion Sunday, we will have Teri Motley come as professional pulpit supply for that week. Otherwise, it will be lay people creating and leading a service. Jill can't get people to sign up for those 5 weeks.

- The plan is to use pre-recorded services from other sources. We will still present it with an email that includes our prayer concerns and announcements.
- The first Sunday for which a substitute minister is required is MLK Day so we would tap into Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Dr King's church.
- Cath: we have separate coverage for pastoral emergencies from neighboring ministers.

### **Reopening the church**

- The NH conference's position is about to come out: no in-person worship until 2/16.
- Cath's post-surgery unavailability would take us to 2/28.
- The UMC will likely say "keep following local standards"
- Ann: do we want to go with 2/28 and revisit at February's cabinet meeting? Consensus was yes.
- Cath: If surgery gets rescheduled does it change things? Susan: doesn't think so. We should at least follow the UCC guidelines. Cath: Is this the case even with Bill's concerns about physical presence driving financial support? Consensus was yes.
- Cath: we could start having outdoor services before June.

### **In-person 12/24 service**

- It will be no more than 20 minutes with no singing. We will read scripture, have prayers, and light candles. We shouldn't park in the parking lot as that's where we will be worshipping.
- Cath and the Deacons thought they'd wait until 12/20 to decide go/no-go based on safety guidelines and weather conditions. Should we just cancel that or wait until the 20th? Who will make the decision? Cath is working on a good online service.
- Susan: we should wait until the 20<sup>th</sup>. There was general agreement by nods and vocalization. Susan: tradition is important, especially at a time like this.
- Carol: thinks the question about suspending services is only about indoor services. Jill agrees that there's no inconsistency between deciding not to have in-person worship indoors and having a short outdoor Christmas Eve service.
- Cath: will it feel like a worthwhile event with no music, etc.? Susan: maybe we could do an instrumental Silent Night? Cath: she would sing Silent Night if someone played it on Christmas Eve. It's hard to ask people not to sing music they know.
- Ann: thinks people are craving in-person worship so much that it would be satisfying even if it's a greatly reduced experience. There was general agreement.
- Cath: who makes the decision about 12/20? Bill: leave it to the Deacons. Amy: whoever's figuring out the logistics should make the decision. Ann: Is that the Deacons with Trustees input? Susan: yes, particularly if the parking lot needs to be cleaned and lights adjusted.
- Consensus: we will leave the decision to the Deacons.

### **Emergency Management Training**

- Cath sent a resource out to the whole cabinet. Ann: clicked on the link and it was a closed poll for choosing a good time. She couldn't find how to register.
- Cath: will follow up to find what the decision on date and time was. This coming week is her really bad workload week pre-Christmas so she won't get to it until after Christmas. Ann: is willing to chase it down with Dave Coffey.

### **Trustees Report**

- Nothing major.

## Finance & Treasurer's Report

BCC YTD Financial Summary	Actual Income	Actual Ex-penses	Income vs Expenses + / -
November	\$89,821	\$77,906	\$11,916

- Nothing further to add.

### Outreach Report

- Collected \$725 of gift cards for SHARE
- Adopted 8 kids
- Bought 5 market basket gift cards for single adults
- Adopted a family for Thanksgiving
- Gave out breakfast & dinner meal basket for a family in Brookline through the town welfare office. Offered to do one for Christmas but hasn't heard back.

### Fundraising

- Christmas Faire: the firepit raffle will be drawn at noon today. Carol will send the name of the winner to Cath who will put it in the bulletin for next week.
- Ann: do we want to put the raffle winner's name on our Facebook page? Carol: when the winner picks up the firepit, we can see if they're willing to take a picture we can put up.

### Publicity

- Candy has made a note to start sending the Cabinet updates on monthly activities.
- This month, with the newspaper being basically nonexistent, it has been Facebook posts to the Hollis-Brookline page and Megan posting THM information.
- Cath: Is there a requirement to post notice of Annual Meeting to social media? Candy: yes, we changed that a couple of years ago.

### Deacons' Report

- The deacons met via zoom on 11/29/20.
- Discussed current COVID-19 positivity rates and local conditions and decided to recommend to the Cabinet that in person worship be suspended until conditions are more favorable for gathering together.
- Discussed the idea of having a brief outdoor service at 7pm on Christmas Eve. Decided to keep the option open and to ask the Cabinet to make the decision on Sunday, December 20, about whether the outdoor service will be cancelled.
- Decided to invite someone to share a Christmas memory at the beginning of each coffee hour during Advent to promote fellowship and to help us to feel connected while we are apart.
- Confirmed that we will place and light 50 luminaries (half the usual amount) outside the church on Christmas Eve, even if there is no service.
- Discussed logistics of preparing for Rev. Cath's 6-week surgical recovery in 2021.

## **Minister's Report:**

### **December 2020 (through 12/6)**

Since this goes in the church's record, the Covid-19 global pandemic led the church to stop in person meetings and services on March 13, 2020. In person service resumed over the summer and resumed weekly from 9/27 – 11/15. With the rise in cases, we went to remote worship only starting 11/22.

- Averaging 29.25 hours/week, which puts me between 21-51 hours over since Sept. 13. This time last year, I was 2-30 hours over.  
Pastoral counseling over the phone & in person
- Virtual coffee hours on 11/8, 11/15, 11/22, 11/29 and 12/6.
- Online Prayer Group: 11/4, 11/11, 11/18, 12/2.
- Figuring out Advent wreath lighting liturgy and recruiting volunteers. Helping record some of the videos.
- Getting 2021 Stewardship Pledge Form mailing project out the door.
- Closing the loops on the Boy Scouts of America bankruptcy filing.
- Last two Video Discussion Groups.
- Graveside service for Earl Bosquet on 11/14.
- Working on pulpit supply plan for knee surgery with Jill.
- Getting coverage for pastoral emergencies for knee surgery.
- Publishing worship plan for Advent – Transfiguration.
- Trying & failing to recruit some folks for empty leadership positions.
- Thanksgiving holiday
- Beginning worship plan for Ash Weds – Easter 4.
- Working on a 12/27 worship service with Mason & Hollis.

### **Services:**

- 11/8: [In person worship as well as on-line] Getting everyone around one table.
- 11/15: [In person worship as well as on-line] Stewardship keeps us from being indifferent to God.
- 11/22: [Remote only] Stewardship allows us to partner with organizations who help us see where we are blind to the harms we cause.
- 11/29: [Remote only] God offers us an “and yet” to change the course of history.
- 12/6: [Remote only] We can offer comfort to each other to better see the comfort God is offering us.

**Regular Meetings:** Cabinet, Deacons, Moderator/Minister, Clergy Support

### **Other Items:**

We decided between the November and December Cabinet meetings that we would offer remote worship only on December 6<sup>th</sup> and December 13<sup>th</sup>.

The meeting was closed in prayer at 9:43 am by Rev. Cath.