

West Philadelphia Mennonite Fellowship
Church Council Meeting
February 17, 2016

Present: Alex Esh Bouwman (church council chair/deacon), Betsy Sneller (HRC), Lorie Hershey (Pastor), Brenda Rich (Elder), Reuben Wetherbee (HRC), Nick Lordi (Elder), Bryan Geib (Deacon), Dorianna Lordi (Administrative Assistant).

Absent: Tim Martin Johnson (HRC), Brooke Blough (Deacon), Mark Michalovic (Elder), Laurie Callan (Elder).

Minutes Recorded by Dorianna Lordi.

Alex began meeting at 7:05 p.m.

Brenda prayed.

1. November 11th Council meeting minutes approved via email

2. Pastoral Team Items

a. Partnering with Redemption Housing (See Addendum)

- Alex emailed out information regarding Redemption housing's business plan prior to the meeting.
- Lorie explained some of the Redemption housing steps, process, and involvement with WPMF so far.
- Pastoral team recommends that church council take steps to move forward in discerning and learning about being a partnering congregation with Redemption housing.
- Church council members asked questions and Nick and pastoral team responded.
- Nick discussed where he is in the process of starting this non-profit. He is spending this year laying ground work and building a board.
- Pastoral team shared some resources and processes for WPMF that are offered from other organizations.
- Will have a congregational meeting in early April about Redemption Housing.
- Council agreed to move forward with the process of exploring and deciphering what roles WPMF can fulfill with Redemption Housing.

b. Affirmation meeting for Lay Leaders (See Addendum)

- Pastoral team had received some feedback regarding the process of affirmation of lay leaders.
- Pastoral team shared the congregations view of leadership being less traditional or formal.
- Pastoral team wants to ensure that the process of affirmation is fair and not intimidating to the individual being affirmed or member of the congregation.
- Council discussed some options as well as the process of prospective leader leaving the room and returning during affirmation process.
- Discussed the goal of affirmation meeting is to affirm, where most of the discernment process should be completed prior to the meeting not at the meeting.

- Council agreed that for future affirmation meetings the church will be presented with a short bio to get to know the individual before the meeting, as well as encourage the congregation to bring reservations and questions to HRC before the affirmation meeting.
- HRC will continue to prepare prospective leader with talking points, mainly focusing on getting to know the individual.
- When conducting the affirmation meeting, facilitator will articulate role of the prospective leader, as well as provide a brief summary to the individual of what was discussed when the individual left the room.

3. HRC items

- HRC has concluded the process of gathering applications for sabbatical pastor position. Ready to begin interview process and plan is to decide on someone by mid March.

4. Deacons items

a. New sign outside

- New sign is completed and ready to be placed outside.

b. NVNNL loan update

- Deacons referenced recent congregational budget meeting where congregation discussed options to forgive NVNNL loan.
- NVNNL was able to refinance and WPMF recently receive a check for the full amount loaned.
- Church council discussed different options, as well as referenced previous congregational meeting.
- Church council approved a shalom fund gift of \$2,000 to be given to NVNNL through Franconia Mennonite Conference. Also agreed to revisit the possibility of an additional gift next year.

c. Building & Space with visioning

- Pastoral team has begun the conversation to decipher what our priorities and visions are for the future regarding building and worship spaces.
- Lorie referenced some congregational hopes and dreams from previous visioning meetings.
- Council discussed if our current space aligns with our calling and vision, as well as if it allows for growth and opportunity.
- Deacons will compile a survey for the congregation so council can get a better picture of the values and vision of congregation.
- Pastoral team and council will continue to discuss options and evaluate goals regarding space.

Next church council meeting is scheduled for May 11, 2016 at 7:00 p.m. in the church office.

Alex concluded meeting at 8:55 p.m.

Addendum:



REDEMPTION HOUSING

Dear Church Council,

As you all know, for many months I have been planning and preparing to launch Redemption Housing. I have already visited a few of you as well as others in our congregation for input or help along the way; I am very grateful, especially to Pastor Lorie, for your continued, thoughtful feedback.

The year 2015 was the start of something special for Redemption Housing. With the help of a committed few I have developed business and fundraising plans, designed a professional logo, launched a website, and began to reach out to neighborhood organizations in regards to ongoing partnerships. As a church we have also been moving forward. We have heard multiple sermons in the past six months on the injustices of mass incarceration. We have partnered with Kingdom Builders Network to donate soap and toiletries to inmates in the Philadelphia Prison System, and in conjunction with MCC we have recently concluded a study in Michelle Alexander's book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*.

For these reasons I am also excited for what is to come, both for Redemption Housing and for West Philadelphia Mennonite Fellowship. I will be spending most of the year raising financial support, with a goal of \$150,000 to launch the ministry. I am still seeking the right team of committed board members and soon plan to start on the state's incorporation process. I have been connecting with area prison/reentry ministries, and in the coming weeks will shift this focus towards local church partnerships.

My hope is that 2016 will also be a year for WPMF to continue upon our current path of education, advocacy, and compassion for incarcerated and returning citizens. My desire is to continue this journey together, to grow and support one another as we realize this calling of God to the prisoners among us. It is important to me, personally, for our church to continue in this way because this is my personal connection to the body of Christ, and I long to see my body pushing itself for the goals of the Kingdom. But even more so, I realize that my greatest spiritual experiences have come not from the church, but from the streets. And I desire for us to collectively share the Holy Spirit in this way.

Starting this nonprofit is a long process, and I purposely plan to take my time to ensure that I am doing everything I can so that the organization might be healthy and sustainable. What this means is that as a congregation we also have the time to grow and change our culture, to be ready for what I hope is coming next. I ask that you consider the following proposal, which seeks to make 2016 a year of partnership and continued growth. But I also ask that we as congregational leadership prep our members for what lies ahead with continuing trainings, conferences, sermons, and prison tours.

Grace and Peace,

Nick Lordi

Redemption Housing is seeking to partner with West Philadelphia Mennonite Fellowship for financial, relational, and administrative support. For many years WPMF has reached out to its community through various friendships and projects which closely align with the church's goal to "work for the Shalom of the city." A partnership between Redemption Housing and WPMF will help the congregation to more fully live into its desire to be welcoming, loving, and peacemaking.

At this time Redemption Housing asks that WPMF provide financial support in the following ways:

1. Add Redemption Housing to the 2017 mission budget.
2. Approve a Shalom Fund grant for a total of \$21,000. This grant will include two components: \$6,000 for startup costs, consisting mainly of incorporation and administrative expenses, and a \$15,000 matching grant.
 - a. Startup Costs (\$6,000) - In 2016 Redemption Housing will be incorporating in the State of Pennsylvania and filing for nonprofit status with the IRS. These funds will provide for legal and filing expenses as well as initial fundraising materials.
 - b. Matching Grant (\$15,000) - The Shalom Fund application asks that "requested funds be leveraged, providing matching funds or in some way multiplying the gift." This \$15,000 portion of the grant represents one year's rent for Redemption Housing (\$1,250 per month). It would be used to kick start Redemption Housing's fundraising process by providing incentive for the organization's first donors to multiply their gifts.
3. Choose to become Redemption Housing's fiscal sponsor during its startup period. (See attachment.)

At this time Redemption Housing asks that WPMF provide relational support in the following ways:

1. Foster connections within the broader Mennonite community for the purpose further developing Redemption Housing.
2. Commit to become a one of Redemption Housing's Partnering Congregations, churches where residents will be encouraged to attend and become involved.
3. Mobilize a committee to act as the bridge between Redemption Housing and the congregation. This committee will be responsible for keeping the congregation informed and organizing volunteer opportunities.

At this time Redemption Housing asks that WPMF provide administrative support in the following ways:

1. Commit to allow Redemption Housing to use WPMF's office space and desktop computer for the duration of 2016. Space would be used for monthly board meetings, weekly meetings with potential partners and donors, storage of documents, and layout space for development planning.
2. Become an official Partnering Congregation, further giving Redemption housing credibility in both the broader Mennonite and West Philadelphia communities. This could include would not be limited to an official partnership announcement on WPMF's website and in an email to its congregation, listing on Redemption Housing's website, and an announcement to Franconia Conference.

Addendum:

For Church Council Agenda
Feb. 17, 2016

1. Redemption Housing Proposal:

Based on Redemption Housing's proposal to WPMF (see "Redemption Housing WPMF Church Council Proposal"), Pastoral Team is recommending that Church Council make a commitment for WPMF to move towards these areas of support and decide which pieces to commit to in 2016 and beyond, based on our respective committee's jurisdiction.

2. Discussion for Council: Change to the affirmation process of choosing congregational leaders

Pastoral Team received feedback about our congregational meetings to approve leaders being asked to serve on Elders, Deacons, or HRC. Specifically, being uncomfortable with the process of asking questions of a candidate on the spot, sending them out of the room, and giving space for the congregation to voice anything about them. They felt that the scrutiny feels a bit intimidating and may discourage people from volunteering for important positions if they feel the bar is set too high or they want to avoid being the center of attention.

Lorie resonated with some of the feedback, and sees our congregation's culture as having a more egalitarian view of leadership, not wanting one person to have too much authority or influence, yet a high accountability and intentional process of affirming a congregational leader. And so Pastoral Team discussed our congregation's values around this process, the growth that's happening in our congregation, and ideas for making the congregational meeting more of an affirmation meeting.

We see that WPMF values transparency and face to face discussion, as well as having a variety of people use their gifts in leadership positions. As our congregation grows, we may not know the new candidates as well as we have in the past. Therefore, we may have the tendency to ask more questions of some candidates than others. We also noted that the only clear step of expressing reservations about a candidate is in our affirmation meeting, when we ask the candidate to step out of the room before the CDMs begin.

So we are proposing that Church Council discuss these possible changes to our process and come up with some viable options for our process of affirming congregational leaders:

- When a candidate is offered to the congregation, whether elder, deacon, HRC, the candidate is provided with talking points to help frame what they might share at the affirmation meeting. Congregation also sees these questions.
- If congregation has other questions, they are invited to talk with the candidate, or add other questions to those being asked. (within reason)
- The candidate could also be asked to provide answers/information in a brief form before the affirmation meeting. (i.e. electronically or written)
- Should there be reservations about a candidate, we recommend a clear path for the congregation to address them before the congregational meeting. Therefore, the congregational meeting is truly an affirmation meeting and the candidate need only go out of the room when the CDMs begins.