

West Philadelphia Mennonite Fellowship
Congregational Meeting
November 18, 2018

Attendance: Tim Martin Johnson, Lorie Hershey, Sherri Michalovic, Mel Esh, Cindy Cassel, Matt MacNeil, Ariel Ressler MacNeil, Shelley Crognale, Alex Esh Bauman, Rebecca Weber, Jeff Knightly, Jim Kurtz, Ken Beidler, Bryan Geib, Mark Michalovic, Sheldon Rich, Robert Kuehl, Christine Waanders, Joe Syzdek, Amanda Esh Bauman, Nancy Geryk, Tim Schellenberg, Carol Buhrman, Sylvia Horst, Zac Steele, Cynthia Boyd, Elizabeth Hamilton, Reuben Wetherbee, Amy Hochstetler, Katie Tan, Ethan Tan, Nate Yoder, Carol Martin Johnson, Laurie Callan, Sarah Gotwals Rody, Kathie Sauder, Peter Horst, Angelina Horst, Elaine Shenk, 1 additional individual (do not have name)

Tim Martin Johnson began the meeting at 11:47 a.m.

1. Additional copies of a report (listing issues with current building and describing the process to search for additional meeting space) were distributed. Tim MJ explained that we would not simply repeat information from this report at this meeting. The purpose of the meeting is to provide additional information and to hear from congregation. Tim outlined today's agenda:
 - a. What are the problems?
 - b. What are our options?
 - c. Sharing our thoughts
 - d. Listening committee report (Matt MacNeil and Laurie Callan will listen and then report back as to what they heard).
2. What are the problems?

Jeff Knightly described the overall current situation at Calvary, and indicated that we have several options: to move or to stay (with various changes needed, especially becoming more active in terms of advocating for needs and being involved in maintenance issues).

Pastor Lorie Hershey described how in the 1990s, the CCCC (4 C's) was set up with the idea to save the building by having a community of users working together. There is confusion in that model. We have a renter/landlord relationship, but we are also part of the community of building users which is not based on the landlord/renter relationship. She described additional challenges in building maintenance and communication. Kol Tzedek, WPMF, and Curio have advocated for changes to leadership. Right now, leadership is held by the Calvary congregation and the Trustees, and changes need to go through their Church Council. The Board and Calvary Trustees are thinking through a new leadership structure, which would involve an Advisory Committee. WPMF could possibly participate in the Board or Advisory Committee to help trustees make better decisions about how building is run, which would also free up the Board to do more fundraising (original intent of board). Lorie indicated that this is currently being discussed and moving through various groups. If we want to effect change, we would need to have greater involvement, potentially be on board and also on Advisory Committee.

Jeff Knightly indicated that at the July 2018 meeting, we heard the question, "What are the issues?" Jeff then provided a summary of many issues that have arisen repeatedly over the past number of years related to Management, Worship space, Office space, Bathrooms,

Kitchen, Nursery, Sunday School rooms, Outside space, Security, and Communication, many of which have still not been resolved.

3. Rebecca Weber then addressed four options, laying out pros and cons for each:
 - a. ***Buy our own building.*** It would be our choice where/how things are laid out, and how the space is managed. It would be more expensive, and we would likely not be able to do this on our own, but would need to partner with another organization. We have had conversations with Kol Tzedek, they're not ready to do this now.
 - b. ***Meet in late afternoon/evening.*** There would be more potential spaces to consider that would be nearer to where we are now. The timing is less ideal, particularly for families with small children. We would need to talk about timing (i.e., 4 pm vs. 7 pm).
 - c. ***Move to The Common Place (TCP).*** The building is in good condition, there is plenty of space, most spaces are air-conditioned (minus the sanctuary), and it meets our basic space requirements. There is competent management (several WPMFers visited and viewed an empty basement area; several weeks later a nearly complete commercial kitchen was in that space. There is a rec center across the street, and many activities in building, which would be good for partnerships. It is located 1.25 miles from this space. Many of us think of our current setting as an ideal location, and this may mean getting to church by an alternative method (bike, car, public transportation). The meal space in basement is not currently accessible (2 stairways to basement). New Spirit congregation has been in conversation about merging with Grace Christian Fellowship, and the pastors would prefer to wait for us to move until that is complete, likely by fall 2019.
 - d. ***Stay at Calvary.*** This is our ideal location. We're familiar with it and are comfortable here, despite the challenges that Jeff described (management and maintenance issues that we just heard).

Rebecca pointed out that each of these options will require follow-through (i.e., a feasibility group to study purchasing a building; examining an evening time and revisiting buildings with this in mind; working with TCP to negotiate arrangements; getting more involved at Calvary on board and also with maintenance).

4. Sharing our thoughts.

Tim Martin Johnson then opened the floor for every person present (outside of Council) to share their ideas. Each person had one minute to speak, with Ethan Tan as time-keeper. We first took two minutes to take notes about what we wanted to say. Thirty individuals spoke during this time, with three additional individuals who were unable to be at the meeting voicing their thoughts via email to Tim. These 33 individuals expressed their first choice option as follows (as closely as could be determined), followed by reasons given for that choice (a number of which were expressed more than once):

- a. **Stay at Calvary: 8 people**
 - We can deal with building issues with more time and resources;
 - We can get more involved;
 - We want to help save the building; we are saddened by old buildings that are shuttered in our neighborhood;

- Basement space at TCP is not accessible to everyone;
- No one lives in TCP neighborhood;
- Calvary neighborhood is safe for arrival on bike;
- Many of us walk to church and TCP is farther away, making that more difficult for us.

b. Move to The Common Place: 17 people

- We are concerned about safety/security for staff at Calvary;
- Calvary has already spent a lot of money, and deacons have invested significant time/effort, yet building issues are unresolved; we're not convinced more time/effort will make a difference;
- Having a rep on board at Calvary is not going to have a major impact. Many of the problems need money, not just change of management. Is it worth our time and energy to restore this building?
- Many of us currently drive to church and the difference is not that great from current location.
- Some of us actually live closer to TCP;
- Accessibility could be addressed by installing chair lift;
- TCP is a community where we can also build relationships, and use our gifts and talents. Might shake us up (in good way).
- Does our presence at Calvary contribute to the gentrification of University City?
- TCP has an office with steady, competent staff, and is a positive shared community;
- Parking lot is a plus.
- We can adapt—what will be the fallout if we stay at Calvary and nothing changes?
- We could use this year before TCP is ready as an ultimatum for Calvary.
- We stayed home several times because of the heat situation last year.

c. Move to a later afternoon/evening time: 8 people

- Pessimism that change will not happen at Calvary. If there's no accountability at Calvary, things won't work.
- Putting in lots of time/effort at Calvary takes away time/effort from other initiatives.
- We can adjust to a later time—many others have done this successfully.
- TCP is difficult for those of us who walk, don't bike, and don't have cars.

d. Purchase our own building: 0 people

In addition to these numbers, one individual stated they were willing to consider any of the first three options—anything other than buying a building.

5. At 1:00 pm, Tim asked the listening committee to share what they had heard.

Laurie Callan pointed out that no one opted to buy a building. Some people are willing to try to dig in a little more and stay at Calvary for a period of time to see if changes can happen before giving up on Calvary. A lot of people are ready to move on. A number of people stated that they feel one way but are willing to go with the group's decision.

Matt MacNeil thanked everyone who shared (30 people). In council meetings we hadn't talked about the feeling of obligation to stay with (save) the building, so it's interesting that this came up. Many people talked about safety issues and that we care a lot about our staff,

Pastor Lorie and Dorianna. He was encouraged to hear that people care about these issues. He did not hear anyone talk about heat, which is notable. That's been a problem but there are so many other issues aside from the heat. He also did not hear anyone say that if we move to the Common Place they're going to stop coming. Maybe these individuals did not come to this meeting. He got the sense that we are in this together as a family.

6. There were about ten minutes for Q&A:

- Safety/security issues were new to me and are troublesome. Could office space be held elsewhere?
Yes, it's possible, but it's not ideal. Office and Sunday am worship space are very connected for all kinds of reasons.
- What are the chances of the accessibility issues at Common Place being addressed?
No plans at present, but we don't really know, since we haven't discussed this with them.
- Is TCP a definite possibility or do they have concerns because of the upcoming merger?
There are some uncertainties, but TCP has expressed a clear interest in working with us.
- Can we hear from the council about next steps?
Church Council will need to process all of what we have heard and figure out where to go from here.
- Can we hear more about what all would be involved in being on the advisory board? Who among us is willing to put in extra time/effort to volunteering for these added needs?
Serving on the board would also involve getting involved in some of the management and projects. It's not just meetings. These volunteers will need to come from outside of Church Council, whose members are currently "sprinting" and cannot take on yet more responsibilities. Management is the big issue, and we have not been able to effectively address these issues, despite much time and effort to do so.
- Has there been any willingness to have the building professionally managed by outside entity?
This possibility has been raised at the board, but it came down to (a lack of) money, and has not been considered as a viable option.

7. Tim MJ pointed out that Council has a diversity of opinions as has been expressed in this meeting. He led the group in reciting the Lord's prayer together, and concluded the meeting at 1:17 p.m.

Minutes recorded by Elaine Shenk (HRC rep)