

BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH
ANNUAL CONGREGATION MEETING
January 28, 2018

The meeting was **called to order** at 10:48 AM in the sanctuary by Church Council President, Ron Harapat.

Pastor Christopher Miller opened the meeting with devotion from Colossians 1:15-23, and prayer, emphasizing verse 17: He (Christ) is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Bill Lester and Nancy Lester reported that 43 (forty-three) voting members and 3 (three) non-voting members were present at the meeting. Ron declared the needed **quorum of 23 (twenty-three) as met.**

Approval of Minutes of the 2017 Annual Meeting

There was no discussion, corrections, or additions to the minutes. A **motion was made** to approve the minutes. Motion seconded. A member wondered why the minutes of the special congregational meeting of June 3, 2017 were not included in the Annual Report. President Ron and Secretary Linda noted it as an oversight on their part. A vote was taken and the **motion to approve was carried.**

Audit Report

Dawn Jacobson, of *Keepin' Books* in Whitefish, conducted audits on January 8, 2018, with Ken Olson present, of the following accounts: General Accounts, Women of Bethany, Trust Fund, Sunday school, Good Samaritan Fund, and Youth Group. She found all accounts for the year 2017 to be in good standing. The **auditor's report was approved.**

Approval of General Budget for 2018

The congregation's Treasurer, Ken Olson, reported a slow, steady decline in financial giving of 23% over the past 5 (five) years. No questions were raised from the floor regarding the proposed budget per se.

Questions/comments from the floor:

- Is there a parallel between attendance and the giving decline?
- Ron Harapat responded that attendance numbers have stabilized over the past 2-3 years.
- Pastor Christopher said the median attendance for 2017 was 82; Chris Miller said the average was 81.
- How do we cover the deficit?
- How much longer can we do this?
- Is there a penalty for paying off the mortgage (in a lump sum)?
- Would the sale of the ARK pay off the mortgage?

- A question on the appraisal of the ARK was noted and reserved for discussion under *New Business*.

A **motion was made** to accept the 2018 budget proposal. Motion seconded. A vote was taken and the **motion to accept was carried**.

Elections

Bev Ostroot of the Nominating Committee presented three names to fill the council terms ending for Linda Dahlman, RobinLynn Stobart, and Jacqueline Whitehorn: Linda and RobinLynn agreed to stay on council for another term; Niki Knauth agreed to fill Jacqueline's position. A **motion was made** to close nominations from the floor. Motion seconded. Ron declared a **vote by acclamation to accept** Niki, RobinLynn, and Linda as council members.

Ron thanked Jacqueline for her time spent on council.

Trust Fund Committee

The Trust Fund Committee is comprised of 3 members: Marge Bagley, Keith Kapelke, and Karyl Gopp. All three agreed to continue as members of the committee, so a vote wasn't necessary. Keith reported that the account grew nicely in 2017 (see page 16 of the 2017 Annual Report).

Old Business

There were no specific agenda items for *Old Business*. A wide-ranging discussion occurred during this time concerning dwindling attendance and membership at Bethany. The discussion began with a member reminding the council of a letter submitted last year by said member in reference to this topic, and wondered what, if anything, had been done since then? *See "Motion Made/Seconded/Passed" at conclusion of Old Business.*

Questions/comments from the floor, about membership:

- Is our membership roster up-to-date?
- Is our current method of tracking members out-of-date?
- How do we contact folks about their membership status?
- Whatever we're doing isn't working.
- Wording of a document is important.
- Chris Miller said that she has been working on updating membership for 2-3 years, but that it is difficult because people don't always let the church office know when they move or begin attending another church. Chris has a letter on file from the tenure of Pastor Jack Shannon that is used to contact people about their membership wishes.
- People should be personally contacted before sending a form letter to them, asking why they no longer attend Bethany.
- Important meetings that require congregational voting could be attended by members who haven't been involved in the life of the church for years.

- Could this be a good way to combine purposes: reaching out to people to find out why they are not attending, and determining who is eligible to vote on big issues, like sale of the ARK.
- Can Lutherans be members of multiple churches? Pastor Christopher replied that there is no rule against this; membership rosters are an administrative, practical matter, mainly to keep track of attendees.
- Is there a monetary cost to keeping non-attending people on the church membership roster?
- President Ron referred to pages 7-8 of Bethany's Constitution, reading the stated membership requirements.
- Pastor Christopher noted that the by-law change referenced in the Constitution was not changed.
- President Ron read the letter earlier referenced that began the discussion, dated February 26, 2017, to the congregation.
- What will be done? *Council will review and come up with a plan.*
- It should be made clear that we are reaching out in Christian love and concern for people to urge them to return, not just because we want to "clean up our roster."
- We don't need to change a by-law in the Constitution before we contact people. Do the letter anyway.
- By-laws should be cleaned up—stop referring to something that doesn't exist.
- Can a letter be sent without adhering to the by-laws?
- Do council members each still have their assigned calling lists for church members? *Yes.*
- We should have guidelines for voting members.
- A letter should be welcoming, a gentle reminder; loving, warm, not accusatory.
- Follow up the letter with personal contact.
- A letter could be sent to snowbirds who attend but are not members.
- Include a self-addressed, stamped envelope from the church for replies.
- Send the letter to everyone so no one feels singled out.

After much discussion, it was asked that the motion made earlier be re-stated. A **motion was made** to give church council members permission to create a letter, based on the member letter of February 26, 2017, to be sent to all non-attending members of Bethany Lutheran. Motion seconded. **Motion carried.**

New Business

Selection of Nominating Committee: The Nominating Committee meets in the fall to select candidates to fill openings for church council and Trust Fund Committee. Those who volunteered at the annual meeting to be on the Nominating Committee for 2019 are Rebecca Miller, Bev Ostroot, and Doug Buffington. **Volunteers accepted.**

Karen Bradstreet and Art Crane were each presented a *Thank You* and check as a token of appreciation for the wonderful musical talent they share so unselfishly with the congregation.

President Ron gave an update on the status of the proposed sale of the ARK:

- Council explores ways to relieve Bethany of its debt/deficit.
- Flathead County Library System expresses strong interest in buying ARK.
- June 3, 2017: Special congregational meeting to explain decision to offer the ARK for sale. Congregation votes to proceed with potential sale.
- The Task Force created to handle the details of a potential sale could know anywhere from February 6 to February 21, 2018, if the library is able to purchase.
- Library representatives indicate that they may be able to pay earnest money of \$250,000, and that it would take approximately 2 (two) years to remodel and then open to the public.
- Legal counsel has been retained by Bethany to guide us in the process.
- Appraisal of the ARK building and land is complete.

Discussion centered on the parking needs/parking maintenance of both the church and the library. Those are details yet to be determined by the Task Force with the Library if the sale occurs.

It was stated that the Task Force has done “a great job” thus far and can handle these details without further discussion today.

Recognition of Outgoing Council Member

Ron thanked Jacqueline Whitehorn for her time spent on council. Jacqueline was a mentor for Ron as he began his first term, and he expressed his gratitude for her guidance and counsel.

Ron also took the time to say *Thank You* to everyone who wears the different hats of sharing in the ministry of Bethany Lutheran:

- Council members
- Karen Bradstreet
- Art Crane
- Sunday school teachers
- Altar guild
- Musicians
- Women of Bethany
- Care Team
- Prayer Team
- Worship volunteers
- Folks who clean the property
- Congregational Life participants
- 4th of July Parade participants
- Kelly Jorgenson and Sara Olson—janitors
- Chris in the office
- Pastor Christopher

All council members were reminded to remain after the annual meeting for the organizational meeting of the 2018 Council.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:17 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Linda Dahlman
Council Secretary