

MLC Governing Council Meeting Minutes

February 5, 2017

Approved

Present: Barbara Bachechi, Al Burmeister, Ellen Dobson, Pastor Chris Heller, Dave Hartenberger, Ron Kulju, Brian Osterloh, Cassandra Osterloh

Guests: Marian Kulju, Pastor Anne Morawski

1. Brian called the meeting to order at 11:06 a.m.
2. Opening Prayer by Pastor Chris.
3. New Business
 - a. Adoption of constitution changes – informational only. Last version updated approved by RMS was 2012. Clause regarding Synod approving constitution. The constitution stands as is. Subsequent copies will need to be approved by RMS.
 - b. Part-time/shared Pastor
 - i. Information from Synod. Marian and Ron Kulju talked with Pastor Sarah Moening this past week. Ron's email sent to Council members with the information gathered from their conversation with Pastor Sarah. They will be meeting again Tuesday, February 7. Ron will contact those members who wanted to help out to get them on board.
 - ii. Potential next steps. Need to start have conversation with Pastor Chris regarding part-time. Ron moved to create a compensation subcommittee of the Council comprising Brian, Ellen, and Al to work with Pastor Chris on potential changes to his time and compensation. Dave seconded the motion which was passed unanimously.
 - c. Changes to the Church's bank account. With new members and changes to the Council due to our recent election, changes are needed on Messiah's bank account. Barbara moved to remove Jean Paananen and Susan Utegg from the account and add Brian Osterloh and Al Burmeister to Messiah Lutheran Church's Compass Bank account. Ron seconded the motion which was passed unanimously.
4. The meeting was adjourn at 11:33 a.m.
5. Closing prayer.

Dear Council Members,

Per request of Council President, Marian and I had an initial teleconference with Pastor Sarah Moening of the Bishop's office regarding the realities of employing a part-time Pastor at Messiah. To start the conversation, Marian and I sent the following questions ahead of time. These questions served as a good starting point, but the conversation went well beyond these as Pastor Sarah had interesting and appropriate questions of her own. Below is our attempt to capture the conversation for your review prior to the special council meeting on Sunday:

Can we share some of Pastor Chris Heller's time with another congregation in Albuquerque? Are you aware of any congregation needing part time pastoral care that could share in his compensation? How would Messiah approach this?

Pastor Sarah has no current knowledge of available ELCA needs, but would check with Bishop Gonia to see if he has more information. We informed her of the rumor that Pastor LaHam was retiring soon, but she was not aware of that. Marian and I also mentioned that Pastor Anne is retiring soon as another area where Pastor Chris might share his time.

Pastor Sarah emphasized that they are not looking for the easiest answers, i.e., the Synod will not place an available body where there is need. It has to be a good match for all involved.

Pastor Sarah seemed to be leaning toward a near-term, and likely short-term solution, that would be to reach out ecumenical partners to see if they have current needs.

Pastor Chris has shared with us that he would not be able to continue on a part-time salary for an extended period and has placed his name on the Synod Call List. In the event that Pastor Chris should find a suitable call before we can find a partnering arrangement, are you aware of any local congregations that would be willing to share their pastor with us? Again, how would Messiah approach this?

Again, Pastor Sarah was not aware of any immediate needs. She will speak with Bishop Gonia. This question was jointly addressed with the first question.

Finally, if neither of the first two scenarios can be arranged, is the Bishop's office aware of any Pastor that might be looking for a part-time position? We are simultaneously working on cost cutting options, so we don't have a hard number yet for what we can afford, but I would guess we are looking at a total compensation package amounting to \$40,000-50,000. (We'll confirm that soon.)

There are pastor candidates looking for part-time positions, but this would reduce the candidate pool, of course. Also, it may be difficult to relocate a pastor to a part-time position.

What else should we be considering?

This will be an ongoing dialogue, as there are no easy answers to our complex situation. Pastor Sarah assured us that we are not walking alone in this. They are there to support us. She wants to meet again next week after we meet with Messiah Council and she meets with Bishop Gonia.

Much of the conversation was spent with her wanting to learn more details from us.

She reassured us that many congregations have the significant portion of their budgets apportioned to staff compensation. We are not unique.

She wanted to hear our personal observations of the situation. She was pleased that we were frank and level-headed. She was particularly interested in hearing about strengths to build upon and weaknesses needed to be addressed.

The teleconference was not rushed. It was a frank discussion from both sides. Marian and I are encouraged that we are getting adequate attention from the Bishop's office and that Pastor Sarah is genuinely concerned for the well-being of Messiah and for Pastor Chris.

Pastor Sarah was pleased that we are approaching this with disciplined and controlled leadership. (Not in panic.) She views the solutions to be multifold. There likely will be short-term, mid-term, and long term solutions.

Should you have additional questions or concerns that Marian and I neglected, please bring share them with the group on Sunday.

In His service,

Ron and Marian Kulju