

TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH, Lansdale, PA
September 24, 2024 Council Governance Meeting

The September 24th Council Governance meeting was called to order by William Shimer, President, at 7:01 p.m., in Luther Hall followed by devotion/prayer by Pastor Fowler in which we focused on Exodus Chapter 16 reflecting on the desert testing of Moses and how God provided for their needs of the day with manna and quail as He provides for us today even as we focus now on the budget challenges we are facing.

In Attendance: Council: Sandy Cottrell, Curt Deardorff, David Freudig, Pastor Fowler, Julie Kinzel, Susan Pashos, Jamie Price, William Shimer and Michael Voicheck. Others: Pastor Steiner. Excused: Dianne Kalb due to the confidential nature of the planned adjoining meeting session with the Strategic Design Task Force (SDTF). Visitors: none during the first part of the meeting; Part 2 session: Members of the SDTF (John Wittenbraker, Larry Ramsey-Macomber, Cassie Jewell, Bill Graeff (convener), and Karen Bergey.

The council agenda was approved, and the Council Covenant was read responsively. It was acknowledged that the prior Council minutes were edited and then approved via email (8/27/2024).

Financial Report: Jamie indicated that the important 2025 budget planning process continues. The forecasting process for 2025 is more complex due to changes in giving styles than the historical “placing a weekly envelope into the passing offertory plate”. She noted the 2025 Ministry Plan net budget is currently showing a negative balance of (\$8,864). The current surplus of \$88,545.41 (as of 8/31/24) 2024 actual vs YTD budget includes the giving challenge of the \$25,000 matching gift. Jamie indicated she expects giving to pick back up for October to end of year, compared to the summer slow down in giving. Regarding other financial decisions, **a motion was made by Pr Fritz and seconded by Susan to continue staff benefits level at the Gold⁺ level;** even as we maintain our benefits package level, the premiums will increase on March 1; **the motion passed.**

Pastor’s Report:

Pr Jonathan indicated there is continued growth with 18 new youth confirmations. Twenty-four students were registered in Sunday Church School (SCS) ; 31 attended. Trinity Alive service is going well, and new parents are volunteering. There is increasing participation across the 4th to 6th grade, Kids Rock, and 1st to 3rd grade programs for youth. New disciples represent the largest class this year. There has been positive engagement in the Wednesday book study. The parlor re-design is done.

The General Council session was adjourned at 7:35pm and the SDTF joined the Council members into a confidential session. The session provided the council for the first time with a presentation summary from the LEAD report with insights on the analyses, conclusions and recommendations from the SDTF as overseen by ELCA Deacon Peggy Hahn, Executive Director of LEAD. After a first Q&A opportunity, it was agreed that council would digest the full LEAD report and reconvene in another session with the SDTF on October 2 at 7:30pm. In the interim, council members were called upon to submit questions based on the review of the LEAD report. The September 24th meeting ended with a closing prayer at 8:40pm and was adjourned at 8:45pm.

Council Governance Meeting - Session 2 with the Strategic Design Task Force - October 2, 2024

Follow-up based on the LEAD report was opened at 7:33pm. In addition to the SDTF members, ELCA Deacon Peggy Hahn, Executive Director of LEAD joined using Zoom.

Bill Shimer, council president, reminded all that the council covenant and importantly, the confidentiality commitment still applied from the September 24th council meeting. Council introductions with Deacon Peggy Hahn, were shared. It was agreed that if council needed another meeting, it would be held October 8 at 7pm in Luther Hall.

Deacon Peggy began with a summary of her background and then shared a historical perspective of the evolving membership in the ELCA between 1987 to 2022, noting the obvious inflection point in 2020 due to the Covid 19 pandemic. To set the vision, she noted churches are growing older and smaller and we need to shift this decline; 80% of congregations have < 60 members in worship. She then went into describing the shift in staffing from administration to operations aiming to achieve a focus on community because people will come to worship if they feel an engagement into the community.

Deacon Peggy then went into the specific analyses regarding Trinity's staffing in the context of analyses of skills, defined contributions and budget constraints to manage the new structures and processes needed for "moving church [our church] forward". Her specific visions as supported by the SDTF focused on changing the roles of staff members (and elimination/redefining of some positions), cultivating a new population of volunteers and expanding Trinity's identity into the community. She provided specific analyses based on both new roles and recommendations for potential individuals to fill the new organization. The SDTF will serve to meet the needs of training for these new positions. Based on Peggy's interviews, she also commented on additional findings to be addressed by council.

It was agreed additional questions should be submitted to Bill Graeff and Bill Shimer with a cc to all of council by October 4th in preparation for the next session council wanted to have on October 8th. Session 2 was adjourned at 9:45pm.

Council Governance Meeting - Session 3 with the Strategic Design Task Force - October 8, 2024

This session focused mainly on details being clarified with a focus on roles and staffing costs. The SDTF then left.

It was acknowledged that at Trinity's current spending versus income and using the General Fund to cover financial short falls annually would result in the General Fund being depleted by 2029. It was noted that the negative 2024 budget passage at the annual meeting included promising to the congregation that council would work to balance a budget.

Budget assumptions were discussed. Additional discussion clarified the changes in staff roles and responsibilities recommended by Peggy, and reasoning behind assignments recommended for specific people. The implementation of the SDTF recommendations does require the changing of some positions and the elimination of previous roles and staff serving in them. A plan for informing the staff of the changes tentatively was planned for the end of October.

Post the SDTF leaving this session, additional details were discussed regarding Denny's employment resignation received by Pr Fritz. Council discussed the value Denny has offered to TLC and his years of service and discussions then followed around plans for the property committee to evaluate options for hiring a building and grounds director to assure the facilities were not neglected in the time of transition.

A motion was made by Bill Shimer and seconded by Jamie regarding recommendations for: a contractor proposal, estimated costs and quotes for cleaning services. Motion passed.

A general recommendation was made by Dave and seconded by Susan to accept the SDTF recommended plan. The motion passed. The meeting ended immediately after this vote.

Respectfully Submitted
Sandy Cottrell, Council Secretary