Session Notes

by Paul Bergsteinsson, Clerk of Session

May 2011

The Session held its regular monthly meeting in Congregational Hall on the evening of Tuesday, May 17th, moderated by Interim Pastor Dr. James Carter. A wide range of topics were incorporated in the docket for this meeting.

This was an important meeting in that it was the one at which Reverend Susan Rice announced to the Session her decision to leave BMPC to join her husband in Florida and follow a new career path that will include teaching, but with a continuation of interest and activities as a pastor. Reverend Rice offered heartfelt remarks regarding this decision and regarding her time here as Associate Pastor for Congregational Life. She noted blessings that had come with this service, which has included growth in the areas of Children and Family Ministries, Children in Worship, and also Congregational Life as a whole.

With sadness that she would be leaving and thankfulness for her service, the Session took action to honor Reverend Rice's requests, including the calling of a congregational meeting for Sunday, June 5th, so that the congregation could act formally on the request that her pastoral relationship with BMPC be dissolved. For the Personnel Committee, Elder Lindsay Johnson reported to the Session that the committee would be doing work to develop recommendations for Session consideration on how the responsibilities of Reverend Rice's position may be handled following her departure.

Trustee President Nancy Wolcott reported that HVAC work was proceeding according to the expected schedule and that negotiations on bank borrowing, led by Trustee Rick Ware, were also progressing. These negotiations are for a $6.0 million three year revolving credit agreement, which will be used exclusively to pay for the HVAC project until permanent funding is achieved through the Major Gifts Campaign.

Trustee Vice President John Schneider gave a report to the Session on the matter of determining the amounts that the Foundation provides to the church from its endowment each year to support the mission and ministries of the church. Trustee Schneider's remarks focused on the payout rate. The objective of a payout rate is to provide current year funding while preserving the purchasing power of the Foundation's endowment by leaving sufficient investment balances after distributions and Foundation expenses such that the value of endowments will rise over time at a rate equal to that of inflation.

John Schneider explained that the current Foundation payout rate is 5.4 percent. Based on independent surveys, he indicated that a rate closer to 4.5 percent would be more responsible and more in line with practices of many other non-profit institutions.

For the Audit Committee of the Trustees, Elder Laura Getty gave a report on the 2010 audit and financial statements for the church and BMPC Foundation. The church's independent auditors are the firm of ParenteBeard LLC. Elder Getty stated that the auditors issued an unqualified opinion on financial statements for both the church and Foundation.

George Henisee, Chair of the Major Gifts Campaign, gave a report in which he shared progress of the campaign committee, including recent work to identify and assess all of those things that point to readiness to conduct the full campaign. He appealed to Session members for ongoing support of the campaign through the remainder of this year and as it is formally launched church-wide at the beginning of 2012. The Session designated a team to bring to the Session a recommendation on the benevolence component of this capital campaign.

The Session received a report from the Action Group regarding Session and church priorities for 2012. The members of the Action Group are Susan Bravo, Dave Callans, Bob Guthrie, Bob Holmes, Kep Kephart, Mary Ledwith, Steve Mygatt, and John Schneider. This group's recommendations touched particularly on financial matters and were based on understandings of the church's overall financial situation as they have been developed and refined during the interim period, such as by work of the Strategic Education Task Force.

The Action Group recommended that the 2012 church operating budget be prepared with a reduction of $175,000 in expenses from their budgeted level of $3.7 million for 2011. Looking beyond 2012, the group recommended additional actions to help assure long term financial strength and stability. These included reducing the payout rate from the Foundation endowment by .25 percentage points each year beginning in 2013 until a 4.5 percent payout rate is reached. Finally, the group made recommendations in the areas of budget control, stewardship, engagement of members, review of church programs and ministries, and communication with the congregation.

The Session voted its acceptance of the recommendations of the Action Group. Additional work was noted that will follow from these recommendations, including work of the Joint Budget Management Committee (JBMC) on the 2012 operating budget. The benefits that would come from increased annual stewardship and congregational giving were noted. These Action Group recommendations incorporated

a no-growth assumption for 2012 on stewardship and congregational giving and, therefore, budgets could be adjusted upward if stewardship and congregational giving increase, as will be the goal of the 2012 campaign. The Session expressed gratitude to the Action Group for the completion of its work.

The Session voted its concurrence with actions of the Worldwide Ministries Council for the following awards from the Richard Shaull Fund in the Foundation: 1) Hands Along the Nile: Spirit of Youth Recycling Center and School" in Egypt in the amount of $22,000; and 2) "Cedepca: Reducing Disaster Risk Program" in Guatemala in the amount of $29,500. The Session also voted to accept a recommendation that the church participate in the Pentecost Offering this year and in the future. Forty percent of such offerings will stay at BMPC and be allocated to mission and outreach programs. This year's BMPC share of the offering will go to the BMPC Tutoring Program.

In other business, the Session accepted a recommendation from Lindsay Johnson, Chair of the Personnel Committee, that Georgette McAuley join the Personnel Committee. For the Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC), Elder Jen Bowers gave a report, which included a request, granted by the Session, for access to information that the PNC felt might be helpful in its work. Elders Sue Gibbons, Bob Holmes, Susan Joseph, and Klaus Volpert told inspirational stories from the Senior Choir tour through Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana.

The Session met on two other occasions in May. On Sunday, May 8th, the Session met with the Confirmation Class as a part of the WHIF (Windows into Faith – with a Dash of the Holy Spirit) Expo. The Session accepted into church membership the 26 youth in this Confirmation Class. On Sunday, May 22nd, the Session met with a new member class. The 11 persons in this class were welcomed into membership of the church that same day at the 10:00 a.m. worship service.