

## **Special Congregational Meeting Summarization**

**September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2025**

Approximately 35 members in attendance.

Council Members present: Lori Chipman, Christine Kobylski, Emily Olson, Dick Glime, Monica Rector, Jim Timm

The meeting was called to order at 10:00 am

Larry Chipman made a motion to adopt the agenda. Beth Johnson seconded. Motion was carried.

Christine put together a visual representation of Bethany's current financial situation (please reference/review the additional document, "BL Financial Review 9/2025") and went through it with those in attendance.

### **Highlights from Christine included:**

- Decrease in giving has been an ongoing trend since approximately 2019
- Decrease noted first in March, had hoped it was related to where Easter fell this year. Unfortunately, after April's financials were reviewed, it was apparent this was more than that.
- The primary area of concern is the deficit in our general funds, which is what pays the church's bills, the Pastor's salary, the Secretary's salary, etc. We have reached the point where, on occasion, we have had to hold bills to pay until after the weekly offering is collected.
- Deaths in the last few years in our congregation contribute to this as well, as many of our older members are the biggest givers.
- Acknowledgement that it isn't feasible for most of our members to be able to give \$100 each week.
- Projected deficit for our general budget this year is -\$15,750
- Christine does have some short-term suggestions for getting through this year and start of next, asks that members interested in how they can help now see her after the meeting for details/handout.

### **Questions following Christine's presentation:**

- Audrey Moen asked about membership since Pastor Joseph's arrival in 2023. Have we seen an increase in membership over the last 2 years? Reviewed that while we don't have official numbers, we have had many new members, as well as older members returning to church after being gone for a period. But we have also had a fair number of deaths, so we estimate that membership numbers are roughly the same.

-Scott Christenson made a statement that our congregation has not had an active Stewardship Program for approximately 15 years.

-Joyce Sjoström asked about a double-up month, noting that we have done these in years past- typically for June. Reviewed that the council is planning for a fall double-up month, with details to be finalized during the council meeting this week. While these types of things help, they are a “band-aid” and only provide a very short-term solution.

-Audrey Moen asked about a financial committee and what the next steps will be. From her previous experiences, it has sometimes been helpful to provide more tangible goals for members to contribute towards (the electric bill, toilet paper for the quarter, etc).

-Jack Hanson asked if projects are currently “on hold” due to our current finances. Christine clarified that since we have specified gifts specifically for work being done at the parsonage, those projects will continue for now. Anything needing to come out of the general funds would be placed on hold. If urgent, we would need to use our line of credit (like we did for the church HVAC unit replacement).

Lori then discussed the council’s recent meeting with Reverend Peter Beeson, who is the associate to the Bishop for Generosity, to discuss our current situation. He did a walk-through of the building with members, discussing the need to find ways to be sustainable in the future. He highly suggests Bethany participate in the “Funding Forward” program, which starts this month. It involves a monthly meeting with members from 9 different congregations, rotating where it is held. Provides the opportunity for discussion for things that have worked for others and things that haven’t worked. This could help us figure out how to fund and sustain ourselves long term. Our building is our biggest asset; how can we utilize our space to generate income? We would need at least 2, preferably 3, volunteers from the congregation to participate in this.

**Pastor briefly spoke to the following points:**

-A church cannot be sustained on member giving alone (any church, not just Bethany)

-We need to find our Mission and Purpose, what will bring us fulfillment, to establish what we can do based on how we are serving our community outside of our church walls

-Need to figure out our long-term goals, not just short-term fixes.

-Jack Hanson asked about resuming member giving pledges for the following year. Feels this acts as a promise from members. Lois Pieper agreed that this should be restarted.

-Beth Johnson commented that previous churches where they have been members have rented space to groups to utilize their building space – examples included another church group, 12 step program groups, senior groups – even renting their space for weddings for people who were not members.

-Monica Rector commented on some of what she took from the meeting with Reverend Beeson. She has been reading the Funding Forward book. Stated that the “3-legged stool” stands out to

her-one leg is General Giving, one is the Building, and the last is Business. You need all 3 for it to stand up on its own.

-Audrey Moen briefly spoke about Stewardship and its definition and the need for us to really embrace it.

-Scott Christenson commented that our congregation has always been great at supporting big projects (elevator, etc), and Stewardship is where we tend to falter.

-Beth Johnson would like to see our church council members' information displayed, so members can easily see who they can reach out to and how. Whether this is in the weekly bulletin or displayed elsewhere.

-Joyce Sjostrom was appreciative of the meeting and the council's desire to keep the congregation involved. Feels that having finances more visible would be helpful, such as we did in the past with including them in the monthly bell.

-Larry Chipman suggested members use the birdcage in the narthex if they come up with additional ideas.

### **Round Up Ideas**

#### **Short Term:**

- Double Up Month this fall – council to finalize at meeting this week (envelopes, stickers, etc)
- Pledge Cards for the following year
- “Adopt a Bill” – shows where the need is currently

#### **Long Term:**

-Funding Forward is a good place to start. Monica Rector and Dick Glime expressed interest in participating -would like to find one non-council member to participate.

Meeting was closed with the Lord's Prayer.

Audrey Moen motioned to adjourn the meeting, Sandy seconded.

Meeting was adjourned at 10:58 am.