

Special Church Conference Minutes
First United Methodist Church of Santa Rosa, CA
February 8, 2021

Attendance: District Superintendent Shinya Goto, Pastor Lori Sawdon, Sonda Anderson, Kim Barnett, Thomas Barnett, Chris Bowen, Lynne Brown, Cathie Bryan, Norm Bryan, Fran Byrn, Bob Cheal, Shirley Cheal, Sam Cox, Su Rood Cox, John Creager, Cheryl Cummins, Andrea Davis, Bill Dornbush, Jennifer Dornbush, Jeannette Dow, Jack Dupre, Marsha Vas Dupre, Mike Ferrel, Peg Ferrel, Lynne Garrison, Karen Girard, Pat Hannon, Jennie Hartman, Mary Ellen Heising, Penny Hunt, Fran Hurd, Jim Hurd, Diane Jackson, Jan Lappin, Gwen Neary, April Nichols, Naomi Niimi, Barbara O'Rear, Bill O'Rear, Paul O'Rear, Paula Peterson, Sharon Peterson, Mereseini Ponijiasi, Carmen Rapp, Charles Rhodes, Sarah Rhodes, Denise Rich, Pat Sanborn, Margie Schultz, Anne Sekara, Pat Silva, Bill Stevens, Pamala Stevens, Marty Wait, Elizabeth Walton, Bill Ward, Cathy Wieschendorf, Jim Wieschendorf, Diane Wikse, Larry Wofford, Heather Young

Meeting Opened at 7:04pm by District Superintendent Shinya Goto, with prayer.

The purpose of the special church conference was to discuss the possibility of using the recent Marilyn Eicher bequest to restore some funds to the church budget for staffing. The amount the church received from the estate was \$115,000.

Lynne Garrison, on behalf of the Board of Trustees, presented the following motion: **“The Board of Trustees recommends that a Church Conference make an exception to the Bequest policy approved by the Church Conference 2008 in order to allow the Eicher Bequest to be used for staffing, to be recommended by the Staff-Parish Relations Committee to the Church Council.”**

Denise Rich gave a history of staff reductions in the past 5 years. Staff salaries have been reduced by \$107,000 annually (a 30% reduction) with a reduction in the positions of Associate Pastor (75% cut), Director of Worship & Creative Arts (50% reduction), and Director of Youth Ministry, which was reduced by 20 hours and remains unfilled.

Since Pastor Lori's arrival in 2018, the Church has eliminated 1-3/4 positions.

Pastor Janette Saavedra will join us as our new Lead Pastor on July 1. She will face many challenges, including adapting our ministry and worship in response to the pandemic and Church re-opening, supporting our youth program and hopeful re-opening of our Preschool, determining how to best support our Fijian Language Ministry, discerning how best to use our resources and two campuses. Bishop Carcaño, DS Shinya Goto, and the SPRC strongly recommend that our Church have two full-time Pastors to lead, equip, minister, and guide us forward, and that we immediately begin the process to request a full-time Associate Pastor.

Sam Cox spoke of the finances of our church and stated that although the church may not be able to afford the associate pastor position in 2 or 3 years, given the current pastoral load, the church cannot afford not to have the associate pastor position. With the combination of the bequest and reserve funds, the church can take a “faithful leap of necessity” to fund the position. He invited all to attend the special Church Council on February 20 to hear the Financial Planning Report. To receive the report before the meeting, contact Bob Cheal.

Shinya Goto opened up the meeting for discussion. Mike Ferrel motioned for an amendment to the request; seconded by Peg Ferrel. His amendment deletes the following statement: ~~The Board of Trustees recommends that a Church Conference make an exception to the Bequest policy approved by the Church Conference 2008 in order to allow the Eicher Bequest,~~ and amends it to: **This Church Conference makes an exception to the Bequest policy approved by the Church Conference 2008 in**

order to make a tithe to an entity or entities outside this church to be determined by the Church Council from the Eicher Bequest, with the balance to be used for staffing, to be recommended by the Staff-Parish Relations Committee to the Church Council.”

Sam Cox opposed the amendment stating that Conference policy does not require a tithe to the Conference on bequests. The Eicher family included three other community charities in the bequest, so groups outside the church are already benefitting from the bequest. We are at an extraordinary time in the life of the church.

Discussion also clarified that the recommendation is based on a single action and does not set a precedent for a policy change to the Church Conference 2008.

A vote was taken on the amendment to the original motion: 2 approved the amendment, 3 abstained, all others opposed. The motion was not adopted.

Further discussion on the original motion ensued. It was stated that we hope that by having a full-time associate, it will help the youth ministry & other programs; the bequest was not intended to just support a pastor. The motion does not specify who/what the bequest will pay for, but SPRC recommends the amount go for paying for a full time associate pastor.

Based on last year’s revenue and what we anticipate in PPP funds & reserves, the bequest will allow us to fund an associate pastor position for at least two years. We will then need to make decisions that will allow us to move forward after these next two years. It was asked whether the Beulah Grant, for a senior ministries person, would be used to fund an associate pastor. Pastor Lori responded that the pandemic curtailed the Beulah Grant and the senior ministry position; we will hold onto the money until it is feasible to hire for the senior ministry position.

A vote on the original motion was taken. All in favor, -0- opposed, -0- abstained. Motion was adopted as originally presented. Pastor Lori expressed gratitude for the unanimous support of this motion as the reduction of staff and associate pastor’s position has had a significant impact on the church and unfair strain on the remaining staff members.

DS Goto ended the meeting in prayer.
Meeting ended at 8:02pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Anne Sekara
Recording Secretary

Next Church Council Meeting: February 20, 2021, 9:00am.