

Regional Church Council Minutes Oct. 28, 2017

(not officially approved)

Present were: Judy Alston, Thomas Barnes, Steve Brown, Janice Burns-Watson, Chad Delaney, Edward Davitian, Alan Dicken, Jeff Gill, Heather Hicks, Janice Hill, Steve Hurd, Laurie Metzko, Kevin Phipps, John Richardson, Steven Robertson, Tom Stephenson, Richard Swain, Candice Wilson, Merlyn Winters.

Guests: Jeff Wheeler, Todd Cosart, Jim Smith, Eric Brown, Jeff Bartlett, Margot Conner, Tyler Reeve.
Staff: John Richardson, Steve Bentley, Janet Mers, Al Channell.

John Richardson opened the meeting at 9:10 a.m. with a covenant prayer. Introductions were made and new members were acknowledged and welcomed. Tom Stephenson briefly described the work ahead.

Recap of all minutes of the Regional Council and Executive Committee were presented. Janet Mers **moved** that minutes be received as presented. Steve Robertson seconded. Minutes were received and approved as written by unanimous vote.

Financial Investigation Report ([Linked HERE](#))

Regional Church Council met in March to request a forensic audit of regional finances. It became apparent that due to a lack of policies in place this could not be accomplished. In early July, we learned that what was possible was a Financial Review with agreed upon procedures, which Donald Wells & Co. undertook after winning the bid. The review (approx. \$4,000) helped us determine where we stood. A forensic audit would not have given us the information needed. Janet Mers who was Finance Committee Chair at that time, informed Council that the word ‘audit’ raised questions. She should have used the word ‘review.’

Jeff Gill of the Special Investigative Task Force (SITF) offered that Wells & Co. reviewed every document. They investigated records for a 5½ year period and examined every transaction and disbursement. Kevin Phipps referred to the letter from Wells & Co. (pg. 14 of docket). The investigation was thorough and indicated that all funds were applied properly to regional church accounts.

Tom Stephenson officially presented the report to the Council to be received and invited discussion. Discussion included the mortgaging of Camp Christian. Jeff Gill reviewed minutes from the past and reported that Camp Christian was mortgaged in October, 2013. The balance owed is \$142,045. Churches may not have been aware of the mortgage taken out. Actions of the Regional Church Council were not being reported to churches at that time. The new practice is to forward *unofficial minutes* to region/congregations via email as soon as available.

The subject of other debt was raised. Being ‘out of trust’ was discussed. The work of paying the region back for funds withdrawn is ongoing. Under investigation is the possibility that designated funds may have been used for operating purposes. The difference between designated funds and restricted funds was discussed. It was decided that a document would be produced to explain this distinction to churches when gifts are received. Churches will also receive documentation acknowledging the purpose for which their donated funds are meant and how they may be used in lieu of the original purpose and under what guidelines.

Tom Stephenson concluded that it was apparent we need policies and procedures established throughout the Christian Church in Ohio to get our fiscal house in order. Treasury Services has been and will continue to be extremely useful to this end. Their annual audit covers all our finances and will be invaluable to demonstrate all funds are being handled appropriately. There is no additional cost to the region for this annual audit. Task forces will be called upon to develop policies moving forward. It has not been the practice to provide churches with regular financial statements but Treasury Service Reports will be provided to churches within 30 days of receipt, once they have been reviewed by the Executive Committee.

Also, by the time the new Regional Minister is called, new commissions/committees will be in place to begin or continue the creation of policies and procedures that reflect 'best practices.' The Financial Investigation Report revealed that there was no evidence of malfeasance that led to insolvency. All transactions were accounted for. In some cases better decisions could have been made.

Jeff Gill **moved** to accept the report. Judy Alston seconded. All voted in favor. **Motion passed.**

Financial Report ([Linked HERE – Included with Financial Investigative Report](#))

John Richardson led discussion on the Financial Reports from Treasury Services (Pgs. 19 and 20 of docket). Also discussed was the fact that many ongoing ministries are in the negative (pgs. 21 & 22 of docket). Statements were also reviewed for Camp Christian and the Lilly Grant.

Kevin Phipps **moved** to receive the Treasury Services Financial Reports. Jeff Gill seconded. **Motion passed** with unanimous vote.

Personnel Committee

Steven Hurd represented the Personnel Committee. Executive Committee at its last meeting voted to recommend to RCC that we consider reinstating pension percentage for regional staff to 14% as a fairness and justice issue. Tom Stephenson reminded all that in the past, as a belt-tightening measure, the Regional Staff agreed to accept a 50% reduction in pension. Steve Bentley said that pensions were slashed in 2007 and no raises have been offered since then. John Richardson noted that this would have affected retirement benefits and that the damage done cannot be rectified. Steve Bentley said that Al Channell was also required to pay for his own health insurance at that time.

The Personnel Committee **moved** that the RCC restore full pension dues to 14% to regional church staff effective October 1, 2017. Motion was voted upon and passed unanimously.

Proposed 2018 Regional Budget ([Linked HERE](#))

John Richardson and Rich Swain (Chair of Finance Committee) referred to pages 31-33 of the Regional Church Budget. Discussion followed with questions asked and possible cost-saving measures suggested for the coming year.

Steve Bentley and Al Channell referred to the Proposed Camp Christian Budget Report for 2018 on pages 35-37. The cost for camp registration for children will increase. A 2% increase in attendance is anticipated. Estimate for 1/1000 giving looks hopeful for 2018. It was pointed out that the payroll figure reflects full salaries of Steve Bentley, Al Channell as well as one food service worker. Health insurance for Al and his pension dues at the full 14% rate are also included. Electricity and ACA fee were discussed.

Tom Stephenson explained that by accepting the budgets for the Regional Church and Camp Christian we are also to be advocating to our churches to commit to the work that needs to be undertaken.

Discussion ensued.

Tom Stephenson pointed out that we're not far from insolvency; that we must recognize this is our budget and that Regional Church Council is the accountable fiduciary body. We have to make sure that the decisions made at this meeting are the best possible for the region. Our job does not end here, however. We have to be out and about in the churches acknowledging that we're in lean years and that while it is hard, we can overcome this with God's help.

The question was raised about congregations receiving financial reports. John Richardson assured that monthly statements will be sent out from now on. The Executive Committee was waiting to see what the Investigative Task Force findings were before recommending this action.

Tom Stephenson recommended that all concrete questions and suggestions be submitted to the Regional Office for review. Steve Bentley suggested that it might be helpful to preach on the subject of Covenant to help strengthen ties with the Regional Church.

Motion: The Executive Committee recommended that the Regional Church Council adopt the Finance Committee's proposed 2018 Regional Budget. Motion passed.

Ohio Disciple Extension Corporation (ODEC) Recommendations

Two recommendations brought by the Executive Committee were raised for discussion.

Motion 1: The Executive Committee recommended that the Regional Church Council approve the sale of all funds managed by Morgan Stanley, which have a total value of \$205,992.50 as of 9/30/2017, and move the proceeds to Christian Church Foundation.

John Richardson explained that ODEC was meant to be the holding company for land in the Region of Ohio but had evolved into its investment committee. The RCC created it and can close it. The Executive Committee voted to recommend that the RCC officially close ODEC. The full value of funds will be transferred to Christian Church Foundation.

Motion was placed by Janice Burns-Watson and seconded by Judy Alston. **Motion passed.**

Motion #2: The Executive Committee moves that the Regional Church Council close Ohio Disciples Extension Corporation (ODEC), as provided for in the Amended Code of Regulations of Ohio Disciples Extension Corporation, Article 1, Section 1.2, (a), (3).

John Richardson said that he and Tom Stephenson will be authorized to sign the documentation. Members of ODEC have been emailed to seek authorization.

Motion was placed by Jeff Gill and seconded by Kevin Phipps. All voted in favor. **Motion passed.**

12:08: Resumed after brief lunch break.

Special Investigative Task Force Report (SITF) ([Linked HERE](#))

Jeff Gill, convener of the SITF, opened by thanking everyone for their prayers and informed the Regional Church Council that a full report is available for examination. He explained that we do not seem to have any regional policies and procedures that have been clearly and formally adopted, with the most recent documented and approved policies and procedures in any area of regional life going back to 1980 or earlier, with the exception of an “Investment Policy” in 2008 and the “Employees Handbook” for the region updated in 2013. Other than these, no clear records have been found. Different drafts and versions do exist of attempts made to establish policies.

At the March meeting of the RCC, complaints were forwarded regarding the Regional Minister. It became obvious that while there are processes in place regarding complaints against clergy, these were less than clear when applied to the Regional Minister.

Jeff reminded all that this was a procedural review and not a criminal investigation. On behalf of the task force he stated that if anyone suggests a more comprehensive review, we would be spending money we don’t have for evidence that does not exist. We found no evidence of anyone misappropriating funds.

There is no criminal action that needs to be acted upon. We can all learn from what has happened. Ohio shouldn’t go it alone. We now have partners, and we have possibilities.

Discussion followed regarding when the financial problems began and the steps that have been taken in addressing the former Regional Minister. Jeff explained that the financial problems go back to the 1980s (before Dr. Edwards’ time with us). Admonishment where necessary is the responsibility of the Personnel Committee.

Tom Stephenson explained that concerns were shared with Dr. Edwards and multiple discussions were conducted. Personnel Committee made a recommendation that Dr. Edwards be terminated. Dr. Edwards, in the meantime, had decided to retire. He also added that we have been encouraged by Paxton Jones, Chair of the General Commission on Ministry, to share our findings with the General Church. What they are hearing is gossip.

Kevin Phipps offered that what he is hearing is: *Who can be blamed for the state of the Ohio Region?* This report helps communicate that there is no one person.

Note by Jeff Gill: There were heartfelt concerns expressed in the letters received. The complaints about Dr. Edwards went in a number of directions. There was something that struck us through all six letters. The impression received was that there is one right way to be a Regional Minister and that Bill Edwards wasn’t that. We want the Regional Council to be mindful of the effects of systemic and institutional racism, as we work on corrective and remedial action in moving forward to select a new Regional Pastor and President.

Tom Stephenson reported that the Executive Committee accepted this report and recommends the Regional Church Council accept the recommendations of the Special Investigative Task Force. **Motion** was placed by Janice Hill and seconded by Ed Davitian.

Janice moved that the SITF Report & Recommendations be accepted and amended pertaining to the congregations to remove “admonished for” and replace with “be advised of a long-standing practice

that...” (Chad, Kevin, Jeff met separately to modify the language). Discussion was suspended temporarily. Candice Wilson **moved** that the Report & Recommendations of the SITF be accepted as amended. Ed Davitian seconded. Motion passed with one abstention.

Proposed Commission on Ministry Policy [\(Linked HERE\)](#)

Motion: The Executive Committee recommends the Regional Church Council adopt the proposed Commission on Ministry Policy to become effective immediately. After discussion the Motion was placed by Candice Wilson and seconded by Ed Davitian. Motion passed.

Update from the Commission on Ministry: Todd Cosart and Brenda Sing-Ota were approved for ordination.

Election of New Commission on Ministry Members [\(Linked HERE\)](#)

Motion: The Executive Committee recommends the election of the following new members of the Commission on Ministry with terms as defined in the new COM Policy: Melanie Delaney was added as a commissioner to Team 1. Candice Wilson seconded list of commissioners as presented by Jeff Wheeler. **Motion passed** unanimously.

Appointment of Ecumenical & Disciple Representative to UCC.

Motion: The Executive Committee moves that the Regional Church Council elect Rev. Dr. Jack Sullivan Jr. to a 3-year term as the RCC’s Ecumenical Representative to: 1) the Ohio Council of Churches, and 2) to the Ohio Conference of the United Church of Christ. Position description is not available at this time. **Motion passed.**

Ministry Reports

Interim Regional Minister: John Richardson’s presented his report. (See written report [Linked HERE](#)).

Associate Regional Minister: Steve Bentley presented his report. Since March 28th Steve’s responsibilities have increased greatly. Personnel Committee has been notified that his load is excessive and he has had to turn down tasks. (See written report [Linked HERE](#)).

THRIVE Grants (Lilly Grant)

This grant is about health. It is about being whole. Website is expected to be up by the end of the year. Janet Mers reviewed the Statement of Financial Position. Church Extension has \$900,000 gaining interest until educational events are planned. (See written report [Linked HERE](#)).

Camp Christian - Al Channell

See report. There was discussion about the pool at camp, water shed problem, and sprinkler system. It was also decided that if someone claims a project, donations must go to Regional Church. John Richardson said we will post camp wish list on regional site. (See written report [Linked HERE](#)).

Regional Church Council Committees

Personnel Committee

(See written report [Linked HERE](#)).

Membership Committee

(See written report [Linked HERE](#)).

Vision Committee

(See written report [Linked HERE](#)).

Finance Committee

See Financial Reports and Proposed 2018 Budget linked above.

Regional Ministries

New Church

Final acceptance of settlement between the region and former New Church Pastors was reached 2 weeks ago. New Church efforts will be suspended until better policies and procedures are established.

Ohio Disciple Outreach

Need new members.

Jeff Gill pointed to the financial reports received: we had avg. of 23K coming in and 40K going out each month. Our cash flow is suffering. Request that Finance Committee send a letter to every church requesting:

1. Estimate of giving for 2018 to Disciples Mission Fund.
2. Give monthly

Jeff Gill placed motion and Steve Bentley seconded. **Motion passed** unanimously.

Ohio Disciples Men

Need members

Partnership with Shalom Center in Chile

Partnership with Congo

Bruce Barkhauer workshops

Meeting ended 4:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Merlyn Winters
Secretary