



Spirit of Grace

ELCA UMC
Annual Meeting
Sunday, January 21st, 2024

Agenda

*Quorum: 13 voting members
UMC Presiding Elder: The Rev. Donna Meinhard*

ATTENDANCE

OPENING LITURGY

REPORTS

- Pastor's Report – Rev. Miranda Bermes-Goller
- Board Chair's Report – Shelley Oates
- Staff Parish Relations Committee Report – Sharon Pantely
- Welcoming Church Team Report – Alicia Bermes
- Budget & Financial Report – Tom Hart
- Building Ministry Team Report –

NEW BUSINESS

- Approve Budget for 2024
- Adopting a Single Board Governance Model - vote to amend the constitution

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

In accordance with our constitution, the Nominating and Leadership Committee will present a slate of nominees for the elected offices of the church. Other nominations may be made from the floor, and must be accepted or declined by the individual nominated before the election may proceed. Write in nominations will also be allowed. Elections are effective at the close of this meeting.

CLOSING PRAYER

Pastor's Report

Beloved Siblings in Christ,

I begin every worship service by acknowledging that it is my genuine honor and joy to be in relationship with you all here at Spirit of Grace – and this year has only increased the resonance of these feelings. It has certainly not been an easy year or a smooth one – those times are hard to come by in this day and age – but with each new day, I have been reminded of how blessed we all are that none of us walk this journey alone; that we have a community of perfectly imperfect people to grow and learn and love with on this road God calls us to walk together.

Here in this community of faith, we have engaged in study with one another; expanding our understanding of ourselves, one another, and the Divine by learning from the voices of those who have often been cast out or overlooked. We committed to becoming an Open & Affirming church and living out those values by striving towards not mere tolerance or acceptance of our LGBTQIA+ and BILPOC siblings in faith, but radical acceptance and genuine love of all of God's children. I was moved by the ways in which you all engaged with the texts we read and the speakers we listened to – the way you all showed up in this process with a genuine desire to learn and grow gave me hope for the future of God's church on earth and the body of Christ in this world. When we officially voted to become an Open & Affirming congregation, I could feel the presence of the Spirit moving among us and resting upon us, affirming the work we had done and stirring up plans for the future; and I can't wait to see those plans come to fruition.

Here in this community of faith, we have engaged in worship and prayer with one another, lifting our voices in praise, lamentation, and wonder in the presence of God and one another. Easter Sunday saw our sanctuary filled with the most number of people I had seen since beginning my time with you all, and I could feel the power of the resurrection dwelling amongst us. Christmas Eve saw our sanctuary filled with dozens of lights, each shining forth fiercely in the darkness, coming together to illuminate the light of Christ in our world, in this time and this place. But my favorite services will always be our small, midweek gatherings in Lent and Advent, when we gather around a table to share a meal and a simple service of word and music, letting our voices rise up as an offering to God. This Advent, we extended an invitation to our neighbors at St. Mark's Episcopal to join us in this

time of worship and fellowship, and my heart swelled with joy to see the love of Christ expressed and experienced between our two communities. I am excited to see how this partnership will grow, and dream together about how we might partner with other faith communities in similar endeavors in the coming years.

Here in this community of faith, we have engaged in service and care for all of God's creation. We have served hundreds of individuals through our service with the FISH Food Bank distribution; we have seen our garden (lovingly tended to by our local Master Gardeners!) be a place of learning and nourishment for people all across our community; we have collected items and given of whatever we have so that our neighbors might be cared for. Though we are small in size, the capacity of our hearts only seems to increase with every passing year – thanks be to God!

Here in this community of faith, we have engaged in wonder and discernment with one another, as we have considered what it is that God is calling us towards in this time and this place. At our annual meeting last year, we voted to adopt a new mission statement, vision statement, and set of values that will guide our work together. Our board set goals based on these values, and we committed to working towards these goals to the best of our ability. Over the summer, in addition to our RIC/RMN learning journey, we heard from Bishop Cedrick Bridgeforth about the M.I.L.E ministry initiative he was introducing to our UMC area. District Superintendent Tim Overton-Harris joined us for a special meeting on October 29th, and led us in discerning commitments to each of the four areas articulated in the initiative. Though we are a small congregation with limited capacity, we set realistic goals for ourselves, and are already taking steps to prioritize these commitments in the coming year of ministry.

As we look ahead to the year before us, our future remains uncertain. Though the size of our congregation does not diminish the depth of our faith, it does force us to confront some difficult realities about our capacity and what realistic expectations we should have of one another in the coming years. I am deeply grateful for the service and commitment of those who have stepped up to serve this congregation as members of the leadership team, as well as those who serve this congregation in small, unnoticed ways every day. We may not know what our future will look like, but we know that God has brought us all together to do the work of God, to be the body of Christ, and to live into the fullness of the Spirit, in this time and this place. May it be so among us.

In Peace,

Pastor Miranda Bermes-Goller

Board Chair's Report

The year began with goal setting and review of our vision and mission. Our mission statement was revised as a result. Long term and short term goals were established. Some we have accomplished and others not.

Despite our small membership, we have met our financial commitments for the year including apportionments to both Lutheran and Methodist bodies. We began the year falling short, but finished with increased giving. We have increased our awareness of the personal trials and difficulties members of the LGBTQ community face by our participation in several book studies. Groups met both in person and via Zoom to advance toward becoming an RIC/RMN church. For participants, it was also another opportunity in faith based education and personal connection, meeting two of our short term goals. In October we voted to adopt our new Welcome Statement and become a RIC/RMN Church. Goal achieved.

Several outdoor maintenance activities took place. Members and volunteers work throughout the year to prepare, plant, and harvest produce for the FISH Food Bank. We cleaned out the "garage" for cleaner and safer storage. This fall clean up and pruning was done to improve visibility of our signage for both church and FISH. Painting was completed to increase visibility to the parking lot. Another goal achieved.

A Coordinator for the FISH meeting room has been hired: Celeste Peralta is a dream candidate for the position, and we are grateful she has accepted the job!

\$2000 was granted to the Red Cross Ukraine Relief fund from the Duckwall Endowment.

Preference in the future will be given to Lutheran and Methodist options. No Johnson Scholarship applicants this year.

An audit was completed on the 2022 treasurer's books.

Board members participated in the Oregon Synod Day of Learning.

Hopes for the Outreach House to be of use to a non profit have not worked out. MCCAC expanded their expectations and exceeded our site capacity. It remains to be removed at some point.

As two members are completing terms on the board, finding willing participants has become difficult. This issue is to be addressed at our January congregational meeting.

Pastor Miranda has organized several ministry teams. These however did not produce results, and a revision this fall has also failed to gain momentum. Our aging congregation is tired. Despite many good outcomes and an able and productive pastor, our future is in question.

Respectfully submitted by

Shelley Oates

Chair of Spirit of Grace Board

Staff Parish Relations Committee Report

The purpose of this committee is to encourage, nurture, support and respect the pastor and staff and their families in order to build and maintain strong relationships between them and the congregation and district officers beyond Hood River. We aim to help the pastor and staff set priorities that strengthen the congregation's total ministry. We are focused on both management and ambience. SPRC committee members for 2023 have been: Sharon Pantely, chairperson, Pat Moore, Margaret Godard, Lee Huckins and Sharon Poynter as board representative.

We have continued to support Pastor Miranda as she expands our ministry with creative ideas to better utilize staff and parish persons available to fill roles. She admitted that inquiries as to the use of the FISH building community room could be disruptive at times, and Debby had agreed to oversee this temporarily. As a result, a talented young Hispanic woman was hired part time to fill this need.

Our combined midweek Advent soup supper and worship brought members of St. Mark episcopal congregation to our location for joint fellowship and worship service. This successful joint worship will be repeated during Lent.

We conducted an evaluation of our staff, with positive feedback and hopes for continued fellowship and growth, personally and hopefully as a congregation.

Our committee remains optimistic and hopeful for a productive, worshipful upcoming year. We support the new leadership model proposed by Pastor Miranda optimistically!!

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon Pantely, Chairperson.

SPRC Spirit of Grace Congregation

Welcoming Church Team Report

The Welcoming Team was formed in 2022 with the goal of helping shepherd Spirit of Grace through the process of becoming an RIC (Reconciling in Christ) congregation. During 2023 we held individual 1:1 conversations with everyone we could reach. We learned what brought you to Spirit of Grace, how you were feeling about our congregation and what your concerns and excitements were about becoming a Welcoming Congregation. We learned where maybe more education was necessary. We, as a congregation, read *One Coin Found* and discussed this book that chronicles a young, queer pastors' journey. We took a SOGIE workshop together and learned more about Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression. We learned why words are important. Then we read, as a congregation, *Transforming- The Bible and the lives of Transgender Christians*. We learned what the Bible does and does not say about the queer community. And we learned about the damage that the church has done in the lives of transgender Christians. We then felt like Spirit of Grace was ready to call ourselves welcoming; ready to accept everyone and not do harm. We then set about crafting our Welcoming Statement. We presented that to the congregation for feedback, made some changes and on Reformation Sunday we voted unanimously to become an RIC/RMN Church. We recognize that this is just the beginning of the work and have planned a celebration for February 4, 2024, with surrounding congregations that are also fully inclusive. How can we work together, learn from each other, and make certain that all of God's beloved are truly welcome?

Respectfully submitted,

Alicia Bermes

Chair of the Welcoming Church Ministry Team

Finance Report

Thank you all for your support in 2023. I have just a few words to accompany the numbers. We began the year with a budget that showed an expected deficit of \$14,500.00. Our actual deficit at the end of the year was only \$4,700.00. We met our apportionment commitment of 10% of our contributions. I see those as positive signs. We anticipated contributions of \$91,000.00 but the final number was \$101,295.00. Not only did we exceed our projection, we were up almost 4% from 2022. Total expenses for 2023 were down \$240.00 from 2022. Our budget for 2024 shows a surplus of \$1,500.00. Our projected expenses for 2024 will be down approximately \$10,000.00. While the Pastor and Linda both received cost of living increases in their salaries, our cost for Miranda's health insurance will decrease now that Jenni will have her own coverage. Also, the parsonage required a major HVAC repair, which should serve us well into the future.

Respectfully submitted,

Tom Hart, Treasurer

Building Ministry Team Report

No report submitted.