

Gulf Cove United Methodist Church
Helping Everyone Meet, Know, and Serve Jesus
Church Council Meeting
(Formerly known as Administrative Council)
May 27, 2014 – 7:00 PM

Attendees:

Rick Starck (Church Council Chairman)	Zak Alvarez Vic Costello	Scott Folsom John Furtado	Sandy Palmer Linda Starck
Rev. Dr. Bill Fisackerly Doreen Alvarez	Alfred Current Kim Fisackerly	Betty Hansell Jo Ann Hopkins	Dana Hanson

The meeting was opened with the lighting of the candle representing Jesus Christ, followed by a prayer by Rev. Dr. Bill Fisackerly.

Corrections To Previous Minutes – The recording secretary was not notified of any necessary corrections to the minutes of the March 24, 2014, Church Council meeting.

COMMITTEE DISCUSSIONS

Sound Booth Expansion Update: Rev. Bill reported that over the past couple of years, donations in excess of \$20,000 have been received toward upgrading the sound system and expanding the sound booth. It is hoped that everything will be finished within the next few months.

No other discussion topics were raised.

AGENDA ITEMS

Topic #002: Closet of Hope

Submitted by: Rick Starck on 5-14-2014

Sandy Palmer has been managing the program without assistance from us and has been doing an excellent job. She and her many volunteers have organized a massive amount of clothing and have a pretty good system in place.

As you might recall Mimi Cook started the Closet of Hope as a youth project to provide free used clothing to the people of Charlotte County. Under Mimi's leadership counting of all incoming and outgoing clothing items was initiated in anticipation of writing a grant request. It was thought that we needed to document our activities to justify a grant. We do not have a grant writer and there is none expected to step up to this task in the foreseeable future. As a consequence we have burdened the volunteers with much additional work needlessly. I see no reason to continue counting incoming clothing items and would like to relieve the volunteers of this task.

Over time, there have been other issues that had to be addressed. One was people from other counties were making regular visits to pick up unlimited amounts of clothing. This resulted in a depletion of the inventory available to the residents of Charlotte County. A second issue was the belief that some of the out-of-county customers were selling the clothes. A third issue was raised when we learned that other

customers were making regular visits to gather clothing for Haitians. A system of driver license review with a maximum allowable clothing count was adopted to control these open-ended policies.

It can easily be argued that people in other counties and even Haiti are in need of our clothing. It can even be argued that people selling clothing are in need. What is the scope of this ministry? Is it worldwide distribution or a community project? Can we allow someone to back a truck up to the portable and take all for resale?

Rick Starck started by commending Sandy Palmer and all her volunteers on what they are able to accomplish with little outside guidance. Sandy has definitely stepped up into a leadership role in operating the Closet. However, they are once again encountering individuals who appear to be abusing the program.

Sandy read the “goal” of the Closet of Hope as originally established: “Our desire is to be an outward expression of Christ’s love by meeting the practical needs of families who seek assistance within our community.” Initially, the program was meant for children only, but quickly branched out to include needs of adults as well. Sandy advised their current problem involves Haitians who fill kitchen trash bags with as much clothing as they can (not exceeding the currently-imposed 30-count limit), ensuring only that the items selected appear to be the best items available. Sandy explained that they suspend their 30-item limit when circumstances warrant. Linda Stark said that she has observed the women who work in the Closet making *everyone* feel welcome and loved, even when a questionable-looking young man or a truckload of homeless men came in.

One category of assistance the Closet provides involves individuals who are going for job interviews. Often Sandy has either personally delivered clothing to someone’s home or has made a special trip to the Closet to meet that person on a day when the Closet is normally closed. Jo Ann Hopkins told of one man who donated a substantial amount of clothing to the Closet; he explained that the Closet provided him with an outfit for a job interview and he landed the job; he wanted to pay it back. Sandy told of another category of clothing recipients which involves women who have managed to leave abusive relationships; they left with only what they had on their backs and needed additional clothing.

Rev. Bill said the Haitian Methodist minister from Golden Gate came by a few weeks ago. He said he and his wife go to Haiti periodically and try to help the Haitians with clothes and other things. Rev. Bill indicated he would have no objection if the Closet wanted to help that minister in some way. Sandy has called him, but he has not yet returned her call. She said they are currently switching out the seasonal clothing, and things are available for the minister if he wants them.

Sandy said they are always in need of children’s clothing. However, that particular need is also met by Kids’ Needs of Greater Englewood and the Children’s Clothes Closet at Englewood UMC. Excess clothing (both seasonal and that which is not in good condition) is donated

elsewhere, usually to organizations with resale shops. We have been told that some donors prefer to give to the GCUMC Closet of Hope because they know that we do not charge for anything that goes out.

Currently, the only identification that is examined is a driver's license. The purpose is to ensure that the individual is from Charlotte County or south Sarasota County. The average attendance on any Saturday is 25 individuals, but there may be 6 or 7 children, youth, and other adults with that person. Often only one person in the group speaks English, and very broken English at that, making communication difficult.

During the discussion, several suggestions were made:

- Limit abusers to only 5 items.
- Give boxes of excess clothing to abusers in addition to, or in lieu of, other organizations.
- Limit abusers to one visit every one or two months.
- An "enforcer" might be needed on occasion to explain procedures, as the regular workers at the Closet have developed rapport with these people.
- The need no longer exists (for now) to count incoming items.
- Perhaps Sandy could speak to the congregation on a Sunday morning about the Closet.
- More articles should appear in the Newsletter.
- Perhaps an adult playground supervisor could be present to give the children something to do while their parents are in the Closet.

Everyone present agreed that Sandy should use her discretion in establishing any policy (whether suggested above or otherwise) for the Closet which she believes is needed. *Thank you, Sandy, for your excellent leadership in the Closet of Hope ministry!*

Topic #001: Adoption of a sister church in Cuba

Submitted by: Rick Starck on 5-10-2014

Research has shown that growing churches have some common traits. Probably the most important is being outwardly focused.

I recently attended a presentation by Dan Christopherson hosted by the Crafty Ladies. Dan is the Southwest District Cuba Coordinator for the Florida Conference of the United Methodist Church. Dan travels about four times a year to Cuba. He is asking us to adopt a sister church in the Holguin Norte District of Cuba. There are currently six United Methodist churches in the Holguin Norte District in need of a sister church. This adoption would be long term. We cannot give for a year or two and then lose interest. If we were to adopt a church we would be matched up with one best suited to our size and nature but I am getting ahead of myself.

I asked myself how does this fit with Gulf Cove UMC?

1. It fits our Vision: Helping Everyone Meet Know and Serve Jesus.
2. I am sure I am not alone in noticing the outpouring of money and support when our congregation gets behind a mission

3. Young people are attracted to churches that support identifiable causes. Pastors earning \$22 per month, undernourished children being fed after worship services, inadequate medical supplies, need for Bibles in Spanish, etc.
4. Being a good steward entails investing wisely. I can't help but feel our return on this investment, as measured by our vision statement, will far exceed any that we have yet discussed. For \$100 - \$300 a month we could support an entire church!

If the church council agrees this is a worthy idea, we must then present it to our congregation. We would probably want to invite Dan to make a presentation during/after a Sunday service. The question and answer session after the recent Crafty Ladies presentation went a long way toward convincing me. It is sad how many misconceptions I held about Cuba. Being able to ask someone who travels there on a regular basis enlightened me and reduced my angst. Naturally we would want stories, pictures and as much information flow as we could get. Incidentally that is a two way street. They would want to establish the same information flow in the other direction.

Scott Folsom has been invited by Dan Christopherson to be one of two adult chaperones escorting seven area youths to Camp Canaan Bible camp in Cuba this July. Scott discussed this invitation with Rev. Bill and received the go ahead if he could raise the travel funds (\$1,500). He would fly with the group into Havana and then take an 8-10 hour bus trip to the camp located in central Cuba. Scott would participate in camp activities for 3-4 days including a speaking engagement.

Timeline

- Dan Christopherson is due to visit Cuba in June.
- Scott Folsom is due to chaperone the Cuba Bible summer camp in July.
- To support Scott's efforts we need to arrange for a plea to our congregation.
- We need to work up a presentation to our congregation. It's important to make the right decision. What will we need, who will spearhead the effort, etc.

Rick explained that a pastor's salary is \$22 (U.S.) a month, as is almost everybody's salary in Cuba. To support an entire church would cost about \$100 a month. To assist the church in other activities (such as providing food when the people run out of food mid-month) could raise the cost to \$200 or \$300 a month. This is a long-term mission, not a one- or two-year project.

Rev. Bill explained that prior to Castro coming into power, Cuban Methodist churches were part of the Florida Conference. When Castro took office, we suddenly lost contact with all the Methodist pastors in Cuba, and they were not allowed to come to the annual conference any more. When things started easing up in the 1990's, the Cuban pastors were finally able to tell the Florida Conference what was going on.

In making the decision of whether to adopt a sister church, we should consider:

- Making personal visits to Cuba at least once a year, possibly in conjunction with individuals from other Florida UM churches.
- Bringing the sister church's Cuban minister up here occasionally.
- Providing suitcases full of over-the-counter medicines, toiletries, etc.
- Helping to fund other, out-of-the-ordinary purchases for the church, such as a keyboard.

- Praying for them on a continual basis.
- Writing them a letter at least once a month.
- Exchanging pictures.
- Limiting the amount that any GCUMC church family can donate.
- Seeking donations from outside GCUMC.
- Informing the GCUMC congregation of “Cuba happenings” via the newsletter.
- Informing the community of our outreach to Cuban churches.

We also discussed Scott’s trip to Cuba in July to attend the Bible camp with 800-1,000 Cuban youth, plus 7 or 8 youth from our own district. Scott explained that this is the second year he was asked to act as a chaperone for the trip to Cuba. He declined the first year because he did not know what to expect. However, he has since spoken at length with Dan Christopherson and other youth directors who have already gone. He was assured by all that there was nothing about which to be nervous, and that he should be prepared to leave behind everything he takes except the clothes on his back. Rev. Bill added that, because he believes the congregation will support adopting a Cuban church, he told Scott early this year to go ahead and start firming up all the plans, because going on this type of trip is not something you decide just one or two months before you leave.

The total cost of Scott’s trip is \$1,500. The amount of \$250 was payable immediately upon Scott’s agreeing to go; \$519 is due June 1st to cover his air fare; \$450 will be used for transportation, lodging, and all of Scott’s food. Any amount over that total will be used as offerings for different churches that are visited or to help out with “black-market purchases” which are a way of life in Cuba.

One potential argument against adopting a sister church is that we should “take care of our own” first; i.e., individuals who live in the United States. It was mentioned that we do many mission-type things to help those here: Closet of Hope, some apportionments, Englewood Helping Hand, and Habitat for Humanity to name a few. One thing Cubans have, however, that the U.S. does not, is possible persecution from practicing their faith. Those who live under the Cuban oppression are grateful to know that someone is praying for them and helping to support them.

None of GCUMC’s apportionments are earmarked for Cuba churches. There will always be an unlimited number of charitable situations -- people who need help all the time -- which we could help. We will always be in a position of asking, “Which ones do we help?” Of the 34 Cuban churches listed in the Methodists United in Prayer March 2014 newsletter, only 6 Cuban churches are without a sister church. The other 28 Cuban churches are supported by 24 different churches from the Southwest District.

Scott said that internet is available to the churches only in the Cuban Bishops’ office and the District Superintendent’s office.

If we are able to adequately inform the public of our outreach to help our Cuban brothers and sisters, we stand a good chance of attracting millennials -- the young adults who are needed to keep our church going after we are gone. Research shows that millennials are attracted to projects and people who make a difference in the world. Rev. Bill added that his pastoral experience reflects that churches and youth groups who focused on themselves first plateaued and died; but churches and youth groups focused on missions have grown.

The question was posed as to whether we expect the whole church to back a Cuban ministry 100%, or will it be one of several ministries available in which individuals can participate if they so choose? Is it possible that only a portion of our congregation can donate to and take part in the Cuban ministry in order for it to be effective? Rev. Bill advised that he does not want this ministry to turn into a "budget" item.

Rev. Bill opined that the first two steps are getting Dan to address our congregation and getting Scott to Cuba. It was suggested that our own District Superintendent Rini Hernandez be invited as well; he spent eight years in prison because of his faith. Rev. Bill said he would extend the invitation to Dan and Rini.

A consensus was reached that the next steps should be taken to obtain a sister church. Ultimately, it was decided to form a Leadership Team to consider this potential ministry in depth. Those who volunteered to be on this team are: Betty Hansell, Rick Starck, Linda Starck, Scott Folsom, and Alfred Current. John Furtado indicated he would also be willing to be on the committee. Their immediate goal will be to determine the best way to inform the congregation.

LEADERSHIP TEAM REPORTS

There were no discussions regarding the two Leadership Teams established at the March 24 Church Council meeting:

- Non-Sunday / Off-Site Worship Service
- Live-Streaming On-Line, YouTube, etc.

ADJOURNING

The meeting was adjourned at 8:40pm with a prayer by Rick Starck. The next meeting will be a DNA meeting, on Monday, June 23, 2014, at 7:00pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Dana Hanson