

Gulf Cove United Methodist Church
Experience – Embrace – Engage
Leadership Board Meeting
March 15, 2021 – 7:00pm

Attendees:

Joan Priest (Chair), Pastor Mike Weaver, Doreen Alvarez, Alfred Current, Anne Devilbiss, Dave Devilbiss, Beverly Fonder, Dave Fonder, John Furtado, Deb Howell, Carol McGuire, John McGuire, Rick Starck, Pastor Becky Stephenson, Dawn Tesauro, Jamie Van Dyk, Pat Van Dyk, Dana Hanson

The meeting was opened with the lighting of the candle representing Jesus Christ, followed by a prayer by Pastor Becky.

Corrections to Previous Minutes: The recording secretary was not notified of any corrections to the minutes of the 2/16/2021 meeting.

Opening Comments: Joan addressed the gathering first. Her opening statement is worth reading, and is reproduced at the end of these minutes.

Staff Parish Relations: Doreen advised that SPR is meeting tomorrow evening, March 16. Their current plans include performing a parsonage walk-through; reviewing the children protection policies and staff policies; and addressing the concerns expressed at last month's Leadership Board meeting.

Advice received by Pastor Mike from the FLUMC and the CDC regarding COVID guidelines of best practices for meeting in person is as stated by the CDC on 3/8/2021: "the level of precautions taken should be determined by the characteristics of the unvaccinated people, who remain unprotected against COVID-19."
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated-guidance.html#anchor_1615143336158

From the beginning of the pandemic, Pastor Mike suggested that ALL staff work remotely until their particular health concerns allowed them to safely return in person. It was mentioned as a reminder that if a person has underlying health conditions (more so than the usual ones that come with age), they have to be extra cautious.

When it comes to registering for vaccinations online, it was suggested that those who are computer-savvy could minister to those who are not.

Our congregation is varied and has voiced positive and negative opinions regarding various aspects of our changed worship services. In order to accommodate and improve worship, several suggestions were offered and will be discussed by SPR, who will report ASAP back to this board:

- Have one hymn played by Angela on the organ with a music leader to encourage congregational singing at traditional worship services.
- Ask choir members who are willing to sing meet to practice an anthem of Roy's discretion to sing on Sunday. Roy could lead and direct the practice via Zoom.
- Secure a liaison to facilitate coordination between Roy and the singers.

As a church, we are responsible for handling issues with grace, love, and compassion, and digging deeper for wisdom than a regular business would. Our goal is to be supportive of all our employees and their families – especially when they are affected by the pandemic. Our charge is to be charitable and do right by our brothers and sisters in Christ especially in this unusual time.

After the Leadership Board meeting, an article which is related to this discussion appeared in the 3/17/2021 issue of THE SUN newspaper. Portions of the article are copied below:

The rapid decline in cases starting in December came at the time that the state and county started giving vaccines, Health Chief Joe Pepe said last week. ... [However, even] with 60% of elders vaccinated for coronavirus in Charlotte County and an estimated 30% having been infected in the past, the decline in daily cases is slowing locally. ... Asked where the most cases are now in Charlotte County, Pepe said in people ages 55 and over. And most of those cases can be linked to socializing, Pepe said, among younger retirees and empty nesters enjoying their new freedom. ... Concern has grown nationally that the United States could see a new outbreak similar to European countries, where trends often precede similar trends in the United States. Many states including Florida have removed pandemic restrictions on assembly and on businesses.

In addition, an article in US NEWS also dated 3/17/2021 opens with the following paragraphs:

Optimism is spreading in the U.S. as COVID-19 deaths plummet and states ease restrictions and open vaccinations to younger adults. But across Europe, dread is setting in with another wave of infections that is closing schools and cafes and bringing new lockdowns. ... Health experts in the U.S., though, say what's happening in Europe should serve as a warning against ignoring social distancing or dropping other safeguards too early. <https://www.usnews.com/news/health-news/articles/2021-03-17/experts-virus-surge-in-europe-a-cautionary-tale-for-us>

After SPR's meeting on Tuesday, 3/16/2021, the Leadership Board was advised as follows:

- *Roy has acquired vaccine appointments for Be.*
- *Roy will return the first week in May.*
- *He is making phone calls to all choir members to touch base and plan ahead.*
- *He is available for Zoom rehearsals for any small group that may want or need one for live music between now and May.*
- *Pastor Mike is looking for a member to be a liaison between those at church and Roy while he is working from home.*

Finance: Alfred advised that our application for a second PPP loan was completed by Dawn, Rick, and Pastor Mike, and then submitted to Centennial Bank. Today, Nicholas Worden of Centennial Bank notified us that our application was approved for around \$56,000. These funds should be used primarily to help fund payroll costs, including benefits.

Our spendable income received thru February this year is about \$20,000 less than what was received last year. Alfred thinks we will probably be another \$10,000 down for March. In addition, our northern members will probably be leaving in the next month or two. On the other hand, the trustees have a fair amount of funds available for their use.

Alfred and Dawn have been working on streamlining the line items in our accounts, as well as identifying accounts which have balances that are just "sitting there."

Alfred reminded us that the way to get out of any bad financial situation is to invite people to join us, especially with all the new construction that is occurring. We all are disciples and need to share Jesus. In addition, some of our staff members, as well as our congregation, could attend community functions which could ultimately affect us.

Advertising: Dana advised that THE SUN newspapers have stopped providing free advertising for worship services. This includes special worship services such as for Easter and Christmas. She asked whether we want to pay to advertise in THE SUN for this year's Holy Week. Their current special is \$100 a day for a 3"x1.75" full color block, but the deadline for submission is this Thursday, March 18. After a short discussion, it was decided that we should not spend the money this year, since we are already sending out flyers which contain information on not only the Easter Egg Hunt, but also Easter Sunday.

Endowments: Rick said he is reviewing, writing, and revising information that needs to be conveyed to the congregation.

Nominations: Pastor Mike said nothing is going on now, and this agenda item can be removed until later this year.

Trustees: Dave Devilbiss said the new popcorn machine should be here Friday. *All present gave Dave thankful applause for all his work around the church.*

EEE Experience: John Furtado advised that our sanctuary seats are currently configured for 240 individuals over the three worship services (or 80 seats per service). For February, we averaged 174 people a week as compared to 158 in January. Online, however, has dropped from an average of 548 in January to 438 in February. All small groups except Genesis are meeting in person and/or via Zoom, with attendance about equal to where we were prior to COVID.

Deb added that we had 168 people in attendance on Sunday, March 14. There were 43 at 8:00, 83 at 9:30, and 42 at 11:00. Joan commented that on many Sundays we have new visitors.

EEE Embrace & Engage:

Vacation Bible School: Joan reported that the initial meeting for VBS has been held. It was decided that VBS will be held on Monday to Friday, July 12-16, from 5:30-8:30pm. This year, however, the meal will be offered to just the VBS Kids and Volunteers – not to families and siblings. The maximum number of VBS kids will be 50. There will be 5 groups limited to 10 kids each, with tables distanced in the sanctuary for each group at dinner. Masks will be required. A VBS meeting for volunteers will be held on Sunday, May 2, at around 11:45am (after the third service).

Family Hike: Joan said it will be held on Saturday, April 24, from 10:30am to 1pm.

Parents Night Out & Craft Night: Joan advised it will be held on Friday, May 21, from 5:30-8pm. There will be pizza, painting, and messy fun for the children and youth.

Boys & Girls Club: Alfred said that the BGC recently sent out a survey about their need to construct a building here on our property and their need to raise \$5M for an endowment to fund the building. Ideally, we should help them make this happen by bringing more people into GCUMC. The building that will be built by the BGC will be shared with us, just as portions of our building is being and will be shared with them.

Alfred told us that a couple weeks ago, the BGC held an event at Laishley Park in Punta Gorda. Alfred and his wife attended, but to his knowledge, there were no other people from GCUMC there. He encouraged us to become aware of what is happening with them and to join in those affairs. One way to find out is by being included on their email distribution. Another way is by joining relevant Facebook groups, such as the Englewood Boys & Girls Club, or What's Happening in Englewood, Florida.

Lemon Bay High School's Project Graduation: Alfred advised that he was contacted by a representative from LBHS Project Graduation. That group provides a safe place for the high school graduates to "party" after graduation. Carol explained that in the past, the youth have left their keys at the door, and they are locked in for the duration; if a graduate leaves the venue, he or she cannot return. Graduation is May 28. They are not able to hold the event at Englewood UMC this year, and the group was wondering if GCUMC could provide the needed venue. We would not have to worry about food, ice, or anything else, as their group takes care of everything. Pastor Mike, Alfred, and Dave Fonder will meet with representatives of LBHS Project Graduation to discuss it further.

First Monday Supper: It was asked if we were going to start inviting the public to this new program. Anne is the leader of this ministry, and said she has been amazed at the number of people who have come for a meal, as well as by those who have volunteered. Her major concern about advertising to the community is ascertaining the proper number of meals to prepare. Alfred said that any overage can be taken on Tuesdays to Indian Mound Park off of Dearborn Street in Englewood. Every Tuesday, several organizations prepare food and deliver it to that location for homeless individuals to take. Another recipient of any overage could be the Homeless Coalition. At this point in the discussion, Anne said, "Let's go for it!" Our First Monday Supper will now be offered to the community!

Anne did add that if anyone in our congregation signs up for a meal, she will make sure that a meal is waiting for them when they arrive, regardless of the number who show up without having made a reservation. She said they have been adding a small flyer to the bags which informs the meal recipients about GCUMC.

Easter Egg Hunt: It will be held on Saturday, March 27, from 11am-12pm. Crafts will be available and free hot dogs, chips, and drinks will be pre-packaged. Masks are required for those 6 years old and older. Joan reminded us that we need to speak with the Men's Group about using Amdro for fire ants. In addition, we should contact the County about spraying for mosquitoes. Flyers should be mailed later this week. Pastor Mike said they are delivered to houses within about a 1.5 mile radius of the church, which covers about 1,300 houses. It costs approximately \$500. Expansion of the delivery follows and is based on mail routes (not a zip code).

Youth BYOB: This Bring-Your-Own-Blanket Movie Night event is scheduled for the youth on Friday, April 9.

Boy Scouts Spaghetti Dinner: No date has been selected yet.

Pig Pickin': No date has been selected yet.

Expansion Team: Alfred summarized what has been happening with this project. The team has been meeting for about eight months. They have been reviewing feasibility studies, finding out what Charlotte County will allow us to do and build. They need to address things such as how big any building(s) can be, how much parking is required, and how big must the retention pond be. During these reviews it was learned that there is a question as to who owns Conway Road, the south entrance to our campus.

Rick said the team is considering multiple buildings over a period of time. He thinks the BGC building will probably be the first building constructed. We will have to have a capital campaign for the buildings GCUMC will construct. We need to convey what we

do to the community in order to attract new people. Rick thinks we might need to hire someone to complete the “marketing” aspects of our church.

It was mentioned by several people that we have construction going on all around us. There is a major development being constructed north of the Biscayne-SR776 intersection. A large area of construction will be starting soon near the Gulf Cove Publix intersection. There is an increase of individual home construction all over the area close to us. These locations make for a golden opportunity for us to contact new people.

Adjournment. Joan thanked all of us for our participation, honesty, willingness to compromise, and grace. The meeting was adjourned at 9:10pm with a prayer by Pastor Mike. The next Leadership Board meeting will be held on Monday, April 19, 2021, at 7:00pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Dana Hanson
Recording Secretary

JOAN'S OPENING STATEMENT

I'd like to propose that we've been in a testing ground where the customary and familiar were removed. Close your eyes and reflect on how your life has been disrupted, how tired you are of the restrictions, the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual toll it's taken on you.

Now open your eyes. We are in the end stretch of needing to tolerate these restrictions, and we're tired, ready to move on – yet our responsibility is to remain vigilant.

What does moving on mean? During this “testing ground” time:

1. We've remained in contact with our congregation via phone, social media and acts of kindness.
2. Worship has continued via online services, while Devotions and Bible Studies have continued via Zoom and then in person/online when we started meeting again.
3. Music has been provided either physically distanced or by video.
4. Children and Youth continued meeting, learning and supported via Zoom and occasional in person events.
5. The facility has remained in use by the Boys & Girls Club with adequate precautions.
6. Staff has continued to work and be available via phone, voicemail or text while working from home and then with restricted hours in person.
7. Counseling has been provided as needed by various staff/lay ministers via our various ministries.
8. Families losing loved ones have been supported as we've been able.

9. Random acts of kindness have been provided namelessly.
10. The Grounds Crew has maintained the campus.
11. The Cleaning Service has and is providing the extras necessary to sanitize and keep our building clean.
12. Meals have been provided to the community.
13. Since we've reopened with safety precautions, visitors have joined in worship.
14. Visitation when possible has been done.
15. Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts have resumed meeting.
16. Prayer ministry remains functional and foundational.
17. Crafty Ladies have resumed meeting.

This has taken creativity, time, money, grace and patience.

1. Have they all been to our liking? No!
2. Have we stretched ourselves to rise to the occasion? We have!
3. Are we doing the best we can be? Heaven's NO! We are always striving.

Perhaps a more appropriate way to consider this is:

Are we living up to God's desire for us individually? ... corporately?

Micah 6:8 – “But he's already made it plain how to live, what to do, what God is looking for in men and women. It's quite simple: Do what is fair and just to your neighbor, be compassionate and loyal in your love, And don't take yourself too seriously – take God seriously.”

To follow this directive, we would do well to ask – “What would Jesus do?” How would I act using this as my code of conduct for living through difficult times or times of ease, for listening or conversing, for following or leading.

The test is in living out this code of conduct. It asks us to provide grace, forgiveness and love as a basis for justice. As leader, the congregation has entrusted us to listen to them, not to solicit, to share joys and concerns as appropriate, to make decisions based on prayerful consideration. Do we get it right all the time? NO! Hence, the need for forgiveness and grace. We each have our strengths and weaknesses, our own opinions and ability to reason, but let's debate our differences speaking truth in love and reach a compromise and consensus within our Leadership Board. Then we may leave in agreement, dedicated to refraining from gossip and rehashing the matters with others, knowing we were heard, we listened, and we debated, arriving at an equitable consensus for the Body of Christ.

Consensus decision-making is defined as a process that builds trust and creates ownership and commitment which can lead to better quality outcomes and empowers the group or community to move forward to create their future together.

- This takes candor, flexibility and willingness to listen to others.
- Reaching a consensus doesn't mean 100% agreement, but that all participated, had their say, listened to others and are willing to support the consensus in the best interest of the body.

“Wise fools are always formed in the testing ground of exile when the customary and familiar are taken away and they must go deeper and much higher for wisdom.”

~ From Richard Rohr’s devotions on Wisdom