

**Shalom Mennonite Church  
Commission Chair Team  
Meeting Minutes  
November 13, 2023**

The Commission Chair Team convened on November 13, 2023, at 6:30 p.m. EST via Zoom. Present were Frank Kandel, Pastor Brian Bither, Brittany Bither, Pastor Craig Oury, Carol Bixler, Linda Showalter, Mike Wiggington, Zenebe Abebe, CoraLyn Turentine, Bob Love, and Nizeet Deiter.

**Introduction**

Frank opened the meeting by asking “What was your first job?” Members of the Commission Chair Team exchanged stories about their first work experiences.

Following the icebreaker, Frank led the assembly in a prayer taken from the hymnal.

As the meeting progressed, Frank announced the primary agenda item—concentrating on budgetary recommendations put forth by the various teams. He designated Bob to spearhead the ensuing discussion, emphasizing that the outcomes would eventually be communicated to Shalom Mennonite Church congregation for approval.

**Budget Proposal Discussion**

Bob emphasized that the congregation relies on the Commission Chair Team to make informed decisions regarding the proposed budget, underscoring the significance of approaching this responsibility with utmost seriousness. He outlined his plan to thoroughly review each commission budget and engage in discussions to ensure consensus on the proposed budgetary allocations.

**Outreach Commission**

The key points were as follows:

- Discussion on decreasing the budget for the Meseret Kristos Seminary (MKS) support.
  - Zenebe reported that, after consulting with team members, a unanimous decision was reached to discuss a reduction in the budget for MKS support.
  - Pastor Brian highlighted the need for more dialogue with MKS due to unmet goals, citing changes in the country and lack of accreditation.
  - Bob noted that the budget remained unchanged for the past year and proposed informing MKS of the church's shifted focus and the rationale behind the budget decrease.
  - Frank mentioned the support Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) provides to MKS.

- Pastor Brian expressed concern about potential layoffs resulting from a drastic budget reduction and suggested considering the impact of Shalom Mennonite Church's contribution.
- CoraLyn raised the question of the type of reports received from MKS and suggested setting clear expectations before reducing the budget.
  - Zenebe clarified that it depends on who you asked. Different groups have different opinions about the success of MKS. He also noted that one of success metrics was the creation of a liberal art college, which has not happened in the last 20 years.
- CoraLyn stated that maybe Outreach should let MKS about a set of expectations before reducing the budget and let them know what key performances and expectations are needed for the support to continue.
  - Bob stated that since the church is not part of the board, and the relationship is not built in that way perhaps it is not the best approach. However, letting them know that church focus has changed will be better.
    - Linda agreed with Bob statement.
- Zenebe stated that MKS came to the church to ask for support.
- Bob proposed maintaining the current budget for the year and gradually initiating conversations about reducing it.
  - Craig supported leaving the budget unchanged for the current year but beginning discussions about a reduction for the following year.
- **The Commission Chair Team agreed** to maintain the current budget while initiating discussions about future reductions.
- Discussion on placement of the AMBS support.
  - AMBS support will be transferred from the Discipling Commission to the Outreach Commission, accompanied by a 3% increase.
- Discussion on IN-AID fund
  - The proposed 100% increase is driven by the substantial financial needs of IN-AID, coupled with the active involvement of several Shalom members in the ministry.

### **Discipling Commission**

- Discussion on the proposed budget for Dismantling Racism Steering Committee
  - Carol explained that the People of Color Caucus (POC) are organizing multiple activities in February, justifying the budget increase.
    - CoraLyn clarified that the POC plans to host guest speakers and potentially organize a church field trip, extending beyond Black History Month. The consensus among POC members is to prioritize inviting speakers.

- Brian mentioned the initial plan of having four speakers each Sunday in February but acknowledged that plans might evolve.
  - Bob pointed out that there is a separate line in the Worship section for outside speakers, but that he supports using the Dismantling Racism line for funding of speakers specifically recruited for the planned special project in February.
- Discussion on proposed budget for the Sunday School Materials
  - Sunday School Materials has increased the budget and Bob wondered if the current proposed budget will be enough.
    - **The Commission Chair Team agreed** with the current projection to leave it as it is.

### Worship Commission

- Discussion on proposed budget for interpreters
  - Bob explained that the budget increase is attributed to the high cost of interpreters.
    - Brittany noted that while the need for interpreters varies across different quarters, they remain expensive.
    - Linda highlighted that even when utilizing volunteers from the congregation, some form of compensation is necessary.
    - Bob suggested leaving it as it is.
      - **The Commission Chair Team agreed** to keep the proposed budget as it is.

### Community Life Commission

- **The Commission Chair Team agreed** with the proposed budget.

### Administration Commission

- **The Commission Chair Team agreed** with proposed budget for the IN-MI Mennonite Conference Delegates
- Bob clarified that a budget will be needed for the MC USA Convention next year. He also pointed out that payroll increased in the proposed budget.
  - **The Commission Chair Team agreed** with the proposed budget increase for payroll.

### Vision & Accountability

- Discussion on pastoral proposed salary increase.

- *\*\*During this discussion Pastor Brian and Pastor Craig stepped out. \*\**
- Frank mentioned that the VAT members adhered to the MC USA recommendations. Additionally, despite the Social Security Cost of Living Adjustment indicating a 3.2% increase, the VAT members collectively decided on a 7% increase.
  - CoraLyn expressed her agreement with ensuring a fair salary for the pastoral staff, citing concerns about inflation, and confirmed her affirmative vote for the proposed 7% increase.
  - **The Commission Chair Team agreed** on the proposed budget for pastoral salary.
- *\*\*Pastors joined the meeting\*\**
- **The Commission Chair Team agreed** on the proposed budget for health insurance reimbursement.
- Bob suggested to leave the Co-Pastor's health insurance as it is in case of emergency.
  - **The Commission Chair Team agreed.**
- Craig clarified that he does not have any expenses on IN-MI conference because he is on the leadership Enhancement Team.

### Other

- Bob stated that the Leadership Resources and Retreats budget was reduced.
  - **The Commission Chair Team agreed** with the proposed budget reduction.
- Frank stated that the Mileage/Expenses budget for volunteer Pastors & Deacons has the same budget as the previous year just in case it is needed.
  - **The Commission Chair Team agreed** with the proposed budget.

### Proposed Budget Closing

- Bob pointed out that, as a congregation, we spent less than the proposed budget. However, he emphasized the importance of communicating to the congregation that, this time, we might need to adhere to the actual proposed budget.
- Bob concluded this segment of the meeting with a closing prayer.

### **Commission Teams Updates**

1. Linda provided an update on behalf of the **Community Life Commission Team.** The key points were as follows:

- The October meeting centered around Trunk or Treat, proving to be a successful and worthwhile endeavor.
- The focus now shifts to the planning of the upcoming Thanksgiving dinner.

#### Questions/Discussion

- As a team they are working on outside the box activities that could benefit the congregation.
2. Carol provided an update on behalf of the **Discipling Commission Team**.  
The key points were as follows:
    - The team is very pleased with the adult participation.
    - Laura Harms does an excellent job with teaching the kids.
    - The team is working on the Bible memory challenge for adults.
  3. Mike provided an update on behalf of the **Administration Commission Team**.  
The key points were as follows:
    - The team is working on accessibility issues.
    - Andrew Martin has worked on defibrillator grants.
      - Mike asked a question about if defibrillators should be added to the budget? This was not included in the budget, but he is bringing to be discussed by the Commission Chair Team.
    - The Arlington Neighborhood Organization made a request for assistance with a grant aimed at enhancing the neighborhood's appeal. Efforts have been made to this initiative, and currently, they are awaiting a response.
  4. CoraLyn provided an update on behalf of the **Spiritual Gifts Discernment Team**.  
The key points were as follows:
    - During the meeting last week, the team met to discuss to deliberate on the team's responsibilities.
    - The focus of the team right now is to increase the deacon list.
  5. Zenebe Abebe provided an update on behalf of the **Outreach Commission Team**.  
The key points were as follows:
    - Last meeting focused on the proposed budget.
  6. Brittany Bither provided an update on behalf of the **Worship Commission Team**.  
The key points were as follows:
    - The upcoming meeting scheduled for this Friday will address various requests, with a particular focus on theological matters.

- The Junior Children's Church is set to start this coming Sunday.
7. Pastor Brian Bither and Pastor Craig Oury provided an update on behalf of the **Pastoral Team**.
- The key points were as follows:
- The pastors recently took part in a retreat, during which Pastor Craig served as a speaker and it was a very successful event due to his participation.
8. Frank Kandel reported on behalf of the **Vision & Accountability Team**.
- The key points were as follows:
- Brian is going to start the sabbatical in 2024. Both Pastors will have sabbatical in 2025, but at different times.
  - Two VAT members are working on gathering data to working on the pastor's evaluation.
  - The team engaged in further discussions about LGBTQIA+ matters within the church, revisiting previous conversations to clarify the church's stance on the issue.
  - Upcoming the team activities includes:
    - Next congressional meeting will be December 3<sup>rd</sup>. It was decided to have a recording secretary for the December meeting.

### **Next Meeting**

The next Commission Chair Team Meeting is scheduled for **Tuesday January 23<sup>rd</sup> at 6:30 pm EST via Zoom.**

### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned by Frank at 7:56 pm EST.

Recorded by Nizeet Deiter