

OPEN PRAIRIE UCC – January 2004 News

MINUTES OF CONGREGATIONAL MEETING on SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7

Our Moderator, Al Forristall, called the meeting to order after worship. Our main orders of business were our preliminary budget proposal and a vote on the call of the Rev. Curran Reichert.

The Budget

Rich Hornbaker reported for the Stewardship committee that our budget includes a pledge of about \$60,000 for local mission and \$3,000 for our church's wider mission. Almost all members' pledges have been given to the stewardship committee and included in this budget.

Our goal, given the amount of money that we have now and the amount of money we will need in the future, is to add at least one new family per month to the congregation.

To begin operating and start applying for grant money, we need a budget in place. The Stewardship committee distributed the proposed budget to the congregation. Right now, it's a bare-bones budget, and it requires additional funding to work. The plan right now is to obtain this additional funding through fund-raising or grants. Gene will be talking to Jorje Morales, the Conference Representative for Church Development, about 2 weeks from this meeting to discuss fund-raising and money. Also, there might be additional pledges that have not been turned in yet. Those could raise the amount of money we have at our disposal. Al encouraged those members who have not yet made a pledge to do so.

Rich made the point that we should be prepared to pay a pastor if we're going to call a pastor. We need to have our finances somewhat in order before we extend the call to Curran.

Hal Autrey made the motion to vote on approving the budget. Paul Goble seconded the motion. It was approved unanimously.

Extending a call to Rev. Curran Reichert

There was some surprise about the quickness of the decision to extend the call to Curran. Many people thought we would cool our heels a little bit longer.

Kelly Autrey-Webber spoke on behalf of the Search Committee. She reminded the congregation that their committee had reviewed 40 applicants while searching for a pastor. Out of these 40, they thought that Curran was an excellent match for Hampshire Colony. After receiving input from members of Open Prairie, they found that she was an even better match for the new church. In addition to being such a good match for our new church, Curran seems to be a good match for other churches, as well. She has at least three strong job offers on the table, and these people are ready to give her a job *now*. If we wait, she will be employed elsewhere. Although this is the case, Curran still feels called to our church. She believes that her vision matches quite well with our vision for our church. If we call her to be our pastor, the hope is that she will start on Feb. 1, 2004. Victor also spoke on behalf of the committee, stating that he was disappointed twice by seeing Curran voted down at Hampshire Colony. Although we began the new church *without* the idea of Curran in mind, we now have the opportunity to call her. It would be unfortunate for all parties to pass up this opportunity yet again. He also believes firmly that Curran's work at our church could prove to be good for the community of Princeton, as well as our congregation.

Ray Kuhnert expressed concerns as to how long we can expect Curran to stay with us if we call her to be our pastor. Kelly assured the congregation that Curran is not in this for the money. She has also already shown a strong commitment to us. (continued)

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Victor also asked Curran at one point in time how long she saw herself staying with us if she came to be our pastor. Her response was that she planned to be here at least five years.

Gene then explained to the congregation that he met last Thursday with the Church & Ministry Committee. Apparently, some people at this meeting were expressing anxiety and concerns over our vote about calling Curran. They asked that we consider waiting to vote on this decision. While they understood that this decision is a long time in the making for us, they still wondered if we are being rash. Gene characterized their attitudes as those of concerned parents. They are very supportive of us, but also trying to protect us from rushing into anything headlong (like the buffalo). Gene's recommendation was that we go ahead and vote.

Hal Autrey commented that he appreciates the concern of the Committee, but the bottom line is that they aren't us and they don't know about us and how far we've come.

Ron McCutchan wondered if the vote today could cause problems for us in our attempts to become a UCC Church. Gene's answer was an unequivocal "no." They were simply caught off guard.

Bill Beneke raised the concern that we might be endangering ourselves for obtaining grants by including grants in our budget. Gene maintained that we actually need to make a much bigger budget, one that is true to our needs. The only way to get these monies is to demonstrate a need for them.

The Search Committee then made the motion to vote on whether or not to call the Rev. Curran Reichert to Open Prairie United Church of Christ.

Al Forristall explained the process to the congregation. First, they were to fill out the green sheets, indicating that they intended to

become members, then visit Beth Bickerman and Becky Sapp to obtain their ballots. Beth and Becky were to count the votes once everyone had voted.

Donna Chelin raised the question of how many yes votes we needed to call Curran to our church. Since we have no Constitution and By-Laws yet, the Constitution and By-Laws committee recommended that we stick with a 2/3 majority.

Voting then commenced. Al called the meeting to order again after the vote. The results were quite positive:

47 votes cast total.

46 votes cast in favor of extending a call to Curran Reichert.

1 vote cast against calling Curran.

98% voted in favor of extending the call.

Adam Webber took a moment after the results to thank and praise the search committee, a sentiment echoed by many. He commended them for recommending the *best* candidate, even though her candidacy could be (and was) controversial. Not many people have the courage to take that route.

The meeting was then adjourned to a fine luncheon, where the congregation first heard the wonderful news that Curran accepted our call.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

UCC NEWS. Consider signing up to receive the national denomination newspaper UCC News. Subscriptions are free. They do accept donations if you are willing and able. You can subscribe by going to the website www.ucc.org and clicking the tab News – or give Marcie a call and she'll sign up you! This is a great way to keep your thumb on the pulse of the church nationwide and locally.

AN INVITATION. The Sheffield United Church of Christ extends an invitation to our members to attend their "Community Coffee" Saturday December 6th, at the United Church of Christ Hall in Sheffield between 7:00 to 10:00 am. They are featuring fresh baked cinnamon rolls!

CHARTER MEMBER SUNDAY RESCHEDULED!

Due to last Sunday's snowstorm, our Charter Member Sunday will take place on January 11th. The luncheon following worship will not take place – but there will be treats!

PRAIRIE CIRCLE FORMS!

This group is open to all women of Open Prairie UCC and will meet on the first Wednesday of each month for supper at 6:00 p.m. It is through this group that Open Prairie will be active with our area Church Women United. We will gather on Wednesday, January 7th at 6:00 p.m. at the Underground Inn. Please call Kathy Hornbaker or Hazel Crain to make a reservation.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF PRAYER

Heavenly God, help us remember that the jerk who cut us off in traffic last night is a single mother who worked nine hours that day and is rushing home to cook dinner, help with homework, do the laundry and spend a few precious moments with her children.

Help us to remember that the pierced, tattooed, disinterested young man who can't make change correctly is a worried 19-year-old college student, balancing his apprehension over final exams with his fear of not getting his student loans for next semester.

Remind us, Lord, that the scary looking bum, begging for money in the same spot every day (who really ought to get a job!) is a slave to addictions that we can only imagine in our worst nightmares.

Help us to remember that the old couple walking annoyingly slow through the store aisles and blocking our shopping progress are savoring this moment, knowing that, based on the biopsy report she got back last week, this will be the last year that they go shopping together.

Heavenly God, remind us each day that, of all the gifts you give us, the greatest gift is love. It is not enough to share that love with those we hold dear.

Open our hearts not to just those who are close to us, but to all humanity. Let us be slow to judge and quick to forgive, show patience, empathy and love.

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WORSHIP TEAM

We would like to thank everyone who helped us celebrate Advent and Christmas by wearing blue, bringing poinsettias, providing the Christmas Tree, putting up the tree, and giving of yourselves by participating in our services. The Spirit of Giving was truly reflected in your response and participation.

Thanks also to Ron and Adam and the Choir who create, through diligent hard work, wonderful songs of praise.

January promises to be busy. We are planning two special services. Membership Sunday is rescheduled for January 11 and on January 25 we will say good-bye to Gene and welcome Curran.

We have two requests from the Worship Team: If anyone has suggestions for Rev. Gene for January sermon topics, please drop him a note or call him.

If anyone would like to provide special music, please call Ron McCutchan.

MUSIC

The choir will be singing once a month beginning in January. Anyone who is interested in sharing his or her musical talents for special music on other Sundays, please contact Ron McCutchan at 879-2032.

FELLOWSHIP TEAM

Due to the snowstorm on Sunday, January 4th, we've decided to cancel the salad luncheon after "Charter Member Sunday". We will be planning a meal together following worship when Curran arrives and to celebrate Gene's ministry with us. Watch the bulletin and future e-mails for more details!

Our next team meeting is set for Wednesday, January 14th at 7:00 pm

CHRISTIAN ED

The Sr. High Youth will be helping out with a work project at Pilgrim Park following church on Sunday, January 18th. We will be tearing out carpeting in the lower conference center and taking apart beds and moving them.

The Confirmation Class sends out a big THANK YOU to all who purchased cookies before the holidays. Because of your generosity we earned \$99. Thanks to Donna Chelin for sharing her cookies with us!

15 cheerful people, with representatives from every generation, shared a beautiful winter evening on Sunday, December 21st caroling around Princeton. We made about 10 visits to area homes to share our Christmas cheer! Rudolf the Red-Nosed Reindeer became our "show tune".....*like a light bulb*. A warm time of fellowship and fun was shared at the O'Neils' home following the caroling. Thanks to Terry, Diane & Jennifer for hosting us!

CHURCH INFORMATION

Temporary Church Office:
22937 1140 N Ave
Princeton IL 61356
(815) 659-3432
hornbakr@theramp.net

Marcie Jagers, Secretary

Rev. Gene Krause, Interim Minister
205 Park Ave W
Princeton, IL 61356
(440) 339-9811 or call Marcie and leave a message for Gene
dgk@mac.com

CORRESPONDENCE

December 15, 2003

Dear Friends and Colleagues at Open Prairie,
I write on behalf of the United Church of Christ Coalition for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Concerns with words of welcome, gratitude and thanksgiving.

You should know that we have heard the story of your courage and commitment in forming your congregation and calling the Rev. Curran Reichert. It is an honor to have a community such as yours as partners in the gospel work of love and justice. You have stepped out in faith, not knowing exactly where you will be led, but knowing that the Still-speaking God is your guide. And, as many have said, God never calls us to mock us.

It is for this that we offer our gratitude and thanksgiving. In our world, too many-- even in faith communities-- are shackled by fear. But not you. So know we give thanks to God and are deeply grateful for your witness.

I know that you are in conversation with the Church and Ministry Committee of the Prairie Association of the Illinois Conference requesting standing as a congregation within the UCC. And I know you have spoken with the Rev. Ann B. Day, Open and Affirming Coordinator for The Coalition, in the process of being listed as a Congregation in Conversation on the way to becoming an Open and Affirming Congregation. And we give thanks for both of these.

If there are other concrete ways we can be of support or service, I hope you will let us know. The National Coalition is at your service. Our phone is (800)653-0799 and my email is NationalCoord@ucccoalition.org.

And I am sure you know that Gene Humke and Jim Sears, our Illinois Conference Chapter Coordinators for the Coalition, are also excellent resources. Gene is at rgenehumke@hotmail.com and Jim is at rascal2@thewebcircuit.net.

In the meantime, know you are in our prayers. The Rev. Gene Kraus is a gifted pastor and we know you are blessed in this

interim period. Blessings on this season of Advent. And may the Christ child continue to be born in your midst.

In peace,
Rev. Rebecca Voelkel
Interim National Coordinator
The United Church of Christ Coalition for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

All Sundays in January

9:15 am pick-up for Sunday School

9:30 am Sunday School @ Pilgrim Park

10:30 am Worship @ Pilgrim Park

1/6 7:00 pm Worship Team at Ernsts

1/7 6:00 pm Prairie Circle Meeting

7:00 pm Church Council at Iveys

1/8 7:00 pm Meet with Prairie Church & Ministry at Pilgrim Park

1/14 7:00 pm Fellowship Team at Iveys

1/18 3:00 pm Youth Work Project at Pilgrim Park