

Assembly Mennonite Church Congregational Meeting
January 21, 2024,. 7 pm
Meeting Led by Marshall King
Minutes Taken by Jeannette Hughes

Supporting documents:

- [2023 Spending Report & 2024 Spending Plan Drafts \(First Reading\)](#)
- [2024 Spending Plan Proposal Explained](#)

Pastoral Search Committee

- Bethany Swope (co-chair, Search Committee) provided a pastoral search committee update for the pastor of child, youth, and adult faith formation
 - The committee feels optimistic, and initial interviews are scheduled
 - There will likely be monthly updates at congregational meetings
 - At this point the committee can still accept MLI's

2024 Spending Plan First Reading

- Main agenda for the meeting was the 2024 proposed Spending Plan, with proposed cuts, as expenses are forecast to exceed money received. Marshall King started this portion by reading from “Laughter Is Sacred Space” by Ted Schwarz (not approaching life from a perspective of scarcity).
 - This was the first reading of the 2024 spending plan—no action taken; at the February congregational meeting there will be a second reading and we will hopefully reach consensus.

Questions Addressed

- Larry Gautsche noted a change from past years in how the spending plan presents the Student Aid budget: For 2024 this is presented all one one budget line, under Assembly Life & Mission. Previously this was divided between Assembly Life & Mission and Mission Beyond Assembly. Larry said that for student aid to take up the space of two line items is too confusing.
- Raises for staff happen in July—8 percent raise last year was a surprise and was dependent on MCUSA guidelines
- Larry Gautsche said that for 2024, we are assuming a 5 percent cost of living increase for staff, which he thinks should be safe after an 8 percent year. Raises don't just affect salary but also benefits and retirement.
- Larry Gautsche: Reserve fund is a guideline, but we keep a reserve fund of 5 percent of our annual spending plan just as backup in case we have unexpected expenses. We are adding money from the general fund to the reserve fund to maintain that 5 percent.
- The construction fund is set aside for completion of the kitchen and other things that are not complete up to this point.

John Nafziger—Overview of Pledges for 2024 and in past years

- There were 86 pledges this year, 14 of whom did not pledge last year. Also, some pledged last year but not this year.

Larry Gautsche and Ben Sywulka—Overview of This Year's Spending Plan

- Salaries increased last year, and we are budgeting for a 5 percent increase this year, as well as adding a staff person—plus Assembly student aid is increasing. These are big outlays. In spite of all those increases, pledges have remained somewhat static. We generally assume that pledges will cover 80 percent of all spending, and we do not want to stretch much beyond that. We also assume that if we budget a 5 percent increase for our staff, other Mennonite agencies will have the same increase, so we are proposing a 5% increase in giving to Mennonite agencies this year. We budgeted a 7.5 percent increase for Central District Conference because that was a request from them.
- \$9,000 building tithe can be postponed this year.
- Assembly student aid is now one line item.
- Members' needs funds carried over from last year—we never know from one year to the next how much these funds will be used (stick with \$10,000 a year average).
- Larry Gautsche: We need an air handling system in the multipurpose space, but that's \$50,000, which needs to come out of the capital campaign. Member loans would allow us to address the mortgage and the air handling system.
- John Nafziger: Our pledging trend over the years is not a straight line.

Summary of Problem and Potential Solutions

- Given the pledges we received and our 80% policy, we should spend no more than \$538K in 2024. However, our spending obligations amount to \$563K.
- We could try to increase our income, but leadership group is not convinced that this is feasible.
- We could save money by adjusting the start date for the new hire.
- We could save money by reducing the time we spend at retreat and/or reducing the subsidies for retreat costs.
- We could save money by refinancing our mortgage through member loans.
- We need to come back and have a deeper discussion later in the year about future spending plans.
- Assemblyites are encouraged to give ideas regarding saving money / generating money at <https://pienso.app/assemblybudget>.

Comments

- Scott Coulter: Retreat committee has not had a conversation about the proposed cut to the retreat budget. The committee would want to hear from the congregation about what it would feel like to not be able to stay on Friday night or to contribute more to paying own way. Advantage to staying Friday night is that it gives participants one full day in which they're not coming or going.
- Is there a way to slow the mortgage payment down to save money in the short term?
- Is it possible to apply for a grant for the air handling system?

Approved by LG on 2/6/24