

CHURCH OF THE COVENANT

MINUTES OF THE SESSION MEETING: MONDAY, OCTOBER 5, 2015

RULING ELDERS PRESENT: April Betzner, Pat Boyer, Joel Braun, Gordon Core, Jerry Davison, Sue Denmead, Cindy Garlisi, Terri Grantz, Linda Grimm, Jessica Hickman, Jackie Koman, Jim Little, Steve Marriner, Dennis Myers, David Taylor, and Brian Teagarden

RULING ELDERS EXCUSED: Crystal Miles

STAFF PRESENT: Rev. Dr. Stuart Broberg, Don Nixon

OPENING PRAYER AND DEVOTIONS

The regularly scheduled meeting of the Session of The Church of the Covenant was convened with prayer and devotions by the Rev. Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, on Monday, October 5, 2015 at 7:08 p.m. in the Dining Room. Dr. Broberg read from 1 Peter 5:6-7.

APPROVAL OF THE DOCKET

After a motion was made and seconded by a consensus of the Session, the docket for tonight's meeting was unanimously approved by the Session.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES FROM AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER 2015

After a motion was made by Pat Boyer and seconded by Terri Grantz, the minutes from the regular September 2015 Session meeting and the called congregational meeting of September 27, 2015, were unanimously approved by the Session, with a minor change in the regular Session minutes.

APPROVAL OF BAPTISMS

Brenda (Lucas) Griffith and Daniel L. Griffith have requested that their infant son, Garrett Daniel Griffith, born May 2, 2015, be baptized on Sunday, October 25, 2015 at the 11:00 a.m. worship service, with the Rev. Dr. Stuart D. Broberg officiating.

The following four baptism requests are for Sunday, November 22, 2015, at the 11:00 a.m. worship service, with the Rev. Dr. Stuart D. Broberg officiating:

- **Cortney (DiGiovanni) Capo** and John E. Capo request the baptism of their infant son, Giovanni Ethan Capo, born April 27, 2015;
- **Douglas DiGiovanni** and Courtney Yanchak DiGiovanni request the baptism of their infant daughter, Gabriella Jean DiGiovanni, born September 6, 2015;
- **Chelsea Carnahan** and Adam Kearns request the baptism of the daughter (information not yet received by the office); and,
- **Eric A. and Bonnie Simpson Saffell** request the baptism of their infant son, Cole Alexander Saffell, born August 19, 2015.

These baptisms did not require Session approval since they complied with the Church's wedding policy.

APPROVAL OF A WEDDING

Emily Walther and Benjamin Rudman have requested to be married in our sanctuary on June 4, 2016. This wedding would be an exception to our Wedding Policy for non-members and a guest minister. The Worship and Music Committee has met and approved these exceptions, forwarding them to the Session for its final approval. After a motion was made by Terri Grantz and seconded by April Betzner, the Session unanimously approved this wedding.

IMPORTANT NOTES

Dr. Broberg noted that the November 2, 2015 Session meeting will be preceded by a New Member Dessert Reception, which will start at 7:00 p.m. Also on November 2, 2015, a calendar scheduling meeting will be held starting at 6:30 p.m.

Dr. Broberg also pointed out that he learned that the individual who asked if he could use the sanctuary to record some guitar music was in fact doing that for a school project. He was relaying this information as requested in the September Session meeting by the Session.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATION CALENDAR – CONCERNS RELATED TO THE NOMINATING PROCESS

Dr. Broberg handed out a letter to the Session that explained his views on the continuing nominating process; that letter is attached to these minutes as Attachment 1. Jonathan Pachter then outlined the purpose of this part of this Session meeting; i.e., to identify a path forward. Dr. Broberg then reviewed his conversation with Sue Key. Sue felt she had a conflict of interest (she is a member of same law firm as John Rodgers, Stated Clerk of the Washington Presbytery) and could not participate in any legal discussions about the nominating matters at hand. Dr. Broberg pointed out that Denise Gibson, in his opinion, had a valid point that the 2001 Policy shown to the Nominating Committee has been superseded by the new Book of Order, and that recent Synod, General Assembly (GA) and Presbyterian Judicial Commission (PJC) cases have ruled that no Presbytery or congregation can be stricter than the Book of Order.

Next the Session considered why legal counsel needs to be sought for this matter. Dr. Broberg stated that we are not trying to “lawyer up”; rather, we need to get objective legal opinions regarding the 2001 Policy and the Synod, GA and PJC cases so we can move ahead equipped with all relevant information in order to select the correct path forward for the Church. Dr. Broberg said that Sue Key had given him the names of three attorneys. One did not return his calls, and one was not interested. The third attorney that he called, Sam Foreman, would be willing to look into this matter and offer his advice pro bono. Of note, Mr. Foreman worked for the “faithful remnant” at the Peters Creek United Presbyterian Church case.

At this point, April Betzner reviewed legal information provided by her brother, who is an attorney. Dr. Broberg said that her brother’s note will be passed on to Mr. Foreman for his consideration.

Next, the Session discussed whether or not to work with Mr. Foreman in this matter. Steve Marriner, who is an attorney, expressed concerns about Mr. Foreman’s experience and qualifications to help us. He questioned Mr. Foreman’s expertise in this type of religious/secular crossover legal matter. Steve also said that he hoped we wouldn’t need an attorney to keep us

out of trouble and wondered if we have crossed a line in our actions? Have we handled this matter appropriately so far? Steve asked if any Session could prevent someone from becoming an officer of the congregation because of sexual orientation.

David Taylor, also an attorney, noted that the courts are reluctant to get into matters of canon law. David suggested that we need to seek a college or seminary professor who was expert in canon law in this particular field.

After considerable discussion about this matter, Pat Boyer and Joel Braun were asked to review this summer's nominating process for the Session. Members wondered what could happen if elections would be held on October 18, 2015. Dr. Broberg then described the election process that has occurred at The Church of the Covenant and at the churches he has served in the past. Dr. Broberg said that he would talk to John Rodgers and write down those processes. Pat Boyer wondered at this time if we should modify the policy to resolve it not being correct. Dr. Broberg offered that we should get a legal opinion on that question.

The Session then agreed that we should ask Sam Foreman to review our 2001 Policy and report back to the Session as to whether or not we have created a problem. The Session would decide the next step based on Mr. Foreman's report. At Dr. Broberg's suggestion, Pat Boyer moved and Sue Denmead seconded a motion to call a special Session meeting on Wednesday October 14, 2015, at 7:00 p.m. to hear Mr. Foreman's report. That motion passed unanimously. Pat Boyer and Jonathan Pachter were asked to meet with Mr. Foreman before the October 14 special Session meeting and review this matter with him.

Dr. Broberg recommended that two people meet with Denise Gibson both before and after the October 14th special Session meeting. They will be asked to communicate what the Session is doing and convey that the Session is definitely not "lawyering up" for a legal struggle. The goals for meeting with Ms. Gibson would be to keep her informed about the Session's discussions and actions so she is kept in the loop. Joel Braun and Jim Little were asked to meet with Denise.

Dr. Broberg also recommended that two people need to meet with the individual who brought the 2001 Policy to the attention of the Nominating Committee. Pat Boyer and Jim Little agreed to meet with that person in order to accomplish the same goals as meeting with Ms. Gibson; i.e., to keep that person informed about the Session's discussions and actions so everyone is kept in the loop.

Finally, Dr. Broberg recommended that two people meet with Rev. Craig Kephart, Executive Presbyterian for the Washington Presbytery, so he is also informed about this. Gordon Core and Jonathan Pachter agreed to meet with Rev. Kephart before the October 14th meeting.

Dr. Broberg suggested that the Session needs to consider delaying the annual congregational elections meeting until a later date because was not properly publicized to the congregation. Jerry Davison moved and Sue Denmead seconded a motion to temporarily set aside the Bylaw that requires annual elections of officers to be held on the third Sunday of October in each year. That motion passed unanimously.

Next, Brian Teagarden moved and April Betzner seconded a motion to hold the annual congregational meeting for the election of officers on Sunday, November 22, 2015, after the conclusion of the 11:00 a.m. worship service. The Session unanimously approved this motion.

SESSION COMMITTEE REPORTS

A shortened version of the Session Committee reports followed.

Jerry Davison, chairperson of the Buildings and Grounds Committee reported that all tasks given to The Church of the Covenant for the Family Promise building have been completed. He also stated that the Committee is formulating a game plan for installing air conditioning in the Sanctuary, using Memorial Committee funds as the source for the finances associated with such a large project. Jerry noted that Ralph Farabee will create a mock-up of the likely work and solicit comments on that mock-up before the Committee moves ahead with any work related to this concept.

Jerry also reported for the Memorial Committee, noting that the Committee has recently disbursed \$6,000 based on the preferences of the donors.

Brian Teagarden advised the Session that our financial picture has improved. We now have a positive bottom line, but the Committee still is withholding some per capita payments and some payments to the Unified Mission giving. Brian said that the Committee anticipates paying the per capita and Unified mission giving in November 2015, assuming giving picks up in November like in years past.

Joel Braun said that the Nominating Committee will be able to provide the full slate of nominees either on October 14 or at the regular November Session meeting. He thanked the Nominating Committee members for their hard work and diligence.

PASTORAL CARE REPORT

Dr. Broberg pointed out that in-house communion will be held on November 1, 2015, and that help is needed from the Session. Ministry Team members will be asked to help with funerals and visitation while Dr. Broberg attends the funeral of a very close friend in Maine this week.

ADJOURNING AND CLOSING PRAYER

After a motion by Pat Boyer and a second by April Betzner, the Session unanimously approved the motion to adjourn. The meeting was closed with a prayer by Don Nixon at 9:48 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jonathan M. Pachter

Jonathan M. Pachter, Clerk of Session

Letter to Session
October 5, 2015

Dear Session:

As you are well aware by now, my strategy for trying to deal effectively with potential church dividing controversy related to issues of same gender weddings and gay and lesbian ordination in the church is to try not to make an issue of it, to keep us closely connected as a congregation through strengthening relationships through visitation, to not make it necessary for people to take sides, and to ratchet down anxiety related to the issue. I have not preached sermons on it, not led adult ed seminars on it, not tried to take sides. I have wanted to remain everyone's pastor and to hold us together as a congregation.

For whatever reason, people have not taken my lead on this strategy and instead continue to "tee-up" these issues. As we are also well aware there are people of great passion on both sides of these issues. There are people with gay or lesbian children or grandchildren who are very passionate about the issue one way; there are people who are equally passionate about their church and the centrality of their view of scripture on these issues the other way. People on both sides have been hurt by the larger debate going on in our denomination. It is why I have sought to lead us away from such conflict. I believe to "tee-up" these issues will only serve to wound and deeply divide our wonderful church and in ways that will undermine our effectiveness in ministry and mission.

As a pastor I have always sought to lead our flock in directions I believe produce positive fruit for the Kingdom—worship, Christian Education, pastoral care and mission. It has been my goal to not lose even one member regarding these issues and that The Church of the Covenant need not fall into divisiveness and decline as has so much of the rest of the church. Again, for whatever reason our church seems poised to "tee-up" this issue for our congregation in a very public way, visible in our October Congregational Meeting to Elect Officers, that will serve to divide our congregation in the middle of the Fall Stewardship Campaign.

First, I would hope the session will take my recommendation to seek legal advice to guide us in the legal issues before us and then that we will heed that advice and act in a way consistent with the Book of Order and the law. "To do the right thing" with this means that we must first be clear on what the rules are and then to follow them.

Second, I would ask us to pray together this evening about it. While humanly speaking it may seem impossible to reconcile these two diverse opinions and it feels as if we are headed unfortunately for division and controversy, with all of its attendant problems. But I believe that God is able to provide a way where there may seem to be no way. And that if we seek His will we will discover together a better way than any of us individually can conceive in this moment.

I would ask that this letter be included in the minutes of this meeting and as Moderator I so stipulate.

God bless you. I am praying for you.

Faithfully,
Dr. Stu Broberg