

***Rhode Island Conference of the United Church of Christ  
Autumnal Meeting Minutes  
November 7, 2015  
Peace Dale Congregational Church, UCC, Peace Dale, RI***

The meeting was convened at 8:35am by the Rev. Dr. George Peters, Conference President. He offered words of welcome and an explanation of the tight schedule for the day. He also encouraged folks to be full participants in the program today, expressing thanks to the Planning Team for the event and to the Peace Dale Congregational Church for hosting the event. Ray Christian, President of Peace Dale Congregational, offered words of welcome on behalf of the church and reviewed logistics items including suggestions on locations of places to be used in the building during the day. He also offered thanks to all the Peace Dale Congregational volunteers who are working at the event today. He also noted that this church has become known for blending the old and the new in worship and in ministry.

Rev. Barbara Libby, Interim Conference Minister, was asked to offer a prayer to begin the day.

George expressed appreciation to the Planning Committee for the event referencing the list which appeared on the slideshow panel. Appreciation also given to the Conference staff who photos appeared on the slideshow panel. Special guests were also recognized: Rebekah Choate, Global Ministries, Dick Harter - \_\_\_\_\_, Daehler Hayes – Cornerstone Fund, Alex Floyd Marshall – Soren Technologies, Karen Steward – Smart Power.

The Business Meeting was called to order formally at 8:45 am. The Registrar was called forward to certify the quorum which she did: 21 churches (+1 additional arriving late), 27 clergy, 56 delegates, 2 Members In Discernment, 11 Visitors, 3 ex-officio, 7 staff or BOD members.

The first item of business was the action required on the Minutes of the Spring Annual Meeting 2015. *A motion was duly made and seconded. Vote: Unanimously approved.*

The next item of business was a presentation on General Synod 2015 which was done by showing the Synod Wrap Up Video. We did have delegates representing us and they were asked to stand and be recognized along with others who also attended Synod. It was noted that we had the largest youth contingency in New England. The General Synod in 2017 is in Baltimore and folks are invited to consider now to attend. If you would like to be a delegate, let your desire be known!

Susan Rotblat-Walker as Vice President of Stewardship for the Conference was invited forward to make a presentation on the proposed Per Capita increase from \$18 to \$20. This funding is used to support the work of the staff and the support of the RI Council of Churches. It has not been raised in 7 years. *Motion for consideration: The 2015 Autumnal Meeting of the RICUCC approves the recommendation of the Board of Directors to increase the Per Capita Dues in 2016 from \$18.00 per member to \$20.00.*

*It does not require a second since it is coming from the Board of Directors.*

Discussion:

- Rev. Amy Frenze rose to speak that the Hope Church folks support the work of the Conference but they cannot afford the increase.
- A question was asked as to how local church membership is determined. Answer: by the local church.
- Question as to what percentage of Conference income the Per Capita is. Answer from Bob Nolan: 20% of income
- Observation that encouraging local church members who are able to pay the Per Capita directly.

No additional comments or questions were forthcoming so the vote proceeded with a show of hands. A reminder was made that only delegates and authorized clergy may vote. *The vote to approve was not unanimous but was deemed by the President to be an overwhelming majority.*

Bob Nolan was invited forward to offer a presentation on the 2016 Budget & Finance report. Bob invited folks to discern the budget as they hear the presentation.

Income Highlights

- Outdoor Ministry – Net Zero
- Healthcare credit – Gone
- Per Capita Support – based on increase

Expense Highlights

- Salary increases @ 3%

- General expenses (\$5K)
- Outdoor Ministries – Net Zero

Conference budget is not very much different from previous years. It is a standby budget designed to maintain where we are while we go through this discernment process.

RICUCC Investment Asset Progression – slide with detail for years 2008 through 2015 to answer the question if the deficit budgets are hurting us. We have taken \$16,785 from the unrestricted funds to cover expenses in this time period which is not too bad. The Conference is working hard to be good stewards of these assets but we can't continue this indefinitely because we are starting to dip into principal.

*Motion: The 2015 Autumnal Meeting of the RICUCC approves the recommendation of the Board of Directors to adopt the proposed budget for 2016. No second required.*

Discussion:

- Observation that some of the staff receives little or no compensation and others are only part time.
- Question about given the draw down on the principal, how many more years does the Conference have? Answer: Depends on what kind of programming the Conference intends to offer. Hard number answer: 30 years.
- Question about understanding all the zeroes connected to Irons. Answer: The zeroes represent money paid out – zero salary for Jennifer but she does live on the premises without cost; the property costs cover those expenses.
- Comment that it is difficult to continue forward with a deficit budget. We need to either decrease expenses or increase income. What is the plan? Answer: that's why we are discerning as we are the future of the Conference. We are continuing to explore creative ways of decreasing expenses with other conferences.
- What do the operating expenses of Irons Homestead include? Answer (by George Weavill): Utilities, repair, equipment, everything needed to maintain and operate the facility. No major single items but a lot of smaller items. Offset by income number.
- *Question called to vote: Show of hands requested. The President called the vote as overwhelmingly approved.*

Presentation on the Compensation Guidelines for 2016 by Ray Christian on behalf of the Committee on Church & Ministry. Noted that document was distributed at registration so that most folks should have it. Differences from last year were observed appearing as highlighted in the document provided. Major addition of Compensation Guidelines for Faith Community Nurses on p. 17-19. Another change appears on Appendix B. Note that the compensation package for the ordained staff must be voted on annually by the congregation to be accepted by the IRS. Also noted that the document does not include revisions requested at last year's meeting regarding Commissioned and Licensed Ministers but that this will be a priority for the coming year.

*Motion: The 2015 Autumnal Meeting of the RICUCC approves the Compensation Guidelines for 2016 and recommends to its congregations that they prayerfully consider the Guidelines to determine fair compensation for all church staff, authorized and lay. No second required since it is coming from a committee.*

Discussion:

- Is this document prepared with awareness of how it compares with professions other than clergy? Answer: the level of experience and education is taken into account. Questioner observed that was not what she asked. Response was that it is understood that these considerations are taken into account.

*The vote was called to be by show of hands: The President called the vote as unanimously approved.*

*Motion to adjourn following the benediction at the end of the Communion service. Seconded. Vote: Unanimously approved.*

The meeting continued with worship led by the contemporary worship team of Peace Dale Congregational.

Following worship George and Barbara offered a presentation entitled on "Participating in a Season of Discernment". Reference given to the document by this title which folks could have picked up in the advance materials or at the registration table this morning. Their intent is to answer some questions which may have arisen in folks in advance of this morning. Presented as a dialog between George and Barbara.

- Barbara asked about history of partnerships in the RICUCC. George responded:
  - George spoke about the discernment process used by Pawtucket Congregational Church to address similar issues.
  - Two separate churches came together to form Chapel St. Congregational.
  - Vote of Pawtucket Congregational to sell their church home.
- What about the Process Design Group of the Conference a few years ago?
  - Conversations with local churches about what people hoped for in the life of the Conference
  - Answers discerned through that process shared by Barbara, many of which seem to offer encouragement through this discernment process we begin today. This is not a new conversation!

- Also dovetails with ongoing national conversations about Conference boundaries as requested at General Synod 2013.
- General Minister and President John Dorhauer will be speaker at Spring meeting.
- How are we already collaborating with CT & MA Conferences?
  - Search & Call ministries and Interim ministries
  - Super Saturday events
  - Christian Educators have been collaborating in New England for over 30 years.
  - Anticipating even more ways of working together including Racial Justice initiative, shared environmental concerns and response, clergy excellence groups, shared boundary trainings, support in fitness reviews, trainings with national staff
  - Barbara's "RIMACT" t-shirt which the youth developed at Synod this past summer – a noun or verb to describe how the three Conferences work together – what they do (noun) and the doing of it (verb)
- What's the story on the three Boards of Directors talking about all this?
  - Has been on-going for awhile
  - Common decision to undertake this "Season of Discernment" together
  - We don't have any answers but it is time to discern together
  - Question – Is God calling us to do something together and if so, what might that be? Merger is only one of the possibilities and it is not a done deal. Votes required in all Conferences whatever we might decide and it would also have to go to Synod for a vote.
  - We are beginning the conversation now. Clergy met to have this conversation a few weeks ago and lots of notes came out of that conversation.
  - The information coming out of this conversation today will be available in some form. Also working on setting up a "survey monkey" online for anyone to access to offer their thoughts and opinions. Lots to be worked out.
  - Potential Conference of 150,000 folks! 650 churches! Huge range of churches. Expanded opportunities for churches a part of this.
- Why are CT & MA Conferences interested in us?
  - None of us can make it on our own.
  - This is all about relationships – not us and them.
  - Some folks in CT were ready to vote at their meeting. But point was made we are just beginning the conversation!
  - Discerning is not a simple thing. Begin by talking about discernment and what it is. Seeking the deepest yearnings of God's heart for us, experience of group prayer and reflection on God's word.
  - UCC motto – "that they all may be one" -- what it would be like to be one church?
  - Discernment process takes time. We need to consider all the possibilities and being sure we are being faithful about making decisions.
- If we were to become one Conference, would RI have its own Conference Minister?
  - There would be someone leading the RI group, perhaps not a Conference minister but a regional minister or area minister. We only have 30 churches. We might join with other associations.
- How would this affect local churches?
  - Still be a RI committee on ministry. Probably but we don't know.
- Concerns about losing RI's unique identity?
  - RI will continue to be distinctive just as CT & MA will also

Barbara asked to set the stage for the small group conversations. Observed that conversation group # is noted on your name tag. 15 minute break! Gather in break-out rooms for conversation until 12:10 and then return to sanctuary for communion followed by lunch. After lunch, we will continue into the EC for Jametta Alston right here in the sanctuary. Request that we be creative and work to name comments and concerns in the small groups.

Break for small groups as articulated. The plenary reconvened at the appointed time for worship and then adjourned as previously voted.

Respectfully submitted,

The Rev. Ruth Shilling Hainsworth, Clerk

Attachments to the Clerk's Copy of the Minutes:

Agenda

Proposed Budget documents (3 pages)

Wording of motion for the proposed increase in the Per Capita Dues

Compensation Guidelines for 2016