


## **Notes from Church Council - Wednesday, May 21, 2014**

Wednesday night we had a lengthy and rich discussion about the proposal to hire and Associate Pastor. We moved into small groups and discussed things: what is exciting, what concerns do we have, what questions need to be answered? The following lists everything we put down on newsprint. At the end are a few reflections about the process.


### **Exciting**

- New people, especially kids \*
- Biblical Preaching
- Burst of energy
- + Pastor for us
- Alternative worship- mid week
- Qualified Christian Education director
- More men and more varied hair color (not grey)
- Innovation & Tradition both observed
- More human resources
- Programs beyond confirmation for youth
- Sarah has young children
- Non-Traditional process addresses needs

### **Concerns**

- \*\* \$ Big Financial Risk
- Integrations & cross pollination: one church or two?
- Concern about “fast growth”
- Will we “Lose” our First Churches culture & identity?
- Will new folks feel connected to First Churches with time, Boards, \$?
- What if we don't do it?- Lost excitement, energy, \$
- Common Ground is not an established group
- Division as risk
- Would Common Ground worshipers be committed to the whole?
- Risks: Success  leave to form own church
- Process moving too fast-?
- Will this really help us grow?
- Don't know Sarah well enough

### **Questions**

1. Do we have more time?
2. How much is cost?
3. Can we negotiate?  Ex. 70% time

Starting salary to high?  
Temp contract or 3 year project?  
(Concern re: trust)

4. Job description for Associate Pastor
5. Effect on Hadley Church
6. Can there be shared risk?
7. What commitment do we have to bond as one church?
8. Will Christian Ed role be given time & priority it needs, (we need)?

#### Pastoral Notes:

I thank everyone who came out on Wednesday and stayed till after 9 PM to talk about the Associate Pastor proposal (about 20 people). This has been a fast and unusual process and I appreciate the spiritual maturity, careful discernment and openness that people have expressed. Here are a few of my impressions after the meeting.

First, I hear a great openness to move forward as a church to something new, that we are not content to stay as we are, and that we are not done with our mission and purpose as a church. We are pregnant with something new. While this proposal is sudden and did not come about through an internal process as a congregation, I think people have embraced the opportunity for reflection and are open to moving in a new direction. The direction may or may not be Common Ground and calling Sarah Buteux as an Associate Pastor, but there is positive direction and movement within our congregation. That is good regardless of outcome. I don't think anyone voting "no" on this proposal is against change and moving forward as a church.

Second, I share many of the concerns listed in section two. The concerns boil down to this 1) Can we afford to do this? 2) Will there be a common purpose and community between people worshipping at two different times? 3) Will this really bring new people into the church as long-term members? If we move forward on this proposal, how we answer these questions and work on them together will determine whether this succeeds or not. We can only speculate about the outcomes now, but we can do something to address these concerns as we move forward. The good news here is that First Churches members feel that they have something to offer a new worshipping community in terms of culture, values and mission. We are open to their gifts, but we do not need "saved." We believe that we are good soil for a new seed to fall upon.

Third, my concern as a pastor is steering between two sets of risks. On one side there is the risk of spending down our endowment and reducing our long-term viability. We are heavily dependent on the endowment right now, and

since I asked for projections for the future from our financial advisor, Mark Teed, during the Tiffany Window discussions, I'm fully aware of where we stand. On the other side is the risk of what will happen to our pledge base over the next decade due to the age of our members. We may lose between 50-70% of our current pledge income. That is a known risk. If we do not solve this issue, it will not matter what the endowment does in producing investment income. Staying as we are is a choice to retire and phase out the life of the church. Working a little harder, or trying a few new ideas around the edges will not solve this problem. We will need bold decisions and actions that will probably feel risky and will push our comfort zone.

Offering this proposal to call Rev. Sarah Buteux as Associate Pastor, to be our Christian Educator and develop Common Ground, is my attempt to offer an opportunity for the future. As one member put it on Wednesday night, "We did not plan on the roof falling in 2007, but we dealt with that. Sometimes opportunities come from things we can't control." If the congregation determines to do this, I will give it my best efforts. If not, I will suggest the next process to lead to a major new initiative coming from within the congregation. I felt the need to seize this moment of opportunity and put it before you. I put my trust in your wisdom and resiliency. I thank the congregation for their time and the mature and thoughtful way of handling a proposal that is both sudden and large of scope. I could not ask for more.

Respectfully submitted,

Pastor Todd