

From the Co-pastors

APRIL 24 ANNUAL MEETING/TOWN HALL RECAP

LIBBY PIOTROWSKI AND JEFF HUNTER, CO-PASTORS

This spring has been a bit of an adventure in congregational meetings as we have worked on keeping up with our bylaws and making sure we have all the appropriate approvals through this season of leadership appointments. Thank you for sticking with us as we have gathered to approve our nominating committee, our delegates, and now our full slate of board and committee members.

We are excited to announce that, as of our meeting on Sunday, April 24, we have all of our ducks in a row and one of our fullest slates of leaders in recent years! This season has been such a challenging one for all of us as individuals, families, and church and, while these moments of business are easy to overlook, we want you to be encouraged. Our church structure places staff and pastors in partnership with lay leaders from the congregation, and talented, committed people keep choosing to pour themselves into this community and this work here.

After we adjourned the congregational meeting, we pivoted to a town hall and had an open conversation about some of the future decisions that the Executive Council (EC) has been working on over the past few months. In this article, we are going to recap that journey and invite you into the discernment process ahead of us. Also, if you want to get into the nitty-gritty, head over to the church website member resources page, where you can find the minutes from the Executive Council retreat that preceded the meeting and the presentation that guided our conversation at the meeting.

Our church chair, Joel Olfelt, opened with an overview of that Executive Council conversation. Drawing on the work of Gil Rendle in *Quietly Courageous*, Joel talked about the societal changes that have taken place over the last 50 years; the celebration of divergent experiences and beliefs, and the decrease in the number of people who are religiously affiliated have had an enormous impact on the Church. We simply cannot return to the way things were. So, then, the Church must move forward, with no guilt or fear, but with confidence that God will meet us along the way.

Looking forward, two things seem like essential components of a path forward. The first is that we need to continue to grow as a church for the people who are not yet part of the community. Our welcome and outreach as a community need to increase as we move into the future ahead of us. And the other is that an investment into church staff seems warranted. Our youth ministry has been such an important part of our church community, but our past model has resulted in lots of transition and difficulty in building long-term stability in ministry and relationship.

And as the EC was realizing these things in its conversation and discernment, the church's mortgage situation was quickly changing. As of last fall, we were anticipating a few years left in our mortgage payments. Then that timeline accelerated quickly as more and more members and friends of the church committed to help retire that debt more quickly. Currently, we are all shaking our heads and raising our hands in praise as we are preparing to finish paying off our mortgage in the summer of 2022, three years ahead of schedule.

So the Executive Council has begun to wonder if this emerging desire to invest in staff with a more stable and resourced youth ministry position coupled with the mortgage payoff might enable us to make a staff hire in the months ahead. With that thought in mind, we commissioned Scott Applequist, our church treasurer, to crunch some numbers and take a look at what our future budget might look like once the mortgage is complete. There are a couple of big assumptions that have to be made in order to do a project like that, and Scott guessed on general expense trends into the new year, assumed a majority of people who are giving designated funds for the mortgage would pivot that money to the general fund, and assumed a full-time pastoral person would warrant a \$60,000 salary and full benefits. After making all of those projections, adding a full-time staff person would result in a budget deficit of roughly \$58,000.

This was not the rosy picture and the clear path to the future we were hoping for, but the Executive Council felt strongly that the congregation should hear all of these details and join us at this point in the process. These are big possibilities and big commitments, and it's going to take the whole community's discernment and support to move forward into what is next around here.

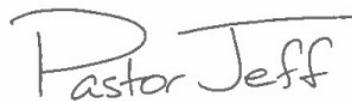
So we closed the town hall with a space for brainstorming and conversation. The responses ran the gamut, and in many ways echoed the exact same sentiments in the leadership conversation to this point. We shared with each other thoughts like this: Youth ministry is essential and deserves all that we can invest in it. Our church needs to prioritize and invest in growth and reaching to those who are not here yet. There is no way this makes financial sense yet—especially with the east wall repair needing our attention in the near future.

And that's where we will close this article, with the engagement questions from the town hall. There is much dreaming and discerning ahead of us, and we can't wait to hear what you are thinking.

What do you think of this idea? What excites you about this idea? What concerns you about this idea? What do you wonder about?



Pastor Libby



Pastor Jeff