

Conference Council Minutes
Missouri Mid-South Conference, United Church of Christ
April 9, 2011
Columbia United Church of Christ
Columbia, MO

Present: Jeff Whitman, Conference Minister; Dale Parson, Associate Conference Minister; Brady Abel, Moderator; Wes Hurt, Vice-Moderator; Don Hubatka, Treasurer; Laura Errante, Conference Office-Business Manager; Joyce Bathke; Dannie Burk; Judi Privitt; Martha Hawthorne; Chuck Adams; Cindy Moeller; Jerry Cundiff; Andy Mockridge; Connie Brooks; Don Frandsen; Don Bizer, Interim Director of Outdoor Ministries; Jeff Fulk, Director of Shannondale; Betsy Happel; Charlotte Ward; Jamie Schultz; Ron Wendle

Absent: Leah Atkinson Bilinski, Secretary; Dennis Berger; Les Kemp; Mauri Peaco; Jacquelyne Tyler; Steve Buchholz; Mark Roberts; Marc Wessels, Associate Conference Minister

Ron Wendle offered to record minutes in Leah Atkinson Bilinski's absence.

Gathering Time commenced around 9:31 AM. The Opening Devotion was led by Dale Parson. Dale used a Howard Thurman parable "Why Don't We Wear Shoes" as the theme of the devotion time.

Call to Order:

Brady Abel called the meeting to order at 10:05 AM.

Approval of Minutes:

The approval of the minutes from the last meeting held January 8, 2011.

Dannie Burk noted that he was listed as absent, but he was present. Also, Mark Roberts was not recorded as being absent. These corrections were made. The following corrections were also made to the minutes: Page 1 –Marc Wessels' name was spelled incorrectly; Page 5 – Andy did not make a comment about the history of Camp(s); Page 6 - Dannie commented that there are some churches at the end of the year still waiting to pay their fees to Camp Mo-Val.; Page 6 – change convent to covenant; Page 8 – Section designated "Shift in the discussion" Delete "each at \$3700; equating to \$75,500 credits each" from the first bullet point. Change "75% to \$75,000" in the fourth bullet point.

Dannie Burk moved that we approved the minutes with the changes requested. Joyce Bathke seconded the motion. Wes Hurt asked how Leah will get the corrections. Ron will send the corrections to Leah. Motion Passed.

Treasurer's Report:

2010 Budget

Don Hubatka reported that the books for 2010 were closed. The 2010 deficit was \$90,893 which was \$12,754 below the budgeted deficit of \$103,647. The deficit reflects the continued decline in the budgeted income (-\$91,829). Expenses were \$104,583 below the budgeted expenses. Don also noted that the deficit has steadily declined over the last several years and if we can increase Our Church's Wider Mission offerings, the potential exists for achieving a "breakeven point" within the next few years.

2011 Budget

The accumulated deficit for the first quarter of 2011 ending March 31, 2011 is \$128,896. The contributions to Our Church's Wider Mission are \$11,241 below the same period in 2010. Don reminded the Council that running a deficit is typical for the first six months of the year. Churches normally do not start remitting contributions until the last half of the year.

Camp MoVal income for the first quarter is \$12,455 compared to expenses of \$65,215. Shannondale income for the first quarter is \$9550 compared to expenses of \$38,945. Again, these differences are following historical trends. Incomes at both facilities do not start to improve until late May or early June when camp fees begin to be remitted.

Don reported that Our Church's Wider Mission offering represents approximately 2/3 of the Conference's total income.

A lengthy discussion occurred regarding the outcome of the 2011 budget.

<p>Wes Hurt moved that we approve the Treasurer's Report. Charlotte Ward seconded the motion. No additional questions or comments. Motion passed.</p>

Conference Minister's Report

Jeff commented that his trip to China was both educational and enlightening. He thanked the Conference for the opportunity to make the trip. He offered to share more of his trip with anyone who was interested at the breaks.

The Conference office move has been completed. The staff did an outstanding job coordinating, sorting, packing and unpacking. Jeff indicated that the staff accomplished the majority of this work while he was in China.

The sorting process involved going through boxes and boxes that had been stored for several years. This process alone consumed countless hours. The staff came in early, stayed late and came in on weekends to ensure that the move went smoothly. As token of his appreciation for the many hours the staff spent in the moving process, Jeff has given each member of the staff a letter authorizing extra personal days.

The Resident Artist Covenanted Ministry sponsored a weekend in April and Oikos' presentation was a great start to the new resident artist ministry.

Registration material for Conference Annual Gathering was mailed in mid March. The Resident Artist Covenanted Ministry is planning the worship experience at the gathering.

In February, Jeff attended a Conference Ministers' meeting in California. At this meeting, he learned that one conference was celebrating its 50th anniversary. In 2012 the Missouri Mid-South Conference will be 50-years old. Jeff suggested that it would be well if this milestone could be celebrated throughout the Conference. Several ideas were suggested for this celebration. Also, it was recommended that a committee be formed at a later date to work with Jeff on this 50th celebration. The celebration is to tentatively be kicked off at the beginning of 2012.

Jeff commented on the multiple issues that are contributing to the decline in Our Church's Wider Mission donations. A few of the items discussed are the following:

- The people who in the past have been dedicated to the wider church are dying.
- The lack of commitment of the local churches to the missions of the church.
- The lack of understanding of how the money given to Our Church's Wider Mission is used.
- The lack of support for Our Church's Wider Mission and the Conference by the local pastors. Approximately 25% of both pastors and church representatives attend the annual gathering.

Camp Mo-Val Interim Board of Directors' Report:

Several Interim Board Members were in attendance at this portion of the meeting for the presentation of the Board's final report and to answer any questions from the Council. Rick Oberle was the spokesperson for the Board. He reminded the Council that this report was the outcome of 16-months of work by the Board. During this time, the Board normally met every other month and spent countless hours in analyzing the data collected and preparing the report. Rick thanked the members of the Board for their conscientious dedication to this task.

Rick also reminded the Council about the history and formation of the Interim Board. He then explained in detail the content of the Board's report and how the group arrived at its conclusions and suggested actions to be taken by the Council. Each member of the Council had been provided with a copy of the complete report prior to today's meeting to provide adequate time to read the report. Throughout this presentation, numerous questions were asked and several discussions occurred. Rick and representatives of the Board attempted to answer these questions and engaged in the discussions.

Connie Brooks thanked the Board for all the hard work that went into preparing this report. She asked if a survey of churches was done to determine the amount of support that existed for Mo-Val. Did churches have any input? Rick indicated that the churches were not asked for input. A self-study conducted in 2005 was the last such survey.

Rick stated that the Interim Board was now in a “lame duck” mode until the Annual Gathering in June, having completed the task initially set forth by the Council. He asked if the Council wanted the group to do anything else in the intervening months. The Council did not give the Board a definitive answer.

Cindy Moeller expressed her gratitude for the Board’s work and suggested that members of Board be asked to remain as part of the Board in order to maintain a sense of continuity. Rick indicated that he would poll the members of the Board on an individual basis.

Several members of the Council echoed the appreciation for the Interim Board’s hard work.

More than one member of the Council shared the positive experiences they personally had while attending church camp.

Brady Abel expressed the Conference Council’s gratitude to the Camp Mo-Val Interim Board for all their hard work. He indicated that no decision was required today on the Mo-Val report and suggested that the Council receive the report today. Action on the report will occur after the Council has additional time to discuss the report. The Council will meet on Saturday, May 21, 2011 at Columbia for the purpose of acting on the Camp Mo-Val Interim Board’s report. The meeting will be scheduled to begin at 9:30 AM and to conclude at noon. Members of the Council that cannot attend the May 21 meeting can email Brady with any questions or concerns that they may have regarding the report.

Don Bizer was asked for his opinion on the Board’s report. Don stated that he had mixed feelings about the report and its conclusions. He did not support the designation of a position strictly for Mo-Val. The position becomes site specific. Giving up the position, “Director of Outdoor Ministries” could cause a problem. The new position does not express how the outdoor ministries at Mo-Val and Shannondale are related. Don said the report is a good starting point, but additional work needs to be done in his opinion.

2012 Budget

Don Hubatka said that Jeff, Laura and he had spent countless hours putting together and constantly reviewing the proposed budget for 2012. The Mo-Val Interim Board put together the Mo-Val portion of the budget and Jeff Fulk put together the Shannondale portion.

The Conference Council Executive Committee had a conference call on Monday, February 28, 2011. The Executive Committee voted a 2.5% pay increase across the board for all permanent Conference staff.

Brady questioned whether it was realistic to again budget Our Church’s Wider Mission income at the same level as the 2010 budget (\$860,000) when the actual income fell well short of the budgeted number in 2010.

Jeff Whitman stated that he had the same question, but that people will work to the expectations. Lowering the budgeted amount received from Our Church's Wider Mission will lower people's expectations of the amount needed for the Conference to do the ministry that is required.

Don Hubatka said we need to reinforce the positive image of the budget: the glass is half full, not half empty; the need to establish endowments to aid in the fiscal problems; and the fact that the deficit has steadily been reduced over the past two years. The total elimination of the deficit problem cannot be accomplished overnight, but significant gains have been made. The possibility that the deficit can be eliminated within the next two or three year is a realistic goal.

Cindy Moeller said we are part of a "Consecrated Covenant." This covenant includes stewardship. What is your life worth? Why is your church part of this covenant? We need to affirm the positives. "I am tired of all the negatives."

Cindy also said that churches see Camp Mo-Val as the only ministry supported by the Conference. We need to tell the people about the other ministries supported by the Conference. "Do not de-value outdoor ministries, but add to the other ministries."

Don Bizer said that we need to make certain that we do not point out that the Outdoor Ministries deficit is equal to the Conference deficit. This would send the wrong message to the churches.

Jeff Whitman reminded Don Bizer that churches must pay their portions of the camp fees up front and not wait six months. Don responded that this is a cultural thing and will take time to change.

Don Frandsen moved that the Council approve the proposed 2012 budget. Cindy Moeller seconded the motion. No additional questions or comments. The motion was approved.
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The members of the Council met with their designated committees. Brady reminded the group that the Council would reconvene at 2:30 PM for committee reports.

Wider Church Ministries:

- The group is becoming a little clearer on its identity.
- Developing criteria for the following
 - Outdoor Ministries
 - Jamaican Partnership
 - Congo Partnership
 - Our Wider Church issues
- The group is meeting on May 16 to better define their purpose.

Finance/Administration:

- Reviewing the current policy manual.
- Developing new personnel policies for the manual.
- Developing a program for the support of Our Church’s Wider Mission.
- Developing a Conference Deacon/Deaconess Program.
- Meeting with a financial advisor to determine where to invest the Conference’s restricted funds and how to take the interest income generated by these funds.

The Finance/Administration Committee recommends the creation of the” Missouri Mid-South UCC MO-VAL Endowment Fund” to be initially funded with the money from the Panhorst Estate (\$77,591).

Wes Hurt moved to accept this recommendation. Don Frandsen seconded the motion. No questions or comments. The motion was approved.

The Finance/Administration Committee recommends the creation of the “Missouri Mid-South Shannondale Endowment Fund” to be initially funded with money from the Holy Ghost Church Gift (\$38,017).

Charlotte Ward moved to accept this recommendation. Jamie Schultz seconded the motion. No questions or comments. The motion was approved.

The Finance/Administration Committee recommends the creation of the” Missouri Mid-South Endowment Fund” to be initially funded with money from permanently restricted funds (\$413,428).

Don Frandsen moved to accept this recommendation. Wes Hurt seconded the motion. No questions or comments. The motion was approved.

Leadership:

The Committee had a conference call on March 28, 2011 to discuss the proposed “Deacon/Deaconess Covenanted Ministry”. The ministry could include retired clergy or lay persons. A total of 30-teams would be formed. The teams would consist of two individuals. These individuals would be responsible for five churches. These individuals would be the liaison between the Conference and the churches. The expectation would be that the team would visit each church under their care at least three times per year.

The Leadership Committee recommends that the Conference Council create “Deacon/Deaconess Covenanted Ministry”.

Dannie Burk moved to accept this recommendation. Don Hubatka seconded the motion. No questions or comments. The motion was approved.

Jeff, Dale and Marc will have suggestions for people to be a part of this covenanted ministry.

The Conference Council will need to replace individuals whose terms expire on the Council at the Annual Gathering. The Leadership Committee had submitted a list of names for potential replacements. Questions were raised about one or two of these individuals. The decision was made to do additional research and the Council would act on the recommendations at the May 21 meeting.

Shannondale:

Jeff Fulk reported that the timber harvest is nearly complete at Shannondale and profit from the timber sale should be approximately \$50,000.

The “Goat Barn” renovation is almost finished.

A men’s weekend work retreat is coming up.

Summer booking is looking good.

Carbon Credits:

Jeff Fulk reported that the projected income from the sale of the carbon credits has hit a stumbling block. Finite Carbon had a second evaluation done on the forest at Shannondale. The Climate Action Reserve (CAR) Program has changed its formula for determining the biomass of an area, which in turn impacts the number of carbon credits that a specific area will generate. Using this new formula for the forest at Shannondale has resulted in the loss of approximately 75% of the anticipated credits originally reported.

Jeff Whitman commented that as of early February he and Mike McKee were still anticipating that the sale of the carbon credits would generate approximately \$750,000. The original projection was based upon a one time awarding of 130,000 offset carbon credits for the length of time the forest at Shannondale had been maintained. An additional 4,000 offset carbon credits would be generated annually by the forest. The new formula reduces the original offset number to 35,000 and the annual offset to 1,000. Given these substantial reductions in carbon credits, Finite Carbon has said it could no longer represent the Missouri Mid-South Conference United Church of Christ.

The Conference Council Executive Committee authorized the expenditure of \$1000 to hire Steve Jefferies to investigate what changed in the formula that severely impacted the original estimate for the number of carbon credits generated at Shannondale. The following items were noted by Jefferies:

- The claim that an ice storm in 2008 severely damaged a part of the trees.
- Excessive logging was in progress at the time of the second evaluation.
- The original formula did not compensate for the shorter tree height (the original height was using a number assigned to trees in California. Trees in Missouri are typically shorter).

Sean Carney, President of Finite Carbon, is willing to come and discuss these issues with the Conference Council Executive Committee.

This change in the number of carbon credits generated at Shannondale has raised several questions:

- Are we still bound by the contract to Finite Carbon?
- Shannondale was enrolled in the CAR program protocol in September 2010. Will Shannondale continue to be registered in the CAR program?
- Should we continue to retain Steve Jefferies in the short term to represent us? (Mike McKee has recommended that there needs to be another meeting with Finite Carbon and Steve Jefferies.)

Andy Mockridge asked if it would be better to have our own forester perform an audit at Shannondale?

Jeff Fulk responded that our foresters were hired by Finite Carbon to do the audits.

Dannie Burk made a motion to authorize the expenditure of up to an additional \$5,000 for legal fees. Andy Mockridge seconded the motion. No questions or comments. The motion was approved.

Mo-Val:

The roof on the lodge needs to be replaced. The Interim Board received a bid from Gerald Branson Roofing for \$20,590 to replace the roof. The roof was damaged by hail in 2003. The insurance company allowed \$11,000 for repairs. No significant repairs were made at that time and the money was placed in the Mo-Val Improvement Fund. Mo-Val has also received a donation of \$10,000. The money from these two sources currently totals \$21,022.30.

Don Frandsen made a motion to use the money in the improvement fund and the Mo-Val donation to replace the lodge's roof. Cindy Moeller seconded the motion. No questions or comments. The motion was approved.

Brady Abel led the group in the Lord's Prayer for the closing prayer.

Meeting adjourned.

The next Conference Council meeting will be on Saturday, May 21, 2011 in Columbia, MO starting at 9:30 AM.