

**Peace United Church of Christ  
Coordinating Council Meeting Minutes  
December 14, 2021  
6:30 pm by Zoom**

Present: Moderator, Tom Hystead; Vice-Moderator, Joan Peterson; Treasurer, Dick Goese; Secretary, Diane Swanoski, Spiritual Life Representative, Susan Larson Kidd, Education Representative, Penny Cragun; Acting for Justice Representative, Monica Liddle; Stewardship Representative: Dave Courtright, At Large members; Jessica Olson, Bud Trnka, Mary Adams, and Matt Ryan, Rev. Jim Mitulski, Faith Formation Minister, Nathan Holst, Interim Pastoral Associate, Charlotte Frantz

Absent: Past Moderator, Doug Bowen-Bailey

Call to Order and Introductions: Call to order at 6:35 p.m.

Opening Meditation: Jessica Olson shares a Facebook post by Liz Olson, Peace member and MN House Representative, about the reality of COVID over the past two years and the upcoming advent season of darkness.

Agenda Additions and Approval: It is moved, seconded and unanimously approved to accept the agenda as emailed.

Consent agenda approval - (Consent agenda consists of previous Council meeting minutes, financial, HR, board, and task force reports as emailed.) It is moved, seconded, and unanimously passed to approve the consent agenda as emailed.

### **Reports of Standing Committees**

**Finance Committee:** Financial reports submitted by Dick Goese, Treasurer.

Comments by Dick Goese:

- After being ahead of budget for income all year, the last two months have fallen behind \$7,800. However, with less overall expenses, we are still currently ahead of budget.
- All 2022 proposed budget questions will be addressed at next week's budget meeting. Dick hopes to get the proposed budget emailed to Council members by Friday and asks everyone to look at it before the meeting.

**Human Resources Committee:** Written report by Leanne Ventrella (Attachment #1)

**Nominating Committee – N/A**

### **Written Committee Representative Reports**

**Christian Education:** Written report by Penny Cragun (Attachment #2)

**Christian Spiritual Life:** Written report by Susan Larson Kidd (Attachment #3)

**Acting for Justice Hub:** Written report by Monica Liddle (Attachment #4)

**Christian Stewardship:** Written report by Dave Courtright (Attachment #5)

### **Minister's Reports**

**Rev. Mitulski, Interim Minister** - Oral report given:

- Pastor Jim continues to appreciate ways in which people help him synchronize into Peace Church.
- We are seeing an increase in the number of people participating as we return to some of the pre-COVID activities and worship. As we return to more activity, we will also see an increase in expenses.
- This interim is a time to experiment with variables in an attempt to reach more people, including looking at how all of our activities can be portals for new members. January and February have ambitious plans.
- Regarding the proposed budget, it is hoped that the Council looks at income enhancement, in addition to expense reduction. We may have to be more intentional about bringing new people to Peace Church and how to integrate them into the congregation. Pastor Jim has ideas for evangelism (church growth) and bringing people back. He also states that we may need to consider passing what may appear to be a deficit budget (initially). People are being generous. The more we educate people about our needs, especially new needs, people may step up to pay for them - a unanimous donor is covering the cost for upgrades to our technology for live streaming. Another consideration may be creating a video about what it costs to be who we are and do the work we do.
- With ongoing pandemic concerns, we continue to adjust COVID protocol and need to figure out how to become more accessible through technology, both for current and prospective participants. Our unique and prophetic voice has wide appeal.
- Pastor Jim recognizes Peace Church's excellent administrative and pastoral staff. Returning to programming and the innovation it requires is not possible without them. He asks the Council to look beyond budget lines to recognize and retain them. He recognizes that it takes three ministers to cover all the ministerial tasks of the Church that Pastor Kathy and Nathan did before. He also recognizes Elise Courtright for her willing and capable assistance with his administrative duties.
- An important focus of this interim time is bringing people back together. Pastor Jim will facilitate three Saturday morning sessions in January to talk, listen, and pray. It is important that everyone has a chance to ask questions and be heard in order for us to reconnect and move forward in the life of Peace Church. He is also starting to plan the leadership retreat the 3rd Saturday in January. It will include reconnecting, prayer, and envisioning who we want to be as Peace Church.
- Pastor Jim continues his ongoing community involvement, including work with the NAACP for Martin Luther King Day and working with the Minnesota HIV Council. He will be interviewing to represent clergy on their state council. The Vigil in Remembrance of Sandy Hook demonstrated Peace Church's reemerging in the Duluth community's view. Pastor Jim thought the event was excellently planned and coordinated by Peace Church

staff and members. Thank you to Elise Courtright and Sharon Dawson for their help in making it so inclusively appealing.

- Pastor Jim will be meeting with Rev. Sheri Prestermon, UCC Conference Minister, on Thursday morning to check in on behalf of Peace Church.

#### **Nathan Holst**-Faith Formation Minister (Attachment #6)

Additional comments by Nathan -

- Regarding his ordination process - Nathan has nearly completed both courses and papers due. He will be starting the Clinical Pastoral piece of his process in January 2022.
- Nathan is starting to vision what children and youth programming will look like in 2022. He will include parents of elementary age children to see what they want for their children. In the future, he will do the same with middle school and high school parents and youth.

#### **Charlotte Frantz**- Interim Pastoral Associate (Attachment #7)

#### **Old Business**

- COVID Task Force Update
  - The COVID Task Force will meet tomorrow.
  - Their diligence is greatly appreciated.
- Stewardship Campaign update
  - There will be an update before the end of the week.

#### **New Business**

- Afghan Refugee Resettlement Committee Support (Attachment #8)
  - Charlotte Frantz, on behalf of the Immigrant Welcoming Team (part of the Social Justice Hub), gives background for the Afghan Refugee Resettlement project. A motion is made by Dave Courtright, "On behalf of Peace Church, the Coordinating Council supports the Afghan Refugee Resettlement Program led by the Immigrant Welcoming Team, and authorizes the creation of a clearing account for funding it." The motion is seconded by Susan Larson Kidd and passes unanimously.
- Leadership Retreat Planning - Saturday January 22, 2022
  - If anyone is interested in helping with the Council portion of the retreat, let Pastor Jim know.
- MN Conference Clergy Care grants (Attachment #9)
  - There is a motion by Diane Swanoski for the Council to apply for the MN Conference Clergy Care Grant on behalf of Peace Church. The motion is seconded by Jessica Olson. The motion passes unanimously. Susan Larson Kidd offers to help with the proposal.
- Staff gifts appeal - Tom Hystead
  - Email blasts and pulpit announcements have been made for financial gifts for staff. Contributions can be made to the church office.

- Doug Bowen-Bailey Resignation -
  - Doug Bowen-Bailey's many contributions to the Council and the work of Peace Church are recognized. We appreciate Doug's calling us to be the best Peace Church we can be, have listened to what he has said, and will continue our work towards that end.
  - A motion to accept Doug's resignation is made by Joan Peterson and seconded by Penny Cragun. The motion passes with two abstentions. Tom Hystead and Joan Peterson will work with Pastor Jim to craft a letter to Doug and Holly on behalf of Peace Church to express our gratitude for their work and service.
  
- Future meeting Agenda Items
  - January - Prepare for annual meeting and budget finalization.
  - Daycare update - revisit in spring.
  - SSC follow up - how are we doing?
  - Transition Team convening in February. Look at the transition objectives document originally written. Some of the work will be done during the January retreat.
  - Adult Ed on January 9th, 2022 will be a budget discussion.

Adjourn at 8:48 p.m.

Next Meetings -

- Monday, December 20 (in person and Zoom) 6:30 p.m. Fireside Room - Budget session.
- January TBD - Final budget session.
- Tuesday, January 18 @ 6:30 p.m. - Coordinating Council meeting. [Sign up for devotion.](#)
- Sunday, January 30th - Peace Church Annual Meeting

Respectfully submitted,  
Diane Swanoski, Secretary

### **Attachment #1**

#### **HR Committee Report to Coordinating Council December 2021**

The HR Committee has not met since the last Council meeting but has accomplished the below:

Proposed HR Budget

- Budget was reviewed and revised for submission to the Council

Meeting schedule

- Working to find a set meeting time each month to be supplemented with additional meetings as necessary

New Members

- Orientation session was held

**Request for Council Discussion/Action:** None

Respectfully submitted,  
Leanne Ventrella  
HR Committee Chair

## **Attachment #2**

### **Christian Education Report to Coordinating Council December 2021**

#### **Adult Education:**

In November, three adult forums on what Intentional Interim Ministry means were held after the 10:30 worship service by Pastor Jim. While there was not a large number of in-person attendees, these sessions were made available online and received a good number of views by Peace church members and friends. On November 28th, Rev. Dr. Justin Tanis from the United Theological Seminary, the guest preacher, led a visual presentation on “Social Justice and Art of the Nativity” This session was held at 9:30 in the Fireside Room. Going forward the forums are scheduled for the 9:30 traditional adult education hour. The forums in December focus on the liturgical season of Advent:

- December 5: An Advent Conversation About Hope and Joy: Learning with the Dali Lama and Desmond Tutu, facilitated by Gudrun Witrak
- December 12: There’s Something About Mary led by Pastor Jim
- December 19: Reflection on Our Ancestors facilitated by Gary Boelhower.
- December 26: Kwanza led by Pastor Jim

The topics of the forums planned for January are:

- January 2: New Year, New Life and the Meaning of Baptism
- January 9: Peace Budget and Finances
- January 16: Dr. Martin Luther King’s Letter from the Birmingham Jail
- January 23: Roe Vs. Wade and the UCC Pro-choice Position
- January 30: UCC and Covenant

Planning was begun for the February forums, which will focus on Afghan refugees and the recently formed Support Circle at Peace.

The team recognizes that the congregation is in a different place than in the past and discussed the purpose of the forums and having a theme of “The Common” for the coming year. Pastor Jim plans to continue the discussions on transition with a series of “Let’s Talk, Let’s Listen, Let’s Pray” sessions on Saturdays. Also explored was creating a structure that would gather all the ministry teams together.

#### **Faith Formation Team:**

The team has clarified their purpose: To reflect on the overall spiritual journey/faith formation of Peace Church, including programming for all ages and groups, as well as the relationship of our church with the larger trends in Christian faith formation. Part of the vision of this team is to regularly connect with children’s ministry, youth ministry, and adult ministry to reflect and create thematic connections around faith formation, and to include assessment, to identify how it is doing. Possibilities for enabling more connections were explored, including meeting quarterly as program

teams and possibly having a retreat in the new year that would include agreeing to a common theme. The team discussed the need for a forum with larger questions around faith formation for every stage and doing things in a more integrated way. Plans are also underway for a Lenten project.

**Children's Ministry Team:**

Planning continued for the Children's Christmas Pageant, which will be on December 19th during the 10:30 worship service. The pageant this year will be a playful way to explore the different versions of the story of the birth of Jesus and will include traditional and new music.

Sunday School during Advent will be an intergenerational event held in the Fellowship Hall, with kids and parents invited to join together in some faith practices of lighting candles and sharing together, along with the usual scripture, children's story, and art.

No action needed.

Respectfully submitted,  
Penny Cragun

**Attachment #3**

**Council Report for Christian Spiritual Life  
December 2021**

**Food and Fellowship**

This committee did an extensive job with a recent funeral that was much appreciated by the family. They continue to step up when needed and are waiting to plan their next event.

**Health and Wellness**

This team did not meet during the past month. Ellen Shelton is stepping down from the team and will let me know when a new chairperson steps up. No update from this committee this month.

**Shared Ministry**

Shared Ministry committee did meet, but had some technological difficulties and so are planning to meet again at the end of the month.

**Worship and Arts**

The committee met and discussed the future of worship services and how some of the changes are being received.

**Faith Formation**

This committee did not meet during the past month.

**Tech Team updates:** We have a new person hired for tech support for the video and streaming portions of the worship service. The volunteers are training him now. Also, Mary Adams has offered to learn to run video and will be trained in early January.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Larson Kidd 12/11/21

#### **Attachment #4**

### **Acting for Justice Report: November 21, 2021 Meeting Submitted by Monica Liddle, Chair**

#### **1. Report—Events and Activities**

Meeting in November included plans for allocating funds from the annual budget for Acting for Justice. These were allocating as follows:

\$100 Together for Youth/Duluth (O&A)

\$100 UCC National Open and Affirming Coalition (O&A)

\$200 UCC National Climate Justice (climate justice)

\$200 UCC National Global Ministries (global ministries)

\$200 Family Freedom Center (dismantling racism)

\$200 NAACP-duluth chapter (dismantling racism)

\$100: reserved for incoming requests through Dec. 23, with any remainder to be disbursed to CHUM.

Per this plan, the total annual budget of \$2500 has been allocated for this fiscal year.

#### **Additional Notes from November meeting:**

**Dismantling Racism Team** hopes to have an adult forum in early January, before the annual meeting, to inform and receive input from congregants on budget line items. Goal is to increase personal investment into the overall budget and especially the social justice programs Peace is engaged in.

MLK events will be virtual event in Jan. 2022 due to Covid situation instability.

#### **Immigrant Welcoming and Afghan Update**

16 Peace members have met/expressed interest/some already engaging in creating a “Circle of Support” for Afghan(s) to be resettled here in Duluth. This is a federal government program. Gary Boelhower, Penny Cragun, Gayle Kelly, Terrie Shannon and Mollie Stapleton Clark are initial steering committee members, and are researching how to become a formal and official circle, and want to inform Peace people of how we may extend our reach/include more people. Commitment of \$2300 required per person to resettle someone. Many other parties in Duluth currently involved in resettlement efforts, include the Mayor/City; Hildegard House; CSS and UMD staff/faculty.

**Use of Sanctuary Funds** were agreed to as follows by Hub members, and Charlotte will write vouchers:

1. Support evacuation expenses for a Christian Afghan family to get out of Afghanistan and to the USA. Members agreed to use \$800 from Sanctuary Fund to cover estimated cost for one person. Charlotte received this request from Molly Coddling and Helen Denfeld, women working on Afghan resettlement.

2. Provide transportation funds for Frank, a Venezuelan asylum seeker in Arizona, to get here to Duluth. Cost: up to \$400. First Lutheran Duluth has sponsorship interest, and Michelle NaarObed from Hildegard House is willing to provide housing.

**CHUM:** Angie Miller, Peace Church delegate, reported.

Request for supplies for the Warming Center: socks, coats, mittens, etc. These can be taken to Joel at Dorothy Day House.

CHUM Director John Cole has a new 5-year plan, "Stepping on up", to address housing needs. 1: Authorized Outdoor Living Spaces, creation of 10 person spaces with outhouses, garbage facilities, to support unhoused people. 2: Turn hotels into housing: create 200 units of supportive housing. 3: use existing unused large building structures for housing.

Discussion today on Steve O'Neil Apartments. Drug use in the building is an identified problem. CHUM is only the service provider at SOA, not the leaser or owner. Center City Housing owns building, collects rent, staff's the front desk. CHUM is not happy with the management, but is limited in what it can do. Angie suggested talking to the director of Center City Housing, or possibly to John Cole.

Sue Munns has been nominated to serve as CHUM delegate for Peace, along with Angie Miller, per November Hub meeting.

**Beyond Violence:** Justice Hub will sponsor the Sandy Hook Vigil at Peace on Dec. 14.

Penny proposes that we consider the climate justice and militarism link. She suggests an online upcoming course on War and the Environment, which starts in January. This would be a springboard for more work on these issues, hopefully engaging people at Peace.

**Global Ministries:** Monica raised the issue of the Covid-19 pandemic, vaccine access, and global health justice for discussion. Hub Members suggested a possible adult forum to discuss this issue further, including physicians at Peace.

## **2. Discussion needed by the Council: Questions, concerns, future plans, etc.**

Rev. Charlotte has initiated action by Peace members to begin creating Circles of Support for resettlement of Afghanis here in Duluth. Steering committee has been formed, and is meeting regularly. As this project involves financial commitment and because many parties in Duluth are also engaging in this work, the Coordinating Council should be aware of this and may need discussion on how/if the larger congregation shall be involved.

As Peace is a significant supporter of CHUM, be it known that there is real need for social support at the Steve O'Neil apartments, where child safety is at risk due to drug use in the building. Consider meeting with Chum director John Cole, or Center City Housing director to express concern.

## **3. Action needed by the Council: Motion from the Committee : As above, as necessary.**

## Christian Stewardship report for December 2021

### Stewardship Committee

Stewardship has been very busy this month as we approach the finish line on the pledge drive. They have had multiple meetings, and are working hard to reach out to those who have not confirmed a pledge yet for 2022.

As of December 1, confirmed pledges were below expected for that time by a significant margin. At the Dec. 2 meeting, the team brainstormed ways to reach out to members. The team met again on Dec. 9 for an update. As of Dec. 9:

Pledges for 2022: 110  
Past pledgers yet to commit for 2022: 108  
e-givers: 70  
non e-givers: 38

The e-givers will have their current giving continue at the same level if they do not take any action.

The committee has been working hard on ways to reach out to those who have not pledged yet. Some highlights of their excellent work:

- Email blast sent to e-givers that have not yet pledged asking to confirm their pledge amount for next year and consider increasing if they are able.
- Non e-givers that have not yet pledged are being reached out to individually by the stewardship team.
- Video appeal by Kelli Hallsten Erickson

The committee also approved a budget request of \$1400, planning on returning to having a congregational dinner in 2022.

### Property Team

- We committed to helping plan an earth day event again this spring.
- Agreed to table the snow emergency lot usage request from the city for this year. No other private lots
- Affirmed the need for the \$20,000 maintenance/repairs budget request for 2022, as there will absolutely be needed maintenance and repairs on the parking lot and roof, plus mandatory inspections and licenses, leaving only 5,000 or so for other repairs that come up throughout the year.

Current projects:

- Large quantity of ballast bypass LED bulbs were purchased to allow us to upgrade existing fixtures as the ballasts fail. Cost is similar to ballast replacement, and has a 40% energy savings.
- The large dove on the front of the building is rotting, and will need to be replaced. We will look into companies/costs for this project in the spring when it is accessible.
- Tent needs replacement this year, the material was very deteriorated when we took it down. Garage sale proceeds have made a good start on fundraising, we'll likely need another \$4000 or so.

No action needed by council.

Submitted by Dave Courtright

#### **Attachment #6**

### **Faith Formation Minister Report for December 2021**

**Nathan Holst**

#### **Events/small groups**

- I have the pageant and a Blues Christmas gathering this coming week
- I gave support to the Sandy Hook vigil this week

#### **Worship**

- I continue to lead Story for All Ages on Sunday morning.
- I continue to provide music for the service as needed.
- Charlotte, Jim, and I have been rotating roles on Sunday mornings.

#### **Youth**

- We have been focusing on advent this month, lighting candles together as we start our usual check in. We've had some fun making a hopes/fears collage the last couple weeks, which has not only given the youth a good creative/reflective outlet, but has been a great space for relationship building and fun. We are growing as a group and now have 10-12 on a regular basis.
- Confirmation continues in the fireside room on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of the month. Sara Olson Dean and I rotate facilitation of a curriculum using the book Manna and Mercy. We have also started to have a group of adult mentors join us on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of the month.

#### **Children**

- During advent we decided to meet in person and hold intergenerational Sunday School. It's been fun having adults involved with the kids and we have been steadily growing—this last Sunday we had about 15 folks together.
- We decided to put a pause on kid's club for now. Numbers have been low and Thursdays don't seem to be a day that our folks come as much.
- I plan to have a few gatherings for parents of elementary kids in the New Year to get feedback from them about what they want for children's ministry in 2022.
- I am starting to plan for VBS this summer. I am hoping to do a Peace Village, an interfaith partnership that focuses on what different faith traditions have to say about peace. I will be reaching out to some potential partners in the New Year to see what's possible.
- Our pageant is this Sunday and I think it's going to be a great one. We have about 15 kids involved, all excited to be in person and sharing the Christmas story.

#### **OWL**

- OWL continues to run well. I have been in touch with parents occasionally for any administrative needs or questions/concerns. I have also been in touch with the MN Conference

about getting some more facilitators trained. I have a list of folks both from Peace and Pilgrim ready to get trained, so I'll be helping set that up in the next couple months.

### **Administrative/Other**

-There is a Gabriel Fund transition team that plans to meet early in the New Year. The team includes a few members of Peace and a few from St. Paul's Episcopal, who would like to be more involved in the Gabriel work. Once the team meets, we will share more information with next steps.

-I continue to write birthday cards for youth and children.

-Continuing to meet with staff on a weekly basis.

-I continue in my racial justice organizing role as a part of SURJ (Showing Up for Racial Justice) in building relationships with leaders of color and indigenous leaders here in Duluth, as well as education work within the white community.

-Nathan Holst

## **Attachment #7**

### **Interim Pastoral Associate Report to the Coordinating Council December 14, 2021**

The past month has afforded the opportunity to think about the multiple transitions occurring at Peace. There is, of course, the transition to new leadership and ministry in the person of Rev. Jim Mitulski. When I was first asked to serve as an interim bridge minister, I believe that both I and the Human Resources Committee assumed that once he was here and began to get to know our congregation, my bridge position would no longer be needed.

I think our congregational leaders (myself included) underestimated the impact of additional transitions we are experiencing. We are transitioning into a more robust life as a congregation and we are doing this even as covid continues to restrict some of our activities. At the end of November we re-instituted weekly 8:30 worship. (I preached at both the 8:30 and 10:30 service on December 12). We also re-instituted a 9:30 educational hour and in person Sunday school. I've participated with the rest of the staff in re-examining what is required to make these changes, how to do so safely, and how these gatherings can help us re-connect to each other and reach out to the wider community. (Along with other staff, I meet with the Worship and Arts team and the Covid Task Force.) As we move into 2022, the staff, teams and Pastor Jim are planning for some additional opportunities for education, worship, community gathering and leadership development in 2022.

We are continuing to figure out what it means to work together in new ways. In September there were shifts in job responsibilities among the staff and we are still a work in progress. I picked up some additional responsibilities so that Nathan could offer support and leadership for our children's ministry. As a result I assist him with adult education and provide staff support for some of our social justice ministries.

As a church, we are also transitioning out of significant conflict and that transition has required much of Pastor Jim's attention. In the meantime, there are still teams that need staff support and congregants with pastoral needs. I took a primary role in planning our remembrance of Nettie Bothwell and served as staff liaison to the Sandy Hook vigil that took place this afternoon.

In general, I believe we are a more stable congregation than we were in mid-summer. I know we are facing some significant challenges as we move into a new year. I remind myself that the transitions we are experiencing will not be resolved quickly, but it feels as if we are making progress.

In addition to serving as an Interim Bridge Minister, I've continued serving as the convener of the Immigrant Welcoming Team. I am submitting an additional report to the Co-ordinating Council about that team's recent work.

Rev. Charlotte Frantz

### **Attachment #8**

#### **Immigrant Welcoming Team Report to the Coordinating Council December 14, 2021**

In addition to my work as interim bridge minister, I've continued to serve as the convener of the Immigration Welcoming Team. For the past two years most of the team's work was carried out in partnership with the Interfaith Committee for Migrant Justice, a local group that came together in 2019. Much of their efforts focused on community education, advocacy on behalf of immigrants, and support for asylum seekers. Members of Peace have been involved in these efforts.

Late last summer when Afghanistan evacuations occurred, members of Peace contacted me to ask how we might be involved in welcoming and resettling Afghan newcomers. Under usual circumstances, refugees are given refugee status before entering the United States. They are then resettled through a not-for-profit agency with assistance from communities such as congregations. Unless sponsored by close family members, refugees are resettled within a 50 mile radius of a resettlement agency office. Unlike many other immigrants, refugees can access some social benefits and are granted work permits almost immediately. The goal is to establish independence from their sponsor or the resettlement agency as soon as possible.

The infrastructure of resettlement agencies has been eroded over the past ten years or more. It's capacity a few years ago was the resettlement of about 20,000 individuals. During the last fiscal year, only 11,000 refugees were accepted into the United States for resettlement.

Suddenly, 80,000 Afghans have come or been brought to the United States to resettle. Because they were evacuated so quickly, they were not processed as refugees, but were granted humanitarian parole visas. This temporary status allows them some of the benefits available to refugees and grants them two years to receive either refugee status or asylee status.

About six weeks ago, the State department approved an alternate route to resettlement by which groups of private citizens can work together to do the work that otherwise would be done by a resettlement agency. They are not geographically restricted as they would be if they were connected to an agency. In order to be part of this alternate resettlement effort, a group of individuals or organization needs to have five individuals who complete a process and become a “certified circle of support.” These five individuals must pass background checks, develop a detailed welcome plan demonstrating their knowledge of community resources, complete an on line course on resettlement, and raise funds that will assist the newcomer with initial expenses in a new location. As with refugees, the goal is rapid independence from the support of the circle (3-6 months).

Afghan newcomers may choose to be resettled through this private citizens resettlement or through an agency using a similar process known as APA. One very unofficial prediction I heard last week was that resettlement agencies, in spite of a push to hire new staff, are likely to reach capacity for resettlement before February.

I hosted two exploratory zoom sessions in which I shared the information I had with members of Peace church and asked who might be interested in pursuing this effort. A day after the second exploratory conversation, I had a reconstituted Immigrant Welcoming Team of 21 and five individuals willing to become a certified circle: Terrie Shannon, Gayle Kelly, Mollie Stapleton Clark, Gary Boelhower, and Penny Cragun.

I continue to work with this leadership circle, am further developing networks of folks who are involved in resettlement efforts, and serve as a liaison between them and the larger Peace community.

Our application is likely to be ready to submit mid-January. We are concentrating our efforts in demonstrating that Duluth could be a good location for Afghan newcomers with some English speaking ability and preparation for entry level professional jobs in medical, educational, business, or hospitality sectors. Our hope is to offer a resettlement opportunity to a group of four. We are in conversation with community partners who are also developing proposals that would offer resettlement opportunities to a group of four.

Given conversations and offers I have already received, I do not expect fund raising to be a huge obstacle. There appears to be a lot of good will for this project. Resettlement is designed to assist newcomers in establishing their own lives as soon as possible. The guidelines suggest 3 months of support; our circle thinks 3-6 months with decreasing amounts of support might be more realistic.

We would like the Coordinating Council’s recognition so that we can move forward and acknowledge Peace Church as the larger community providing the certified circle with support and encouragement. We would like to begin collecting financial donations in an Afghan Resettlement Fund to be used by Peace church to resettle Afghan newcomers.

I realize this report is longer than many you receive, but I felt it was important to lay this foundation for your understanding. If this can be regarded as a project of Peace church, I will help create some educational events in early 2022 as part of Peace’s programming. I will also

work with the Finance Committee to establish guidelines for the fund so that it is held in accordance with Peace's Financial Policies.

I would like to clarify one or two comments in Monica's report. 1) The relationship of this program to the government. It is a program developed under the auspices of the State Department by which resettlement usually carried out by not-for-profit agencies can be carried out by a group of private citizens. Many resettlement offices have been closed and staff laid off during the years when the US accepted 20,000 or less refugees per year. There are upwards of 73,000 Afghans needing resettlement in the US. There are no government funds involved nor any relationship that would jeopardize a congregation's status vis a vis government. 2) The anticipated financial commitment is from individual members and friends of Peace church. We do anticipate asking for a financial commitment from the church budget. I am aware of several gifts waiting to be given, and if they are not given to a resettlement spearheaded by Peace, they are likely to go to other resettlement efforts. Individuals who have asked me about this include both Peace members and non-members in the community. If it seemed good or necessary to approach the church for financial assistance, I would think we would first explore avenues like the Jubilee Fund, not the church budget.

The circle's desire is to have the church accept donations in a fund for Afghan Resettlement. The funds need to be available for the initial resettlement costs such as food, rent, clothing, transportation, etc. Refugees and Afghan newcomers are allowed some limited benefits and work permits more quickly than asylum seekers because the goal of resettlement is to foster independence as quickly as possible. In order to become a certified circle approved to receive one or more Afghans, the finances to support their first several months has to be collected and in an account. A financial statement verifying the amount collected has to be submitted with the application for certification. The circle is eager to begin offering the opportunity to donate so that we've reached the necessary threshold when we've completed the other parts of the certification process. The number of persons a circle can receive is determined, in part, by the financial support given through donations.

### **Attachment #9**

November 10, 2021

Dear elected lay leaders of Minnesota Conference UCC congregation,

Grace and peace to you! | send greetings on behalf of the entire Conference staff and our Board of Directors to our 124 congregations, scattered from Grand Marais to Austin, from Moorhead to Winona.

Over these long months of the COVID-19 pandemic, all of our congregations have been challenged in ways none of us could have imagined. There have been financial stressors for many, alongside the loss of not being able to gather in ways we most longed for, the cumulative drain on our spirits, and the grief of so many lives lost to the virus nationwide. I know from conversations with lay leaders and pastors all through the pandemic that this has been hard. I have marveled at the faithfulness and perseverance our congregations have nevertheless shown. I'm grateful for your leadership in

your congregation and your continued commitment to your ministries where you are. Thank you.

This pandemic time has been difficult for all of us, including our pastors. Pastors have been asked to meet enormous challenges and make impossible decisions countless times over the last 20 months, all while scrambling to find new, adaptive ways to meaningfully minister to congregants and the community in an environment of chronic uncertainty and high anxiety. All these months of high stress have taken their toll on our pastors. Many are exhausted and spiritually depleted.

*I'm writing you as elected lay leaders in each of our congregations to ask you to offer special thanks to your pastor, and to invite you to join with the Conference in extending to them an extra dose of care and gratitude.* The Conference is offering **Clergy Care Grants** to every congregation to help you say "thank you" to these faith leaders who have served us so well. The grants are meant to support time off and time away for the pastor's rest and renewal, or whatever else you can imagine together as lay leaders and pastor that would contribute to the pastor's well-being.

Attached to this letter is a sheet that describes in more detail what the **Clergy Care Grants** are about, how to apply for one, how they can be utilized, and the size of the grants. The application (also attached) must be completed by lay leaders in the congregation, but we encourage you to engage your pastor in some conversation about how such a grant could best be of benefit to them. (Electronic versions of the grant information can also be accessed at [www.uccmn.org/resources/covid/](http://www.uccmn.org/resources/covid/))

In the Church, we are called to love one another as Christ loved us, to create a beloved community and ease each other's burdens in whatever ways we can. We hope our offering of these Clergy Care Grants creates an opportunity for congregations and pastors to acknowledge the stresses of these last two years and to engage in healthy conversation about good self-care. We pray these grants will offer a way for our clergy who are weary to find a bit of rest.

Thank you for considering an application from your congregation for a Clergy Care Grant. And thank you for all you do as well, as faithful leaders in your congregation, to support the ministry of your church with your generous talents, your time, and your treasure.

God bless you and keep you,

Reverend Shari Prestemon,  
Conference Minister