

Council Minutes May 3, 2023 Grace United Church

<u>Executive:</u>		<u>Attendance</u>
Chair	Leslie Veldman	Present
Vice-Chair	Marion Staples	Present
Past Chair	Al Shaw	Present
Secretary	Cecily Chiles	Present
Treasurer	Wayne Pease	Absent
Ministry	Kenji Marui	Present
	Pat Morrison	Absent

<u>Committee Representatives:</u>		<u>Attendance</u>
AOTS	vacant	
Christian Development	Shirley Willis	Present
Communications	Christopher Cooke	Present
Congregational Care & Growth (CC&G)	Bev Walkling	Present
Finance	Paul Cooper	Present
Region Rep	Kenji Marui	attendance noted Ministry
Outreach	Paul Cooper	attendance noted Finance
Ministry & Personnel (M&P)	John Cooke	Present
Planning	Jim Wicks	Present
Property	John Cooke	attendance noted M&P
Proclamation and Special Events	Bev Walkling	attendance noted CC&G
Trustees	Pete Melanson	Present
Worship	John Baxter	Present

The Meeting was held in person and via Zoom with 13 participants, as per adjournment and began at 7:00 pm. There was a quorum.

1. Devotion

Shirley Willis on behalf of Christian Development. What makes a good leader?

2. Approval of Agenda

MOTION: to approve the agenda as amended.

[Al Shaw / Pete Melanson]- Carried

3. Approval of Minutes

MOTION: to approve the Council meeting minutes from April 5, 2023.

[Pete Melanson / Jim Wicks] – Carried

4. Business Arising from the Minutes

- a. Trustees directed to contact the realtor to determine what their interest is in church property. Pete Melanson did contact the realtor who called to inquire. Pete explained the property details to the interested realtor. Council has directed Trustees to close the loop with this real estate agent, indicate we are not interested; no further action is required at this time. **Motion: At this time Trustees will discontinue exploring the sale of church property with this real estate agent. [Pete Melanson / Al Shaw] - Carried (10 in favour, 1 opposed).**
- b. Discuss education sessions for Category 3 Remit. Many churches in this area are going to have similar questions trying to understand what the Remit is about. It was suggested that we try to coordinate with other church governing bodies for education sessions. There is a staff person who holds the portfolio for Indigenous justice who will be presenting at the regional meeting next weekend (Thérèse Samuel). Kenji will report back to Council at the June meeting.

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c. Review current Safety Plan (rev. 18).

John Cooke presented a report, summarizing the discussions amongst Committees and other groups. The “Masks While Singing Conundrum” report to Council is Appendix A to these minutes.

John thanked everyone who participated and provided feedback to the questions that were posed. There was an effort to treat all concerns with respect and care.

Council engaged in an in-depth discussion about the points made in the report and discussed if the report dug in deep enough to the various emotional and scientific concerns regarding Covid; masking; and public health recommendations. After a full discussion, a motion was raised.

Motion: to revise the Safety Plan (Rev. 18) changing the text in Appendix 1, third bullet, to “Masking in indoor public settings is recommended per public health communications. The lay reader stands at a separate lectern when speaking”, removing “Masking is required while singing and strongly recommended at all other times”. [Cecily Chiles / Marion Staples] – Carried (9 in favour, 1 opposed, 1 abstention)

It should be noted that the change to the Safety Plan Rev. 18 involves only a change to one line in Appendix 1. Recommendation of masking indoors and self-screening will remain.

A lengthy discussion followed on the development of a communications plan to convey the change to the Safety Plan, and how we, as a congregation, can continue to provide protection against covid to our members.

Discussions included:

- What are the key messages to the congregation and through which channels the message should be conveyed.
- New key messages for virus mitigation should include, but not limited to, the need to self-screen for illness, stay home if unwell and no one should feel pressured to not wear a mask.
- Should there be a warning about the greater potential for spreading the virus during singing?
- Wearing a mask in indoor public settings will continue to be recommended.
- Worship committee should be engaged in discussions around the communication plan.
- Choir should discuss as a group, the choice to mask or not while singing. Ensure that those who wish to continue to wear masks are fully supported by the rest of the group.
- An effective communications plan could be more effective at preventing transmission of illness than requiring masking while singing.

Council agreed that the communication plan should be in 2 parts. First a one-time effort to update the congregation on the process to change the Safety Plan. Second, the ongoing message reminding people that we are a caring congregation and that there are standards for safety that are in place.

Communication plan will be presented through the email blast and an update will be presented at the beginning of the Worship service. The email, to be sent out May 12 prior to the service on May 14, will include:

- Describe the revision to the Safety Plan,
- Masking is still recommended for indoor use; the personal choice to wear a mask is fully supported by Council and the congregation.
- Self-screening for illness,
- Stay at home if unwell.

Going forward, Council will continue to review ongoing public health recommendations for protection from respiratory illnesses and the evolution of the pandemic. The regular review at staff meetings and Council meetings remains in the Safety Plan.

Property Committee will review HVAC filtration recommendation and provide an update to council in June.

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Council requested Worship committee to come up with a plan to address the audio-visual system and provide an update to Council in June.

5. Correspondence

- a. Community Living Sarnia Lambton, advertise for Community Living Month to help create a message of inclusion. Paul Cooper will follow up with Curtis to post a message on the sign at the intersection. Mayoral luncheon May 19, anyone interested in attending should let the Chair or Secretary know.
- b. United Church of Canada letter, General Council 45. Kenji was notified that he was appointed Business Coordinator for General Council 45 in 2025. Kenji is excited to support Carmen Lansdowne the current moderator. It will be the 100th anniversary of the United Church of Canada.

6. New Business

None

7. Pastoral Team Reports and Teaching

Kenji's ministerial report

- It has been a busy month for Pastoral Care.
- Grace United Church is now designated a dementia-friendly congregation by the Alzheimer's Society. 100% of staff attended the training in April.
- Fairwinds open house was held in April, to update about the re-build and gather people together.
- Relevance to Resonance, focus is on youth mental health, led by Pat.
- Congregational retreat is planned for the weekend Sept. 29 – Oct. 1, at Lambton Centre.
- Attending Festival of Homiletics in Minneapolis, May 15-21.

8. Finance and Outreach

- a. Investment Policy ad hoc committee
Last fall's investment in GIC's, due dates are in the fall; looking for what is available in the subsequent year. Council will be informed of developments.
- b. Short-term deficit reduction ad hoc committee
No report.

9. Key Ministry Committee Reports Ad hoc committee reports_

Worship

- Good Friday Service - after considering the technology limitations and differences, the collaborative effort with St Barts went well.
- Masking Discussion - to be amalgamated with other input by John Cooke.
- Blue Music Folders - not in use and to be removed from the pews and into storage for the time being.
- Anthem Placement in Worship Service - to be discussed by church staff.
- May 14 Service - Joanna Catterson and Bryce McGarvey to present a Rayjon update.

John Baxter

Christian Development

- HRDC summer student grant may not be available to Grace this summer, although we have not been notified yet. Summer programming may be impacted. Previously the money came from Youth initiative fund (approximately \$6,200).

Shirley Willis

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Congregational Care & Growth

- No report
- Bev Walkling

Proclamation and Special Events

- No report
- Bev Walkling

Outreach

- May 9 a dinner is planned for the organization Circles, a programme to lift people out of poverty. Financial support from the congregation has been received and is greatly appreciated.
 - 81 clients were served at the Inn in April, and they were thankful for the meal which consisted of ham, potatoes, carrots peas, and coleslaw, along with an assortment of desserts. Our six volunteers multitasked during the busy times covering off different stations as needed. We have a fantastic group.
- Paul Cooper

10. Governance and Support Committee Reports:

Ministry & Personnel

- No report
- John Cooke

Finance

Operating Cost Summary- End of March 2023 versus 2022 in \$K

	<u>2023</u>	<u>2022</u>	<u>Delta</u>
Revenue	129.2	125.2	+4.0
Expenses	111.6	106.2	+5.4
Surplus/Deficit	17.6	19.0	

- CRA report needs to be submitted before the end of June.
- Still looking to recruit a candidate to assistant Treasurer, training will be provided.
- Finance's intention is to present to Council a balanced budget for 2024. To achieve this the church would need to generate sufficient revenue to overcome the projected deficit and an anticipated increase in costs.

Paul Cooper

Planning

- Want to welcome Marion Staples to the committee in her new role as Vice Chair of Council
- Planning focus at this time is on growing the awareness and knowledge of what goes on at Grace
 - Committees encouraged to have a Minute session at worship to share info about their people and focus ... Suggest a "Did you know?" format for this
 - Communications has agreed to do the next one
 - Others? Members of Planning are able to assist.
 - Committees to provide content for information slides to roll prior to the service
 - Worship to agree on this use of time
 - Planning will prepare the first one as an example
 - Other committees are encouraged to prepare for their group and Planning is willing to format if provided with the content
- Planning will provide support John Cooke and David Murray on the "Greening of Grace" with John at our next meeting
- Provided our input to the Masking While Singing mandate to John Cooke

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- As a group, we reviewed three of the “Community of Faith” documents generated for during the preparation for the pastoral search in 2020
 - Living Faith Story
 - Demographics Worksheet
 - Financial Viability Worksheet
- Mission Statement “Inclusive, Intergenerational, Community Partner” ... some examples:
 - *Inclusive: affirming church*
 - *Intergenerational: Pat’s workshops on adolescents*
 - *Community Partner: Gatherings for Fairwinds*
- Observed in 2019, 24% of the church population was >71
- Observed that “A medium sized church where we recognize each other but may not know each other well” described us well
 - Suggested that efforts to “know the church” better efforts are positive and that events such as “Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner” are welcomed to provide “soak time” to get to know each other better/deeper
- Observed that we have a First Nations community within our city community and we could possibly find opportunities to include them in our community without imposing ourselves upon them as past/current colonizing approaches have done.

Jim Wicks

Communications

- Some quotes received for painting the gym, waiting for a third quote.

Chris Cooke

Property

- Boiler #2 gas valve repair deferred to the fall.
- Garden south of Narthex doors – stump and “old” shrubs to be removed and replaced with small new shrubs in the fall
- Girl Guides will do a garlic mustard pulling SPRINT event on May 8
- Planted 5 shrubs in the area at the north end of the parking lot. This area can be left as a naturalized area.
- Various other small repairs.
- Thank you to Brian Eagleson and Cecily Chiles for all their work.

John Cooke

Trustees

- No report

Peter Melanson

AOTS

- No report

Region updates

- Regional council May 12/13, format is hybrid in person and online, at Stoneridge Best Western south of London.

Kenji Marui

11. Closing

- Next regular meeting June 7, 2023. 7 pm
- Closing prayer, Kenji.

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12. Adjournment, Meeting closed at 9:25 pm

Motion to adjourn: [Marion Staples / Jim Wicks] – Carried (unanimous).

<u>2023 Devotion Responsibility:</u>	<u>2023 Sunday Lock-up Responsibility:</u>
JANUARY –Property	JANUARY – CD
FEBRUARY –Planning	FEBRUARY – CC&G
MARCH – Worship	MARCH – AOTS
APRIL – Trustees	APRIL – Communications
MAY – CD	MAY – Finance
JUNE – CC&G	JUNE – M&P
JULY - na	JULY – Outreach
AUGUST - na	AUGUST – Property
SEPTEMBER – na	SEPTEMBER – Planning
OCTOBER – AOTS	OCTOBER – Trustees
NOVEMBER – Communications	NOVEMBER – Worship
DECEMBER – Finance	DECEMBER – CD

Leslie Veldman, Council Chair

Cecily Chiles, Council Secretary

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Appendix A The “Masks While Singing Conundrum” Report to Council May 2023

I suggested Council consider the “masks while singing” requirement through discussion amongst Committees and others before making a formal decision about the safety plan. My intent was to foster better understanding of the concerns about potential changes and the opportunities we might have for mitigating the concerns.

The conundrum we face is:

- Public Health Guidelines are vague and moving to the new “normal”.
- How do we continue to justify the “masks while singing” requirement? We don’t have criteria by which Council can make an objective decision to continue with or relax that standard.
- While we seem to be OK with the public messages, we are in an agree/disagree stalemate over the “masks while singing requirement”.
- This is a very personal issue. People may have different responses depending on their personal situation or their role in the worship service.

Some “current realities” are:

1. The virus is not going away and it continues to affect the general population, not just the most vulnerable.
2. The virus is cycling/surging although some authorities say the level of infection is stable and not so prone to surging.
3. The province discontinued funding for all Covid, Cold & Flu Clinics on March 31. People are now reliant on pharmacies and primary care providers for testing and vaccinations.
4. Lambton Public Health recommends “basic actions to reduce the spread of respiratory illness”. The word “strongly” has disappeared. The actions include:
 - Stay up to date with your vaccines
 - Screen for respiratory symptoms daily
 - Take a Covid Test
 - Stay home when you are sick
 - Always practice good hand hygiene and regularly clean surfaces
 - Mask indoors (public settings), including schools and childcare settings
5. The last recommendation from the United Church of Canada was issued in April 2022 and doesn’t offer any guidance to Grace other than to “continue to ask people to stay home if unwell or if they have tested positive for COVID”.
6. Many people choose not to mask in public settings.
7. Organizations are rolling back mandatory mask requirements (e.g. Bluewater Health) in favor of gradually/safely returning to normal, while mitigating risk to vulnerable patients/clients.
8. People who are immuno-compromised or face other risks are advised to take additional, unspecified precautions.
9. Government testing is declining so it is difficult to discern the risk or how widespread the virus may be.
10. We generally agree there is a significant difference between talking aloud and singing in terms of risk or airborne spread.
11. Some people don’t follow the “mask while singing” requirement (consciously or unconsciously).
12. People are staying away from Worship for many reasons including “because we have to wear masks while singing”.

Response from Committees, Groups & Individuals

Seven committees, the Choir and the Helen McKay Unit discussed the questions and provided feedback to me.

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Positive Comments:

- The Grace community continues to be very respectful of those who choose to use masks.
- Grace provides remote access to worship services, although people participating remotely may suffer a negative impact in terms of isolation, communications and relationships.
- Grace worship services are somewhat socially distanced and not as densely packed as many public venues.

Potential Benefits of eliminating masks while singing:

- Clearer and better singing
- More people participating in and enjoying singing
- Some people may return to music activities (choir or solos) who decline to do so while masks are required.

Potential Downsides of Continuing the mask mandate:

- Some people will continue to not participate in worship, choir, and/or music performances. Others may follow suit.
- The congregation may be viewed as unwilling to adjust to the new normal.
- Does this make us less inclusive?
- Are we segregating ourselves?
- Are we becoming less relevant to others in the congregation or in the community?

Concerns if we eliminate masks while singing:

I summarized the concerns expressed in the feedback as:

- Concern some people feel they are at an increased risk level if others sing without being masked.
- Concern that the “burden” is on the vulnerable person to protect themselves. This feels “isolating”.
- Concern that we are somehow not inclusive of, perhaps, a small group that prefer to be masked.
- Concern that I will contract the virus or suffer significant illness due to my personal vulnerabilities.
- Concern that many people have stopped mask use even in large group settings.
- Concern that some people feel less safe. We want people to feel safe in the sanctuary.
- Concern that some people may not feel safe for those at home.
- Concern that screening is not happening for worship services (we assume people are doing it).
- Concern that people are now less likely to follow the “stay home if unwell” recommendation.
- Concern that people assume a cold is not covid and don’t test to confirm they are negative.
- Concern people are not willing to do much to protect others.

Hypothetically, what if we stopped all singing activities:

Would any of the concerns expressed be mitigated if we stopped singing activities?

My assessment – NO. In other words, our concerns are focused more on the risks of the virus, in general, and are not driven by the added risk of singing.