

***St. John's United Methodist Church
Church Conference
May 23, 2004***

Prior to convening the Church Conference, Rev. Sheila Rogers read a report from the Finance committee. The report gave details of Church Council's near-unanimous vote on May 20 authorizing Finance to proceed with negotiations for a \$3.8 million loan from Security Federal, which will consolidate St. John's other outstanding loans and provide a line of credit for final payment on the new organ and the Bank of America break funding fee. According to the United Methodist Discipline, borrowed funds may not be used for operating expenses. Any other funding requests must be authorized by Council.

Call to order

The meeting was called to order by Rev. Rogers, authorized to chair in the absence of the district superintendent..

Background

Sheila introduced Doug Leader, who gave a brief explanation of the proposed renovation project. The said that the purpose is to enhance our ability to use the chancel area for the glory of God in his worship services. Every attempt has been made to maintain the beauty of the sanctuary that we all love.

A vote in favor of the project will authorize raising the chancel area floor approximately 5 inches, making the pulpit, baptismal font, and wall in front of the choir loft movable, and replacing the lectern. A separate question on the ballot concerns making the altar table movable, so that it can be repositioned for events such as pageants, massed choirs, and the like.

Meeting/voting procedure

The chair asked for the conference attendees' opinion on whether the nursery attendants and those in prayer for the conference in the chapel should be allowed to vote. Since no objection was voiced, she ruled that this would be permitted.

An inquiry was raised about who would be eligible to vote. Sheila said that any member of St. John's is eligible, and it had been decided to trust members' statements of eligibility on the ballot.

She asked Rob Braithwaite to serve as parliamentarian, and Joan Nagle to serve as secretary.

Comments and discussion

Sheila said that an equal number of speakers on each side of the issue would be heard. She called first for a speaker who was opposed to the project.

Becky Sharpe Risher rose to say that any change to the church brings new financial obligations, and asked voters to consider whether they are up for the challenge of meeting these.

Jim Heffner spoke on the positive side of the issue, noting the beauty of the sanctuary, the music program, and the sense of outreach that had attracted his family to St. John's.

Tommy Greer, a member of the finance committee, reported that this church is currently in a tight budget situation. The current budget provides only 4 percent for outreach ministries. He believes our focus should be changed.

John Stapleton, a United Methodist minister for more than 48 years, said that people come to church for four reasons: for love, because they enjoy being together; because they are in pain of body or heart; because they love God; and because they want to worship him. He believes that the renovations to the chancel will provide new and wonderful ways to love and praise God, to "free the wings of music by which we send our prayers to heaven.

Sally Ewing opinion was that "To me, the altar is not a piece of furniture," and kneeling at the altar rail is not important. She would be willing to give up music in order to get back to preaching.

Joan Nagle said that she is currently unable to kneel at the altar rail for Communion, and is in favor of raising it. She expressed her love for St. John's music program, noting that music is felt internally, and as such is one of the many ways people come to God.

As "the biggest church in the state," Don Nichols said, St. John's ought to be able to pay its apportionments.

Lee Poe expressed his support of the renovation project, but also his feeling that the congregation doesn't know what's happening in church committees and boards. He made a plea for civility and understanding.

Call for question

Rob Braithwaite called for a vote on the question, and ruled out any further discussion.

Kevin Bumpus explained the voting procedure, and Sheila read an anonymous letter from a member who hopes that the spirit of love and devotion to God will continue to be the ruling factors in the life of St. John's.

The votes are to be tallied during the Sunday School hour, and the results posted thereafter in the lobby outside the main office.

The ballots were distributed and the attendees voted.

Closing

Sheila closed with prayer.



Joan G. Nagle
Secretary