

This past Saturday 30 plus members from Shepherd of the Hills and Unity gathered for a day of connection and conversation about collaboration, led by Pastor Donna Simon. Speaking from her role as Director for Evangelical Mission (DEM), Pastor Donna guided us through the different types of collaboration, offered examples of successful collaborations in the church, and advised on how we can collaborate from "authentic relationship".

We reflected individually, in small groups, and then in congregational groups on what our "essentials" are, and where we might be willing to compromise. There was an encouraging amount of positive energy flowing by the end of the day. Connections were made, thoughts were offered, and worship was shared together.

Unity Essentials	SOTH's Essentials
Christian Good News (gospel)	Proclamation of the Word (gospel)
Sacraments	Weekly, open Communion / Baptism
Service to others, mission	Mission outreach
Music (wide variety)	Music (participatory and liturgical)
Respect for liturgical tradition	Spiritual leadership to guide through scripture (not necessarily ordained)
Reconciling in Christ *	Prayer
Sense of community gathered	Stewardship of time, talents, resources
Transcendence in the worship space (being in God's presence)	
Lay participation	
Opportunities of fellowship	
Unity's Important-but-not-a-deal-breaker	SOTH's Important-but-not-a-deal-breaker
Triduum (3 days of Maundy Thurs, Good Fri, and Easter Vigil)	Place of worship, worship time
Wearing vestments (white robes, stoles, etc)	Worship style (casual or formal)
	Projection in worship service
	Little Free Pantries

* Since 1983, the Reconciling in Christ (RIC) program has been a public way for faith communities to see, name, celebrate, and advocate for people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions in the Lutheran church.

Collaboration Next Steps:

- o Form team for collaboration (3 members from each Church plus pastors); recommend only one from Council
- o SOTH visit Unity and vice versa
- o Develop shared purposes (not tied to attendance or money)
- o Have fun together. Plan intentional activities
- o Address bumps as they arrive
- o Pray for each other.
- o Be attuned to grief and loss in congregation.

Participant Feedback

Financial Update

First, thank you all so much for your continued support. This is a very giving and generous family. While we continue the mission of the Church, we are unfortunately in financial difficulty. This is primarily due to the large mortgage, upkeep on the church building, insurance, workman's comp insurance, etc.

Historical perspective:

- At the end of 2022, the congregation approved a budget for 2023 that was not balanced and the unsustainability of it over the long term was recognized at the time. The budget was for \$142,000. There ended up being a \$26,755.59 shortfall for the year 2023. The deficit at the time was covered by using general checking account reserves and some dedicated funds.
- At the end of 2023, the congregation again approved a budget for 2024 that was not balanced, and again, the unsustainability of the budget over the long term was recognized and approved. The 2024 budget was for \$154,000, which was an increase of \$12,000 over the 2023 budget.
- During the transition of treasurers, a projected income was calculated, factoring in all the deaths and transfers in the past year. It was calculated that, given those changes, the projected income for 2025 would be \$30,000 short for even a half-time pastoral leader.

Path Forward

What was stated at the last budget meeting in Nov 2023:

- Council recognizes current financial situation is not sustainable
- Approach 2024 as a transitional year to chart a path to sustainability
- Fund 2024 deficit by reallocating certain dedicated funds

Please note, the deficit is being covered currently. However, the money reserves are dwindling rapidly and **there will be a time in the near future that we will not be able to pay the monthly bills without an increase in offerings and decrease in expenses.**

To the point about decreasing expenses, the council has met with realtors about selling the building. Kim Surratt, aided by Mike Surratt will be the point person with the realtors. We have options to 1. Sell the building and land outright, 2. Sell the building to someone who will rent back the sanctuary to us on the weekends, or 3. Auction off the building.

In the weeks to come we will be creating opportunities to have conversations with members about their thoughts and feelings on selling the building. We ask for your honest reflections as we seek to come to a consensus on this decision. **After worship on Sunday, October 20 we will have a congregational meeting to vote on whether to sell the building.**

If we sell the building, we could look for places in the Bridgeton area to worship on Sundays. Bill Keyes will be reaching out to John Calvin to see if they would be able to host us. We could also reach out to Unity about sharing space there.

Also, in regard to decreasing expenses, sharing pastoral leadership between Unity and SOTH (part time at both congregations) would "half" all the "Pastoral Compensation" line items in the budget (rough estimate: \$48,000)

In regards to increasing offerings, there will be a stewardship focus in October and November, with an opportunity to complete an estimate of giving form for 2025. There is also the possibility of borrowing from Thrivent Endowment Account to supplement one or two months of expenses (which could be paid back upon the sale of the building).