

## Witness Commission meeting May, 2018

6:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.

**Attendees:** Peg Over (chair), Michelle Clapper, Sam Epps, Paula Knudsen Burke, Peggy McFarland, pastoral liaison Greg Laszakovits (late arrival)

- Peg opened the meeting with a reading “Choosing to be a peacemaker” from Deuteronomy
- April minutes approved with a clarification from Michelle – in the section about Children Disaster Services, Michelle was noting that we needed a balance between responding to an emergent situation quickly and having more opportunity for discussion during an-person meeting.
- Peg asks about whether we want our regular practice to be using votes or consensus. Peg said at the regular church board meetings they use red, green or yellow cards to show where they are on an issue. Paula asked about what the term was that Pastor Pam used. Michelle said it was “worshipful work.” Sam said using consensus is less polarizing. Peg said maybe we could sometimes use votes. Michelle said it would be helpful to have instances of when we would vote defined. After discussion, agreement that we could use consensus for commission business except for annual budget and O&M disbursements; those will occur with voting.
- Rich Barber play was brought to us by John David Bowman. Peg went to a rehearsal recently at Moravian Village. Gene and Barb Ellis are supposed to be actors but they were in Chicago so there were substitutes. There are only four actors. As far as where it goes, open-ended. There is very little need for a set and staging. There is only a table and chairs and a few props. Peggy asked about payment, Peg said John David had mentioned an honorarium or taking up a plate. Paula asks what they would ask for – advertising, space? Sam said the stage downstairs would be more intimate. Peggy said do we imagine people from the community would come. Sam said when we originally discussed, we thought about doing it in the summer, so students wouldn’t be around. Michelle asked about refreshments. Sam asked if we could have John David provide questions to think about during the play. Peggy wondered what time or day of the week. Peg said she wasn’t sure but that John David was agreeable to pushing it off. Sam wondered if they could do it at the end of May but Peggy said we might not have time to advertise. Paula said pushing it off to the fall may draw more people because college students would be back. Michelle said we should push off until Pastor Greg gets to the meeting so we can check on church calendar. Greg thought September would be better.
- Dennis Wade email – Sam said the first thing he thought was what do we do with this. Peg said a couple years ago he and Don Kraybill did a Sunday School presentation on it. He’s been working on it. Don said he couldn’t look at it until after June so it’s out there and he’s sent to politicians. He’s trying to find some middle ground. Sam said it doesn’t seem very actionable. Peggy said it seemed like he was trying to educate us. Paula said we use the Witness action alert for more of “action items.” Paula said what if we asked him to come back to us with a more formal proposal. Peg said there doesn’t think there is

anything to do at this point. Michelle agreed to tell him that we'd like him to keep us posted.

- Peg said June 10 is the hygiene kit program for Church World Service during Sunday School hour. There will be advertising in the bulletin in advance to allow people to contribute. Peg asked commission members for help during that day. Jason will be coordinating the youth. Michelle asked if we were doing it with adults, too. Peg asked Paula if she had ever heard back from Church World Service. She said she had not heard back from the church liaison.
- Peg hands out the O&M history going back to 1999. She also noted the Witness handbook has a lot of information in it, including responsibilities of O&M. The key for O&M is “non-budgeted outreach ministries” and those who are engaged in ministry and other denominational activities. Peg says the ministry part is pretty cut and dry and lists people who are in seminary programs, etc. Greg asks if we have an estimate of the seminary costs. Peg said this year the projected amount to distribute is \$27,200 (4% from the investment) and most years it is 50% to ministry costs and 50% to other disbursements. Commission members reviewed the past costs of ministry. Peggy said it would be nice to know an estimate of what ministry costs would be for the next year. Peg is going to ask the folks in seminary for an estimate for what they are going to request this year. Peggy asked if they are paying out of pocket and then asking to get reimbursed, or what. Peg says what we have left after those ministry items is what we have left for non-budgeted ministries. Paula said it was helpful to see the history going back to 1999 to see the diversity of recipients and the diversity of amounts – sometimes it would be a larger number of smaller amounts and in different time periods, fewer amounts, but larger. Paula said she could be persuaded either way – lots of smaller amounts or fewer bigger amounts. Greg said there are factors to consider: connection to the organization, how strong it is, do we want to buoy organizations that we know are struggling, or give to organizations that seem healthier/making more of a difference. Greg says one of the more exciting questions for him is: How do we want to think about relationships with organizations in the long haul? These can be ministry and relationship opportunities, Greg says. We don't necessarily have to be like Santa Claus coming down the chimney and then leaving, we could create opportunity. Peggy wonders if we focus more on Brethren groups. Peg said the handbook references guidelines about how the money should be disbursed. Paula said after hearing that, maybe we should give bigger chunks of money. Michelle said we could do one year with bigger expenditures and another year with smaller expenditures. Michelle also noted it is difficult to have this conversation without doing the budget at the same time. Greg said he agreed with Michelle but that we could still have general discussion about some of the principals. Greg offered an example of times when an organization would be cut out of the budget on purpose so more money could be put in via O&M. Paula asks if we should have grant recipients come in and pitch their organizations. Sam said he didn't think it would be helpful to say we were thinking about them for O&M or budget. Peg said in the past Advoz and Brethren Housing came in to present. Greg asked Michelle what questions we should be asking so that budget and O&M work in concert. Michelle said budget should be a representation of what we say is

important. Michelle said there have been some line items in the budget in the past couple years that seem to be missing, like food security, housing. So for the purpose of consistency, either increase in certain categories, or shrink budget. She added focused on the Church of the Brethren groups and whether we are meeting the proscribed costs. Michelle said a budget is a snapshot is what is important to the organization, so either plug holes that are missing or scale back. Greg responded that Michelle is a keen observer. The budget used to be really long and the dollar amounts were shrinking. Nobody wanted to see their favorite thing cut during board meetings, so it was shrunken down to a “short list,” Greg said. But in recent years it’s expanded. Greg said the quilts generate a lot of money. Michelle offered a great suggestion, better description next to each item, such as “Quilters-Auction.” Sam said setting parameters such as Michelle listed earlier is helpful. Peg said getting all of our thought process in order, so we’re already thinking about some of these things. Paula said we could tweak the amounts we’ve given already. Peg liked Michelle’s idea about trying to have global and local representation both. Greg explained Mission and Ministry Board has a recommended amount and we are at that amount. It is the main administrative arm of the Church of the Brethren, Greg said. Pastor Pam had previously been on the Mission and Ministry and played a role in increasing our giving, Greg said. Michelle said maybe there are opportunities to explain giving, such as newsletter. Paula said what about presenting in Sunday School. Greg responded that the concern about that is that someone in the congregation could pitch an organization and we could pick it or not and possibly risk an arbitrary decision or fomenting a passionate reaction. Michelle said to piggyback on Greg’s comment on the denomination, actions of the district could come into play. Paula says what if we looked at topics, such as food. Sam said maybe thinking of “sectors” and Michelle offered “pie slices.” Greg said what if we got together every January and said “this year, we really want to look at this issue.” Peg asked about having theme? Peg said it would be a way to focus because it’s so hard because there are so many needs and requests. Sam said if we decide to bring people in (from grantees) we could ask about what they are doing toward that cause. Paula offered as a hypothetical “violence reduction” for 2019. Sam said then it would fit in with going to talk to Sunday Schools. Paula said she liked Michelle’s idea of small gifts one year and larger the next. Michelle said there should be some structure and intentionality, including a philosophy that we can explain to people. Greg asks where do we go from here? Paula said she would like to stew on the theme idea and would it be possible to roll it out in June. Greg said the timing would be better for pastors because they plan on a school year schedule. Paula asked if we have a meeting in June. Peg said yes, it is June 6. Paula asked if we could come up a theme at the June meeting. Greg said he thinks it is possible but that we would be “informed” by the theme, not locked into it. Michelle added we would still have budgeting decisions to make that would be outside of the “theme.”

- Peg will have Jason submit something in writing about how much he is requesting from Witness for Camp Swatara counselors. Greg said is this something we’re deciding for this year, or is it something for the future. Peg said how much money are we talking about. Paula said it sounds like ministry. Greg asked to carry this on the agenda to June.

- Paula updated the group about the request from the Poor People's Campaign for food. Greg said the food distribution group who handles providing meals is coordinated out the church office and Paula could call and check in with them. Greg said call Charlotte Brown. Peg said we can tell him we'll support one meal.
- Greg has one more item of business. Doug Lamb contacted him about partnership opportunities for \$1.9 million cost of refurbishing the building. We are going to tentatively plan for July 11 @ 6:30 p.m. to have Lamb attend, but we're waiting on Michelle's schedule.