

Senior Minister's Report to the Board of Trustees

February 2022

Further Report on Priority End 1.3.5 – Minimize our impact on the Earth and work to heal our planet.

I reported on this in October and had great hopes that we would be well on our way towards this goal by this time. In reality, progress has been slow. As of now, we do not have a team of congregants dedicated to this work. I am hopeful that Kim Warman will assemble such a team before her internship ends in May. She has met with several promising congregants who are concerned with this work. Our work with the Youth Group has been fruitful in this regard. They have been engaged in learning about environmental justice and especially in how it intersects with racial justice. One important learning is that most of the pollution and environmental degradation affects communities of color most of all, giving meaning to the phrase “environmental racism”.

As the Youth Group prepares to go to Alaska, they have been exploring how to interact with Native Nations there as they help to dismantle a dam so that the salmon can run upstream. One of the white organizers of this effort in Alaska cautioned the youth group on using “woke” language in Alaska. This prompted a rich discussion about the difference between social action (dismantling the dam) and social justice (decriing environmental racism). The youth have decided to take a “learn and help” approach and focus on social action first and foremost. However the discussion opened understandings as to the complexity of talking about race and environment in their future.

Impacts of Priority End 1.3.5 on Limitations

3.0 Limitations Policies

There are just a few of these limitations which may be impacted by working towards this end:

3.3.2 Fail to provide a reasonable level of safety, upkeep, access and functionality for of the facilities.

We will continue to keep our congregation safe. However, as we explore the impact of our maintenance procedures on the environment we may take actions that some in the congregation might find “unkempt”. For instance, one suggestion is that we stop removing our leafs each fall. Leaf removal is not necessary to health of our lawns. The loud gas powered blowers impact the environment negatively in terms of noise and carbon use. How would our congregation feel about leafs that weren't removed? Likewise, we may decide to reduce or

eliminate our use of salt on parking and walkways. We would replace it with sand. How would our congregation feel about that?

3.3.3 Fail to maintain and enforce procedures to ensure the safety of individuals while at the Congregation or on the congregation's properties and at Congregation functions.

This might be an extension of these changes. Some might consider the removal of salt from our hard surfaces as a violation of the safety norms of our congregation. This would have to be considered.

3.6 Financial Conditions & Activities: With respect to the Congregation's actual, ongoing financial condition and activities, the Senior Minister shall not cause or allow the development of financial jeopardy or deviation from priorities established in Ends policies or the most recent budget plan.

While I would never place the congregation in financial jeopardy, we may need to adjust a budget plan mid-year to enact certain environmental procedures that help us meet our end. Installing solar panels about the parking lot outside our capital budget is one such example.

3.8.2 Allow facilities, premises, and equipment to be subject to improper wear and tear or insufficient maintenance.

We may decide to give certain facilities less maintenance than we already do. Once an Environmental Justice Team is assembled, one of the first orders of business would be to do an energy and environmental impact audit.

3.10.7 Make public statements about the position of the Congregation, if the official position is not formally adopted.

We discussed this last month. Do I need to wait for a congregational resolution to speak out against environmental injustice in the public square?

Overall, we have a great deal of work to do towards making this end a priority much less a reality. I will continue to move us forward as quickly as our resources and volunteers allow.

Update on Non-Gendered Restrooms

In discussing our priority end to support gender equity with several church leaders, it has come to my attention that our current use of restrooms as "non-gendered" is neither correct nor complaint and may, in fact, be dangerous. Simply labelling restrooms that were clearly designed for men and women does not adequately meet the needs of non-gendered individuals and

certainly alienates those who are gendered and who must now navigate which restroom to use. Children and our elderly will be especially challenged by this arrangement. Current building code for the Town of Westport requires us to have an equal amount of “fixtures” for men and women in separate facilities in order to meet our capacity requirements. While we are technically out of compliance on this issue (and out of compliance on access due to disability), no one is likely to complain to the Town unless there is an incident where a member feels their privacy has been compromised. Because of this I have had our restrooms returned to their gendered use as men and women’s restrooms.

The solution to this problem, and in keeping with our priority towards gender equity and our limitation towards accessibility, is to design and build five or six individual gendered water closets (no urinals) with one of those being larger and including a sink for families. Each of these closets would have a full door that can be locked. There would be a common washing sink outside these restrooms. We might also consider putting locks on the non-gendered restrooms on the lower level so they could be used in the meantime. I am attaching a report John Turmelle has written on this subject. This is something our architect could do very soon.

I am asking the board to endorse this plan. If endorsed I would direct our architect Goody Clancy to design and create a RFP from our contractors to build a new restroom configuration. This would bring us into compliance both legally and morally. GC could design this in conjunction with a new chancel, possibly around a new organ, as their next workup.

In effect, we would be bumping the restroom remodel farther up the original building plan. Giving our stated ends this seems like a logical next step.

Respectfully Submitted, Rev. Dr. John T. Morehouse