

Serve Council April 2026 minutes

Present:

Ben Sperry, Wren Fiebig, Joanne Westin, Jesse Bassett, Peg Zitzner, Jim Thomas, Melissa Glorioso, Donna Sens, Steve Chapman, Tim Cuff (via Web) and Ryan Wallace.

Action Items

- [] Ryan to submit Earth Stewards grant (\$920) to Sarah Gresh and Drew for payment
- [] Council to develop and send survey to establish priorities for evaluating grant requests
- [] Ryan to work with Max and personnel to schedule interview/meeting and share date with council
- [] Council members to fill out information on shared drive members page
- [] Batey Task Force awaiting IPM response on services and costs

Opening Prayer and Devotional

The meeting opened with prayer for Natalie's upcoming surgery and a reading from Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail" focusing on disappointment with the white moderate and the church's role in social justice

Current Events and Context

Discussion of recent Supreme Court decision on Louisiana voting district, which ruled against a district created to allow another Black voting district. The Court also heard arguments on ending temporary protected status for Haitians.

Discussion of Church's Role

Significant conversation about the church's call to justice work. Ryan shared experiencing pushback from some congregation members about being "too political" and referenced Dom Helder Mara's quote: "When I feed the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food they call me a communist."

Concerns raised about institutions not holding as expected and questions about when the church stopped being the place that says "we have to fix that" beyond just feeding people.

SNAP Benefits Crisis

Ryan expressed concern about upcoming food assistance cuts affecting 2,500 legal residents since November 1st, with another 2,000-3,000 people losing benefits starting June 1st. Ryan has

been meeting with Greater Cleveland Food Bank, Resource Cleveland, county officials, and business community to plan for increased demand but feels there's inadequate response

Grant Request: Earth Stewards - APPROVED

Council unanimously approved \$920 grant for Earth Stewards for water bottle filling station installation, personalized water bottles, educational programming on recycling, nature exhibit, and speaker honorariums

Grant Requests - Tabled for Further Discussion

Building Hope in the City (\$7,500 request) and Cleveland Owns (annual event funding) were tabled pending development of grant evaluation priorities

Council discussion emphasized need for clearer framework to evaluate requests against limited budget of \$52,000 total (\$42,000 in mission support grants and immediate needs, plus \$10,000 reserved for hunger-related activities)

Bridges to Batey Task Force Update

Task force met twice with International Partners in Ministry (IPM) exploring partnership for fiscal sponsorship and administrative support IPM would cost approximately \$4,000 more annually than Mango Tree but offers more organizational strength Next step is for IPM to respond with specific contact person and detailed cost proposal

Goal is to transition Batey to self-sufficiency with third-party administrative and fundraising support, potentially moving funds to Cleveland Foundation where money can earn interest

North Church Community Meals Update

Donna reported Fairmount went to North Church four times last year and will go five times this year, with recommendation to increase to six times (every other month) next year Church provides meals to people experiencing homelessness living in shelter conditions

Catherine's part-time pastoral position at North is \$28,500 (\$57,000 full-time rate at half time) plus \$1,200 chapel rental Some Presbyterian churches contribute significantly more (\$20,000 mentioned)

Court Watch Program

GCC Court Watch training sessions have had good participation from Fairmount members Program involves observing bind-over hearings in juvenile court

Ryan shared update on 14-year-old who was bound over to adult court and is serving 21 years - case is awaiting Supreme Court decision after appellate court vacated conviction

Community Engagement Initiatives

Equal team meeting scheduled for next week to discuss Pride Festival

Meeting planned with Tanika Shepard (Cleveland Baptist Association) and Felix Munoz (Nuevo Luz/Galilean Theological Seminary) to discuss shared gospel teaching and church's call

Potential pilot program with Texas attorneys to support detained Northeast Ohio immigrants through faith-based accompaniment, gathering documents and connecting with families

Statewide clergy collaboration with Springfield, Youngstown, Columbus, and Cincinnati addressing common issues

Advocacy for clergy and attorney access to detained immigrants at Youngstown facility

Proposed Hire: Max Lozier

Ryan seeking to hire Max Lozier, Haitian immigrant pastor whose renewal application is on pause to help organize accompaniment system for immigrants needing support at court appearances, ICE check-ins, etc. Would also help train and organize Fairmount volunteers

Ryan will work with personnel to schedule interview

Budget and Process Notes

Council's grant-making process documented in Serve Council charter in shared drive

Senior staff can approve up to \$2,500 within budget; amounts over \$2,500 require council or session approval

Approved grants submitted to financial secretary (Sarah Gresh and Drew) for payment

Reflections on Martin Luther King Jr. Reading

Multiple members reflected on the passage about the contemporary church being "a weak ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound" and "an arch defender of the status quo" noting its relevance to current moment

Discussion of how congregations are responding differently - some supporting current administration, some remaining silent, others like Refined Church being vocal in opposition

Emphasis on importance of caring about "the other" and recognition that many don't realize their complicity