

# *The Kenilworth Union Church*

*211 Kenilworth Avenue  
Kenilworth, Illinois 60043-0308*

June 26, 2009

Dear KUC Families,

The recent announcement that Ben Bishop will be leaving the staff of the Kenilworth Union Church later this summer has precipitated a number of calls and questions to the Board of Trustees. Following are answers to many of those questions. We hope this provides more context and background to your understanding of the situation. We underestimated the need for this level of detail and for that we apologize. Also, please know that we appreciate your concerns and thoughts and your willingness to share them with us. If there are further questions please feel comfortable contacting any of the Board members or Ministers.

**Q: Could you provide additional background on the Executive Minister position and the financial situation leading up to the most recent announcement?**

A: In anticipation of Gil Bowen's retirement, the Board of Trustees determined that an Executive Minister would be an appropriate addition to our Ministerial staff. The Executive Minister is a specialized ministerial position, typically found in larger churches, that combines traditional pastoral duties with managerial responsibilities including operations and staff development. This was particularly well suited to our needs at that time as Gil Bowen focused increasingly on his responsibilities in the pulpit.

It was our hope that the Executive Minister could also serve as our Interim Senior Minister, once Gil retired, during our search for a new Senior Minister. It was also our expectation that once he was in place, the Senior Minister would assume the head of staff responsibilities. Ben served in the Executive Minister role for six (6) years including two (2) years as the Interim Senior Minister.

The timing of our review and recent decisions was heavily influenced by the realities of our budget and our financial condition. As described in the recent letter from the Board, we have experienced a decline of about 15% in worship attendance and Loyalty Sunday giving over the past two years, leading us to incur material budget deficits. Interestingly over the last six (6) years we have had four (4) ministerial positions but have never felt the financial impact, because we have had a number of staff changes and never had all four positions in place for an entire year. With a June 30th fiscal year end, our budgeting process for 2009-2010 has been in process for the past few months.

While we took steps prior to Gil's retirement to prepare for some financial disruption during the Senior Minister transition, we understood that the church budget could not withstand further deficit spending of this magnitude. As we worked through various financial scenarios, it became clear that we would be unable to reach financial stability without taking significant steps, including reductions in personnel expense. Our current expenses are close to \$2.35 million and our new projections for revenues are closer to \$2.0 million. We feel we must prepare for a structural resetting of our ongoing budget, not just a transitional or temporary shortfall in revenues.

**Q: What criteria are you using to evaluate expense reductions?**

A: Our plan is to preserve the services that engage and support our congregation, such as Worship and Music, Children's Ministry, Youth and Family Ministries, Adult Education, Congregational Care, and Outreach.

We are working to reduce our ongoing expenses in Operations, Administration and Facilities. We have already asked our departments to reduce their operating expense budgets by 10%, deferred some capital expense projects, consolidated mailed materials and increased the use of email to reduce mailing and paper costs, reduced the use and cost of outside musicians, and implemented several programs to be more responsible citizens to the environment. The staff has been very responsive to these requests, and is working with the Board to help achieve balance in our budgeting process.

**Q: Are there more changes?**

A: Yes, there will need to be more changes. Our shortfall, if we didn't make changes, would be in the range of \$350,000 to \$400,000 on an annualized basis. Therefore we have to consider making significant changes in our operating structure along with making adjustments in our day to day decisions and operations. Our goal is to achieve a balanced budget over the course of the next two years.

**Q: Why aren't we announcing all the changes at the same time?**

A: We would have preferred to make all the changes at once but we wanted to make sure we had sufficient input from the senior staff prior to making the final decisions. Since staff development and operations have been the primary responsibility of the Executive Minister, we needed to provide some time for the senior staff to adjust to Ben's departure and to assess/reassign responsibilities within the organization. We also wanted to give them time to develop and consider alternatives before making final decisions.

**Q: Did Ben make the decision to leave KUC at this time or did the Board ask him to leave?**

A: The Board did ask Ben to leave knowing that the timing was somewhat earlier than he was currently planning. It was a very difficult decision and also a difficult conversation, because Ben is a good friend and has served our church well. As mentioned earlier, there will be other decisions that need to be made and they need to be made in the context of whether we had an Executive Minister position in place for the long term. If the Executive Minister position was to remain, resulting decisions would be different than if the position was not going to be in place.

As Ben indicated in his letter, his call was to bridge the transition from Gil's retirement through the search for a new Senior Minister. When we talked to Ben, we emphasized that he had done his job well and that his call with us has been very successful. He was gracious in his recognition and understanding of the situation. Although he expressed sadness in leaving, he concurred with our overall strategy and approach. He also expressed his appreciation of the past and ongoing support that he has received from the congregation and the Board.

**Q: Did we have to make these decisions now?**

A: Quite frankly, it would be much easier to delay making these decisions. Delaying the decisions, however, would be just that, delaying the decisions. It would not make them any easier and it would create a bigger financial disparity to overcome.

The specific timing was driven by our fiscal year and budget cycle. As previously mentioned, our budget year begins on July 1st, and therefore we are compelled to have a clear plan and budget for our fiscal year.

**Q: Why didn't we give the congregation and Ben more advanced warning?**

A: There are always more than just financial considerations that play into the timing for decisions and for implementing those decisions. We have been wrestling with the issues we have outlined and potential solutions for many months. Once we finally determined that the long term structure would not include an Executive Minister position, we talked to Ben. We indicated that he would be paid through the end of the December, and that we would do whatever we could to support his transition. For example, we have agreed to support his travel and interim minister training at Princeton University in the fall. Over the course of the following two weeks he determined the dates for the announcement, his last day in the office, and the date of the celebration.

Ben indicated that he would like to continue his ministry and wanted to start his search for a new position as soon as possible. He could not begin his search until the announcement was made. Ben also felt that he should allow Andrew and the senior staff ample time over the summer to make plans for our next church year.

**Q: What can we do to deal with the sense of loss with Ben's departure?**

A: Although it doesn't help the loss we feel today, we have always known that Ben was going to leave the Kenilworth Union Church. Time may help, but we must also help each other.

We have all experienced and will continue to experience significant and sometimes unexpected changes in our lives. We have learned that sharing our feelings and being with others is an important part of accepting, adjusting, and moving forward in a positive direction.

One of the greatest strengths of the Kenilworth Union Church family is our sense of community and our ability to come together to celebrate our common beliefs and the love of God. We are made up of many faiths and many families, some that bridge four generations. Let's draw on that sense of community and family to help each other as we work together to keep our faith and our legacy going forward. Your attendance and participation in church activities will help you and others make the transition.

**Q: How can we let Ben know how much he has meant to us?**

A: As a church community, we plan to celebrate Ben's ministry on September 20th. Our Fellowship committee will help plan the event and will need help. Please contact Mark Fuller or Jane Williamson if you would like to assist or even lead a specific effort.

Ben has said that he is very glad to have been part of a church that blesses so many within and without its walls. Let's make sure he knows that we too feel that we have been blessed by him and the time he has spent with us.

**Q: Ben was my contact with the church, who can I turn to for support?**

A: Our Senior Staff, including Andrew Chaney, Jane Lionberger, Sarah Garcia, Susan Bottum, and Lisa Bond, are all available to help and support you. Andrew has spent a great deal of time in his first six months getting out into the community to meet our congregation. He feels that there are many more members that he would like to meet and spend time with. The Welcoming/Fellowship committee has been helping to schedule dinners or small group gatherings for Andrew. If you would be willing to host or bring your group of friends together to get to know Andrew better, please contact Ellie Kilcran at the Church to schedule some time. This opportunity is also available if you would like to get to know Jane Lionberger or Sarah Garcia better too.

If you have additional questions, please contact any member of the Board of Trustees, or members of our Ministerial/Senior Staff.

Thank you,

John W. Hart

President, Board of Trustees