

Council Self-Assessment FSA Survey – December 2020

Purpose: to provide FSA Council members with the opportunity to reflect on the functioning of Council meetings during 2020 and to offer suggestions for improvement and change.

Findings

1) A total of eight (8) people completed the survey

2) Length of Council meetings

- a) Council meetings are currently two hours long
- b) All eight (8) respondents thought the current length of meetings was “about right”

Commentary/recommendation: Keep the current two-hour meeting length.

3) **In terms of the day and time of Council meetings**, seven (7) indicated the day and time of meetings works for them and one (1) person indicated it was not very good.

The following comments: were added:

- Having them fixed for the full year after the election of new members at the Annual Congregational meeting is very helpful. The 3rd Tuesday at 4 pm works as well for me.
- I hope that Katherine Wonfor does not find the meeting time too difficult. Especially when we start meeting in person again. Also, once we recruit a young person to Council it may be more difficult for them.

Commentary/Recommendation: Keep the current day and time of Council meetings but check as new members come on board to ensure it works for everyone.

4) **In terms of the kinds of issues brought forward to Council** to be discussed and addressed, five (5) thought they were very appropriate and three (3) thought they were appropriate. No one thought the issues were either somewhat or not appropriate.

The following comment was added:

- It might be useful to set aside a fixed time, say one hour, in which specific topics are covered, and if they are not finished, ask for either an extension or set

another date for ONLY the issues that are likely to require more extensive discussion.

Commentary/Recommendation: Continue to have issues addressed by Council as identified by members, and continue to prioritize decision-making and discussion items. Chair could delegate issues to a committee that in some cases are discussed by Council as a whole.

5) In response to the question of how issues are addressed by Council all eight (8) respondents indicated that all voices are allowed to be heard.

The following comments were added:

- With your leadership Steve, there is always a fair opportunity for all to speak who wish to. You are very democratic in this and it is much appreciated
- An excellent job on this even with some difficult topics.
- There are always people who speak more at Council meetings and others who are quieter. It might sometimes be appropriate to actually ask if those who have not weighed in with their comments to do so. However, sometimes they may just feel everything necessary has been said.
- In my experience, the Chair has been very accommodating to allow everyone to be heard. Indeed, at times it might be appropriate to be a little more focused on the issues at hand and suggest that either an additional item be added to a subsequent agenda OR that the issue be referred to a Committee to come forward with a recommendation at a subsequent meeting (regular or special depending on the urgency of the issue).
- But some people are quieter than others. Not sure whether everyone feels comfortable speaking up. Might be worth a closer look.

Commentary/Recommendations: Continue to make Council as safe place for members to speak up. Chair should pay attention to those who tend to be quiet.

6) In response to whether or not they thought Council was playing a meaningful role in the life of FSA, all eight (8) answered in the affirmative.

The following comments were added:

- It seems that even during COVID, most committees are kept informed of what is happening and this comes via chairs of Council to their committees.
- It is not evident that the issues and discussion from Council is always brought BACK to the Committees for either information or further discussion. Sometimes, it appears that only the Committee Chairs are making decisions and the Committees are not aware of the issues or have a voice in the decisions being made.

Commentary/Recommendations:

It is a positive reflection on Council that Council is seen as playing a meaningful role in the life of FSA. Is there a need for Committees to undertake a self-assessment as Council has done?

- 7) In terms of whether or not Council is spending its time on important and meaningful issues** seven (7) said yes and one (1) said Council was not spending enough time on important and meaningful issues.

The following comments were added:

- It would be great if there was a chair or co-chairs for Mission and Outreach. This is obviously a difficult role to fill. There must be important issues coming from this group which impacts the whole membership. The latest Tidings has reports from Barb Dalrymple and Linda Badke which include ELUCO and Grow a row all valuable news to read about.
- Usually, Council addresses pertinent issues as they arise, but don't solicit issues people in the congregation might be concerned about, such as homelessness in our city. This might be the question to address to the congregation at large.
- The addition of written reports has helped to allow more meaningful discussion of important issues at the Council meeting. As had been mentioned. unfortunately, the time of arrival of some of the reports a day or a few hours before the meeting removes the possibility of thoughtful consideration of what is in some of those reports prior to the Council meeting.

Commentary/Recommendations: There are gaps in the representation on Council, specifically Mission and Outreach, that need to be addressed. There is an opportunity for Council to solicit issues of significance to the congregation. Steps should be taken to ensure all Council reports are received far enough in advance for them to be read and considered. Might this be the Friday before Council meets?

8) Closing Comments

Four (4) respondents took the time to add additional comments. These are as follows:

- Council has been functioning very well under these changing circumstances.
- The Council has done really well with the Zoom sessions and it is certainly convenient to meet this way. I expect we will be happy to meet back in person again but Zoom has had some advantages too.
- Thank you for the open atmosphere that you've created in Council.
- We have used, and could use more often the concept of a "White Paper" with descriptions of the issues at hand, potential scenarios to be considered. These might be just for the Council OR might be pre-circulated in time for all Committees to consider and bring their thoughts, through their Chairs, to Council. One example of this would be the discussion by Finance of a 5-year financial plan with its different

projections. It might be useful to have Committees see this prior to it coming to Council for discussion... Just one thought.

Commentary/Recommendations: Overall, Council is seen as functioning well under difficult and different circumstances. The suggestion that discussion papers created be circulated among committees before coming to Council should be considered – perhaps on a case-by-case basis initially.

Closing Remarks

Overall, this self-assessment process, as an initial undertaking should be considered a success. Not all, but a majority of Council members took the time to give their input and make comments. Council is generally functioning well and suggestions to make it better have been put forward for consideration.

It is recommended that this process be undertaken yearly by Council and that in addition, Committees be asked to undertake a similar process so they can also reflect on the effectiveness of their meetings and work.

Respectfully submitted by

Steve

Steve Elson, Chair