

Council Minutes: November 2025

Plymouth Congregational Church – United Church of Christ

Tuesday, November 18, 2025

1. Call to Order – Rich Bireta, Moderator

Rich called the meeting to order at 6:31 pm.

Voting Members Present:

Rich Bireta – Moderator

Jenny O’Brien – Moderator Elect

Sonia Jordan – Immediate Past Moderator

Stephen Carttar – Treasurer

Doug Eason – At Large Member

Norine Spears – At Large Member

Annamarie Hill – At Large Member

Jeanne Fridell – At Large Member

Jeff Eriksen – At Large Member

Voting Members Not Present:

David Treviño – At Large Member

Ex Officio Members Present:

Caroline Lawson Dean – Associate Pastor

Ex Officio Members Not Present:

Valerie Miller-Coleman – Senior Pastor

Non-Voting Members Present:

Larissa Long – Clerk

Katy Anderson – Deputy Treasurer

Others Present:

Devon Kim – Chair, Personnel Committee

Kathy Bowen – Chair, Music & Fine Arts

Judy Burch – Member, PMC

James Dunn - Plymouth Member

2. Invocation – Rev. Caroline Lawson Dean, Associate Pastor

Caroline offered reflections on the indigenous community’s awareness of gratitude at Thanksgiving.

3. Icebreaker Question

Attendees shared what they were thankful for this year.

4. Consent Agenda

4.1 Approve Agenda

4.1.1 Approve Minutes from October meeting

4.1.2 Receive Financial Reports

Rich asked for Council’s consideration of the following changes to the Consent Agenda:

6.2 Doug Eason will give the PMC report

7.1.1 Defer Executive Session to discuss items related to financial compensation of personnel

7.1.2 Change to Personnel Health Care Stipend

### 7.3 Facility Update – Doug Eason

*Doug moved to adopt the Consent Agenda with the proposed changes outlined; Jeff seconded; motion carried unanimously.*

## 5. Church Treasurer’s Report – Stephen Carttar, Treasurer

### 5.1 Financial Update

Through October we are 83% of the way through the year, have received 83% of projected income and have spent 81% of projected annual expenses.

Stephen said financials are pretty much as forecast. Referencing the balance sheet, he said Interest on the Silver Lake CDARs of \$1,500,000 goes to the “Enter In” campaign; interest on the INTRUST CDARs of \$828,000 goes to the operating account.

Regarding projected year-end financials, a shortfall of \$8,000 is anticipated, which would be offset by transfers from reserves.

## 6. Old Business

### 6.1 Alternate Worship Site Committee Update – Jenny O’Brien

Jenny and Sue Denning met with Steve Maceli to see how Plymouth might use his building for some events, if it were available. Steve offered to provide the space at no charge. Jenny feels a dedicated liaison would be helpful to ensure event set up and take down are properly handled. James asked how often the space would be available. Jenny said they provided a list of possible events.

### 6.2 Project Management Committee – Doug Eason

Doug, reporting on behalf of Terry Schmidt, said the PMC, working with congregational feedback, has settled on a primary design. The PMC feels that cost estimates need to be provided with the design as the design is shared with the congregation. (Please see the PMC written update attached). Clark Huesmann, the architectural firm we have been working with, has been asked to move forward with specifications. The PMC will meet on December 8 to receive projected costs from contractors, engineers, acousticians and casework professionals and would like to meet with Council on December 16 to provide an update on the design and request approval to share plans with the congregation in January.

Doug further reported that the main design change in the current design eliminates ramps; utilizing technology which presents as stairs but lifts upward. Doug is researching the equipment and believes it will be aesthetically pleasing, allowing the choir to process down the center aisle and turn left and right at the chancel. To improve sight lines, the platform has been raised to 28”.

Doug also reported some good news regarding State Historic Tax credits for this project. He said Doni wrote a lengthy legal brief to the State Historic Preservation Office (SHIPO) and the Kansas Department of Revenue providing rationale for the organ casework and pipes to be recognized as an integral part of the building, thereby qualifying for tax credits. Recent conversations indicate her brief may result in approval. SHIPO has indicated support for this position, though the final determination rests with the Department of Revenue.

Rich reminded Council that other tasks will need to be completed before construction can begin. Approvals will be required from the Kansas Historic Preservation Office (SHIPO) and the City of Lawrence. Details of the acoustic work to be performed must be determined and details regarding the hearing-assistance technology to be installed must be finalized. The church also needs to be confident that we can afford this portion of the project.

Rich added that Kim Manz felt some musical activities wouldn't work on the previous iteration of the design and he asked if they work on the new plan? Judy said the architect provided detailed drawings that demonstrated all activities can be accommodated and she believes those issues have been resolved. Rich said he believes it is important our Music & Fine Arts community are supportive of the design and explicitly concur with the architects' opinion. She agreed with him.

Sonia asked why the PMC now wants to hold a Called Congregational Meeting in January instead of December, which they asked for at the October Council meeting. Doug said the committee realized they need to provide more precise cost estimates with the design and the PMC won't have that information until December 8. Judy added that a full-size cardboard mock-up of the suggested chancel expansion is being considered.

Norine asked if there is a plan to let the congregation know (1) where we're at today; (2) how we're moving forward and (3) the possibility of a called meeting in January. Caroline said this information could be included in "The Rock" but it would be needed soon.

Sonia offered her appreciation for the PMC's willingness to accept congregant and Council suggestions and for their work.

## 7. New Business

### 7.1 Budget Hearing w/Personnel Committee – Devon Kim

Devon referenced the 2026 Personnel Budget Report (attached) noting that requests are listed in order of priority and linked to Council goals. There were some questions regarding whether the proposed requests included the proposed COLA. Devon will research.

Devon was asked how merit pay increases are instigated and she said Valerie brings specific requests for increases to the Personnel Committee, who may then consult with any relevant Board that works closely with an employee. Judy asked what role job evaluations play. Caroline responded that annual reviews are tied to job descriptions, not salary discussions.

Jeff asked if there is a plan for the Pastor of Care & Welcome, as Michael Brecke is currently working on an interim basis. Valerie and Michael will discuss what happens in 2026, but regardless of who is serving in that role, the salary will remain the same.

Doug asked what items Council can change if 2026 income isn't adequate to fund all the budget requests. Devon said items 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 9 could be changed.

Norine asked if there is a policy for remote (virtual) working. Devon said there isn't a policy at this time, but the committee will consider whether it should be added to the employee handbook. The committee felt most of the responsibilities of the Director of Operations (Liz Smith) could be accomplished remotely. Valerie will work with Liz to determine what areas will require time on site.

Referencing childcare, Norine asked that consideration be given to increasing the hourly rate. Devon appreciated her concern and will take her request back to the committee.

#### 7.1.1 Increase in Healthcare Stipend – Devon Kim

A \$100/month increase in the health insurance stipend is included in the proposed personnel budget.

#### 7.1.2 Updated Personnel Policies and Employee Handbook – Devon Kim

Devon referenced her Memorandum to Council (attached) regarding revisions to the Personnel Policies and Employee Handbook and asked members to review the revised handbook. No action is needed this evening.

Stephen said he had some questions but will visit with her about them at another time.

#### 7.2 Endowment Distribution for 2026 – Stephen Carttar

Plymouth's endowment funds are held by United Church Funds and there will be no change in the methodology used to calculate the annual disbursement to the Church this year.

#### 7.3 Facilities Update – Doug Eason

P1 Construction has found a chiller with significant rust which can't be repaired and must be replaced. We're getting three bids, but the cost is estimated to be \$177,000. Funds are available to cover the expense but will only leave about \$10,000 for facilities going forward, which will be a challenge. There are other major items that will need funding and he intends to have a plan for Council next month.

Doug also reported that Doni has filed a federal tax return for credit on the solar panel installation, which should result in a refund of \$34,000 and complete the funding for that project. Stephen added that Doni has spent many hours working on historical tax credits and the filing of a federal tax return and expressed his appreciation for her efforts on behalf of Plymouth. The appreciation for Doni's work on behalf of the church was echoed by the entire Council.

#### 8. Open Forum

James asked if the hole in the alley had been repaired. It hasn't, but Jenny said a request to the city is all that's needed. Doug agreed to file a request with the city.

Doug asked Jenny what the 2026 Council goals were. Jenny said she didn't know that was her responsibility. Sonia said the Moderator is to work with the Moderator-Elect to set goals for the coming year. However, she said there isn't a procedure in place, so it's talked about but never achieved. Jenny said it would be a good item for the Council retreat, tentatively scheduled for February.

Doug asked about the website update. Rich said it would be on the December Council agenda.

Sonia said additional dinner items were needed for the upcoming Harvest Dinner and to let her know if you can help.

#### 9. Moderator's Report

Rich asked Council if they found the two recent budget hearings of value (three of six boards represented and Personnel). They agreed it was helpful in understanding the process.

10. Associate Pastor's Report – Rev. Caroline Lawson Dean, Associate Pastor

- Valerie returns December 1!
- The past three months have been challenging, exciting and a time of learning.
- The name change of "Thanksgiving" to "Harvest Home" has created questions. It's not judgmental but meant to be an inclusion of indigenous people. We're working on being better and compassionate. It wasn't intended to be political – rather a step forward in inclusion.

Stephen then expressed his appreciation to Caroline for "running the ship" for the past three months!

11. Important Future Dates:

Next Council Meeting December 16, 2025 @ 6:30 pm

December 16, 2025, Budget Hearing – Operations Staff, Facilities Committee

January 7, 2026, Budget Balancing Working Session w/Finance Committee

January 20, 2026, Regular January Meeting

Council Retreat (tentative) February, 2026

12. Adjournment and Lord's Prayer

Doug moved to adjourn the meeting; Norine seconded; motion carried unanimously.