

Council Minutes: December 2023  
Plymouth Congregational Church, United Church of Christ  
Tuesday, December 19, 2023

1. Call to Order – Scott Morgan, Moderator  
Scott called the meeting to order at 6:34 pm

Members present:

Scott Morgan – Moderator  
Sonia Jordan – Moderator Elect  
Devon Kim – Immediate Past Moderator  
Larissa Long – Clerk  
Doni Mooberry Slough – Treasurer  
Rich Bireta – Deputy Treasurer  
David Ambler – At Large Member  
Susan Osborn – At Large Member  
Doug Eason – At Large Member  
Valerie Miller-Coleman  
Debbie Schmidt – Stewardship  
Brandy Erzen – Mission & Service  
Kathy Bowen – Music & Fine Arts  
Dick Orchard – Endowment  
Susan McCarthy – History+

Members not present:

Caroline Lawson Dean  
Korey Kaul – Christian Education  
Sue Denning – Deacons  
Linda Thompson – Fellowship  
Kelly Stillings – Membership  
Annas Boyer – Personnel+

2. Invocation – Valerie Miller-Coleman  
Valerie read selected passages from Psalm 90 and 91 – words of hope, trust and God’s continuous care.
3. Consent Agenda
  - 3.1 Approve Agenda
  - 3.2 Approve minutes from November 28, 2023
  - 3.3 Receive Financial Reports

Doug moved to approve the consent agenda; Devon seconded; motion carried unanimously.

Scott then introduced and welcomed Stephen Carttar, a nominee for the office of Treasurer.

4. Church Treasurer’s Report – Doni Mooberry, Treasurer
  - 4.1 Financial Update and Fun Fact

Through November we are 92% of the way through the year, have received income to cover 93% of our expenses and spent 89% of our budgeted expenses.

Fun Facts – Some of Doni’s questions and answers:

- Why are US dollars green?
  - Changed to green ink during Civil War – didn’t fade or decompose.
- What is the origin of the dollar sign?
  - Spanish symbol for the Peso
- When did we start using credit cards?
  - In 1950 – The Diner Card was the first to be used in multiple businesses.
- What preceded “In God We Trust”?
  - “Mind Your Business” (Benjamin Franklin)

## 5. Old Business

5.1 Goals and Strategy Update Facilities, next steps for possible capital campaign. We are still waiting on an organ estimate. Possible steps include:

1. Approval of contract with Generis contingent on the congregation approving moving forward with a capital campaign at a called Congregational Meeting. This will require more information on costs including the organ.
2. The moderator can call a Congregation Meeting before the next Council meeting if sufficient costs become available. Council can then implement the congregation’s decision. – Valerie Miller-Coleman and Debbie Schmidt

Valerie gave the following update:

- Facilities manager position has been filled.
- Facilities Master Plan (FMP)
  - Phase One Activities in Progress or Bids Underway
    - Painting; Carpeting; Audio Visual Technology; Hearing Aid Support; Solar Panels
  - Phase Two – Historic Building (Sanctuary)
    - Capital campaign feasibility study completed.
    - Priorities established.
    - Clark Huesmann reviewed and updated cost estimates.
    - Organ committee researching organ restoration/replacement.

Kathy said the Organ Committee has received an estimate from Quimby Pipe Organ, Warrensburg, Missouri, and is seeking bids from companies in Nebraska and Ohio. Based on Quimby’s bid, the committee estimates it will cost about \$2 million to refurbish the organ. All bids will be for a refurbished organ.

Doug said with the \$2 million organ estimate, the total project estimate is \$4.4 million, but that we could anticipate approximately \$1.2 million in tax credits, so Plymouth would need to raise about \$3.2 million. Clark Huesmann’s estimate includes contingencies and escalation factors. Work in the balcony is not included in the estimate.

Representatives from Quimby Pipe Organ and Clark Huesmann plan to meet to insure there are no duplicate costs in their estimates.

Scott then asked where do we go from here? We can have the congregation determine if a capital campaign should be taken or we can wait a year and avoid undertaking a capital campaign in the summer or during next year's Annual Appeal. Whatever Council does, the decision will be made by the congregation.

Doug asked what the process would be if the campaign doesn't raise enough funds to complete the project. Scott responded that priorities might be reframed to determine what was achievable for the amount of money raised. Dave asked if debt funding was off the table. He said he wasn't suggesting building debt into the plan, but if the goal isn't met it could be put on the table, referencing the congregation's past approval of debt funding for South Church. Scott added that any debt funding would require an additional congregational vote.

Dave also expressed his concern about the congregation's response to a cost estimate of \$3.2 - \$3.6 million and its capability to fund a campaign of that size. He's very much in favor of the project but feels much more information about the cost is needed. He also worries about what happens if the congregation supports the campaign but fails to meet the goal.

Scott responded that he doesn't consider it a failure if the goal isn't reached - failure is in finding reasons not to move forward. If the congregation says no, we will learn what needs to be changed, which is valuable information.

Susan McCarthy requested a clarification of the time frame. Scott said the campaign would be organized and a communication plan developed in January. The public phase would begin after Easter and end at Pentecost (May). The three-year campaign commitments would begin in 2024. Sonia asked if Doug was confident in the availability of tax credits. Doug said he was.

Debbie asked what would make the congregation more comfortable about supporting a campaign. Brandy suggested explaining why changes are needed and describing how the project will help members participate more wholly in the church. Communications should include the emotional side as well as the numbers – multiple messages will be required.

Sonia said she's asked two questions – what are we doing and how much will it cost?

Scott said we need to reflect a unified vision for the church and this project does that by addressing accessibility, the organ and comfort (HVAC). He added that the organ repairs have been a concern for years, but we've always found a reason to avoid addressing the issue. It's never a perfect time and sometimes we have trouble believing we can do great things.

Doni believes there are some members who are very interested and would support a campaign. She suggests making some preliminary visits with them to gauge receptivity to a capital campaign. If they are supportive, they could be helpful at a Called Congregational Meeting.

If we move forward, Scott's preference is to hold a Called Congregational Meeting mid-week in early January.

Scott asked if there was general agreement to have preliminary visits with some members to obtain a sense of commitment prior to calling a Congregation Meeting. Valerie said there were two weeks following Christmas in which information could be provided to the congregation (from the pulpit and via various communication vehicles).

Devon suggested placing a Zoom video of the presentation Valerie gave Council this evening on the website and referencing it in member communications.

Doug said there are other possible funding sources that may be available.

Devon moved to direct the Moderator to conduct an inquiry to determine the interest level of key contributors. If the results are favorable, the Moderator will call a Congregation Meeting to determine whether to proceed with a capital campaign. Doug seconded; motion carried unanimously.

5.2 Policy Update and Review – Scott Morgan – Continue reviewing updates in Policy Book approved by Council in May. We are hoping for final action.

510.67 Operating Reserves.

- Rich asked that the words “maintain at a minimum” be added to line 32.

520.5.2-D – Pledge Confidentiality.

- Rich said he felt the name “Treasurer” should be included in the list of individuals who have access to donor information. Stephen agreed, as a high percentage of Plymouth's annual income is from member commitments.

Kathy moved to add the word “Treasurer” to the language; Dave seconded; motion carried with one no vote.

Scott said the language will be changed to:

- 2.) Treasurer.
- 3.) Senior Pastor and their designees, and
- 4.) Any person approved by Council.

540.0.7 – Safe Church Guidelines

- Scott asked that the language be accepted as written but Council will review with Korey and Caroline at a future meeting.

Kathy expressed her concerns regarding child safety and asked who's in charge of maintaining records and how information can be easily accessed. Scott said he will work with Jaron to systematize records and that the governance committee will be responsible for oversight of record maintenance.

620.1.2 - Planning and Coordinating Sessions

- Deleted as language is elsewhere in policy book.

Devon moved to pass the Policy Book as amended with an effective date of the start of the next Annual Meeting. The new Policy Book will supersede all previous policies. Debbie seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

- 5.3 Update on Annual Appeal and budget process – Debbie Schmidt, Chair of Stewardship and Doni Mooberry, Treasurer

Doni reported that 296 pledge cards totaling \$856,498 have been received. She felt the meeting with members in early December went well. Debbie said boards are reviewing budgets to determine if they have overbudgeted any expenses.

- 5.4 Information from History Committee regarding possible placement of informational sign – Susan McCarthy

Susan showed a mock-up off the proposed 10" x 12" plaque which features a photo of President Obama in a Head Start classroom. The text isn't complete, but she has received permission from Head Start personnel to hang the plaque. The current budget will cover the cost of an aluminum plaque.

Devon moved to approve placement of the plaque; Doug seconded; motion carried unanimously.

## 6. New Business

- 6.1 Nomination update – Sonia Jordan

Council does not approve the nominations for those positions elected by the congregation. The Bylaws require that these nominations be published 10 days prior to the annual Meeting. That meeting will be held February 4. Ten days before that is Thursday, January 25. Council (and not the congregation) approves the nominations for members of Council Committees. This will be on the January agenda.

Sonia reported that a slate of nominees for officers, council members and boards is about 98% complete. The committee is working through the list and expects to have a full slate by January.

- 6.2 Personnel Policy Changes – Devon Kim

Personnel Committee is considering a couple of changes to the personnel policy. Any changes are not yet finalized but will be by our meeting. Any proposed changes will be provided to Council for consideration.

Devon said a review of both Kara and Heather's positions determined they should be classified as exempt employees. No Council action is required for the job description changes.

1. Personnel Policy in Section VI, Benefits, Paragraph A. Retirement

Devon said the proposed change will provide a higher rate of contribution for pensions for full-time staff working with Plymouth more than 10 years and, if approved would be retroactive to July 1. Kim would qualify for the contribution if approved.

Doug moved to accept the proposed language, retroactive to July 1. Sonia seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

2. Personnel Policy in Section VII, Leave, Paragraphs A and B

Devon said the proposed language replaces vacation and sick leave with Paid Time Off (PTO). PTO is much easier to administer and provides employees with greater flexibility. A chart provides details on the amount of PTO provided and available for carryover based on length of service.

Devon moved to accept the proposed language; Doug seconded; motion carried unanimously.

7. Moderator's Report – Scott Morgan  
Scott had nothing additional to report.

8. Associate Pastor's Report – Caroline Lawson Dean  
Caroline was unable to attend the meeting.

9. Pastor's Report – Valerie Miller-Coleman

- The Longest Night Service was well attended. Blue ribbons in memory of someone were tied on the Christmas Tree in the sanctuary.
- Everything is leading to Christmas – four services on Sunday, December 24
- Valerie will be on a family trip to Mexico in January
- Attendance – 495 and 535 for the Major Choral Work

10. Open Forum

Doug will attend a Lawrence Historic Resource Committee meeting in December and request approval for placement of solar panels on South Church.

Susan Osborn suggested that an abbreviated digest of Council proceedings be sent to board chairs.

11. Adjournment and Lord's Prayer

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

Meeting adjourned at 8:35.

12. Important Future Dates:

Next Council Meeting: January 23, 2024 @ 6:30 pm – This meeting will be in person.

Tentative 2024 Council Dates (fourth Tuesday, except third in December) – February 27, 2024