

Council Minutes, June 2025
Plymouth Congregational Church – United Church of Christ
Tuesday, June 24, 2025

1. Call to Order – Rich Bireta, Moderator
Rich called the meeting to order at 6:32 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
David Treviño – At Large Member
Norine Spears – At Large Member
Jeanne Fridell – At Large Member

Voting Members Not Present:

Christi Houston – At Large Member
Jeff Eriksen – At Large Member

Ex Officio Members Present:

Valerie Miller-Coleman – Senior Pastor

Ex Officio Members Not Present:

Caroline Lawson Dean – Associate Pastor

Non-Voting Members Present:

Larissa Long – Clerk
Katy Anderson – Deputy Treasurer

Others Present:

Terry Schmidt – Chair, Project Management Committee
Jackie Lord – Chair, Christian Education
Nancy Bregman – Chair, Fellowship
Marty Reeves – Chair, Membership
Kathy Bowen – Chair, Music & Fine Arts
Robin Wood, Member, Service & Justice
James Dunn, Plymouth member

2. Invocation – Valerie Miller-Coleman, Senior Pastor
Valerie led attendees in prayer.

3. Consent Agenda

- 3.1. Approve Agenda
- 3.2. Approve Minutes from May Council Meeting
- 3.3. Receive Financial Reports

Doug moved to accept the Consent Agenda; Norine seconded; motion approved unanimously.

4. Church Treasurer's Report – Stephen Carttar, Treasurer

- 4.1. Financial Update

Through May we are 41.7% of the way through the year; have received 48.8% of projected annual income and have spent 41.2% of projected annual expenses.

Stephen added that cash flow is good and that each member of the Finance Committee has voluntarily agreed to personally review assigned financial reports prior to each meeting.

Doug moved to accept the Treasurer's report; Norine seconded; motion approved unanimously.

5. Old Business

5.1. Alternate Worship Site Committee. See attached Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

Rich provided an overview of the proposed MOU, adding that board comments provided earlier are included in the document.

Valerie said staff have been meeting to discuss the logistics of being out of the sanctuary and thinking through a few versions of what might work. Jenny will chair the committee and is meeting with staff next week.

Jenny said this is an opportunity to remember that the Church is us – it isn't the building or the sanctuary and finding ways to reinforce that will ease the transition period. Board representatives are on the committee, except for Fellowship, who will be named at a later date.

Doug moved to adopt the Memorandum of Understanding establishing an Alternate Worship Site Committee; Norine seconded.

Doug asked if a representative from Facilities should be on the committee. Valerie said it was considered but currently feels the committee will be more focused on what happens in the building.

Stephen asked if the Sunday service was the committee's primary focus and if so, does the new electronic organ apply to their work. Valerie responded yes to both questions. She said the primary issue is that all members won't fit in the Mayflower Room, so is an additional service needed? How will coffee hour be accommodated? How do we best utilize the space we have?

Sonia said Colton's name should be added as a committee member and that language regarding the committee's timeframe might need more clarification. David and Jenny agreed regarding the timeline as issues/concerns may arise until construction is completed and we're back in the sanctuary.

There being no further discussion, the motion was approved unanimously.

6. New Business

6.1. Project Management Committee (PMC) Report – Review and Approval of Schematic Design – Terry Schmidt

Terry said he was asking Council to consider approving the proposed design schematic as a decision this evening will allow the committee to move forward in the design process.

Rich moved that Council accept the proposed schematic design for the sanctuary; Sonia seconded.

Rich said he want everyone to understand what we're being asked to approve. The schematic is the "guardrail" or big picture. Many details are yet to be worked out, but these are the major elements of the proposed schematic design:

- (1) The choir will be in the choir loft; sides will be splayed outwards to increase both loft capacity and improve acoustics. Accessibility will be improved through a chairlift, hidden behind a pocket door.
- (2) The chancel will be a single level design approximately 1'9" above the height of the sanctuary floor.
- (3) Access to the chancel will be from steps in front and ramps on either side of the chancel. Both northwest and southwest doors remain operational providing access to the back hallway. Both stairs to the choir loft remain accessible.

He said approval is not authorization to begin construction but is acceptance of the schematic so architects can work on the next steps.

Terry believes most members support the proposed schematic but also knows there are members who are not in favor of change. It isn't a perfect plan but he does feel a majority are supportive.

Doug said that once the schematic is approved and some other details are worked out, we will be able to go back to the historical society to obtain tax credits.

Sonia expressed her gratitude for the PMC's work and knows they have been responsive to member feedback.

David asked if something could be incorporated at the chancel's front edge to prevent falls. Terry said this has been discussed by the PMC.

Norine asked if the board chairs knew if their members (1) were aware that Council was voting on this phase of the project tonight and (2) had comments regarding the proposed schematic.

- Robin said Service & Justice members were aware of the vote possibility.
- Kathy said M&A members were aware of the vote and their concerns are listed in the MOU.
- Nancy said she didn't know if Fellowship members were aware of the vote and that she hadn't heard anything either good or bad.
- Marty said Membership members were aware and nothing came up.
- Valerie, on behalf of Deacons said they would adapt to whatever happens.

There being no further discussion, a roll call vote was taken: Rich Bireta – yes; Jenny O'Brien – yes; Sonia Jordan – yes; Stephen Carttar – yes; Doug Eason – yes; David Treviño – yes; Norine Spears – yes; Jeanne Fridell – yes. Motion carried unanimously.

6.2. Planning and Coordinating Session with Board Chairs

6.2.1.1. Deacons – Kathy Elkin

Valerie spoke on behalf of Kathy, who was unable to attend the meeting. The Deacons have safety issue concerns when serving communion in the balcony. Due to the width of the main aisle running north and south, some people feel unsafe as they pass others when going to receive communion and returning to their seats. Deacons voted unanimously at their last meeting to recommend to Council that the first pew in each of the rear banks of the balcony be removed. This would widen the main aisle about 2 feet and thus be safer for movement in the balcony. The pews don't appear to be fastened to the floor, so they can easily be removed.

Jenny moved to adopt the Board of Deacons recommendation; David seconded.

Doug asked if the issue is because people sit in the pews, as he hasn't observed this problem. If the pews are removed, how far is it to step up to the next pew? Will it be too steep? Robin said "Reserved" signs are placed on the pews, so they aren't occupied but we notice that people are uncomfortable with the travel pattern. Members have also made comments to Deacons about feeling safe when accessing communion in the balcony. Robin agreed that removing the pews might create a difficult step up to the next pew.

Rich asked Doug if the Facilities Committee would meet with Deacons to review the situation and bring back a recommendation for consideration.

Doug moved to amend the current motion to “Approve a meeting between Deacons and Facilities to review the situation and bring back their findings to Council for consideration”; David seconded.

David is the Council liaison with Deacons. Sonia and Norine suggested that he let Kathy know Council requested that Facilities work with Deacons on this to avoid confusion.

Motion as amended unanimously approved.

6.3. Governance Committee Report – Sonia Jordan
Proposed policy amendment – Committee Minutes
Policy Book Amendment Process (FYI)

Sonia reviewed the proposed policy amendment for committee structure which was included in the Council packet.

Sonia moved to approve the proposed amendment; Jenny seconded.

Stephen questioned item 6.) under A. Proposed Language, which states the **Senior Pastor** will receive Committee documents. It was agreed that it should say the **Moderator** will receive these documents and will be corrected.

With that correction, motion carried unanimously.

Sonia then gave a brief overview of the proposed Policy Book Process, which the Governance Committee Chair, Barb Holland, drafted for consideration by the committee. It is an outline of the process that would be followed to amend the policy book. The Governance Committee will make sure changes are appropriate, not duplicated and updated on the website.

7. Open Forum

James Dunn said he had used the Mayflower Room in the past for both his wedding and a reception following his wife’s funeral service and always felt it was an open and welcoming space. He is a landlord and recently attended a “Lawrence Tenants” meeting in the room and was surprised when landlords were asked to leave. Valerie said various organizations, including Lawrence Tenants, rent the room and we don’t know who they welcome to attend their meetings. Rich said he would be in touch with James after he reviews the current policy regarding building usage.

Board Chair Updates

- Fellowship - Nancy said the Pride event was a great success. Board members are quite helpful and work hard on all activities. She needs help preparing the MAP (Ministry Action Plan). Sonia said James would help her and Valerie offered her assistance as well.

Jenny reminded board chairs to think of facility constraints as they build budgets.

- Music & Fine Arts – Kathy said they are currently working on providing art and craft opportunities.
- Christian Education - Jackie said Vacation Bible School was a great success and will be held at First Baptist Church next year. The board is currently working on its MAP.
- Membership – Marty said they are working with Michael to increase focus on the Caring Ministry.

Doug asked about Council Goals. Rich said the board would discuss in August and Sonia suggested looking at staff goals and working from there.

Doug then asked Nancy about issues with the kitchen. She said the ovens are inconsistent, sometimes resulting in burned cookies. Jackie said the left oven isn't consistent and wondered if the temperature control wasn't working. Doug told Nancy to let him know if any mechanical issues surface.

8. Moderator's Report – Rich Bireta

Rich expressed his appreciation to Sonia for chairing the May Council Meeting, while he attended kindergarten graduations for two grandchildren.

He asked members to refer to the agenda attachment for a planned schedule of budget hearings during Council meetings this fall to prepare for crafting the 2026 operating budget. Two highlights – (1) board chairs are invited to present their boards' budget requests at the October meeting (discuss new initiatives) and (2) Facilities Committee and staff budgets have been added to the December Council meeting. On January 7 Finance and Council will meet to prepare the budget for the January 11 congregation meeting.

He also reminded members there is no Council meeting in July.

9. Pastor's Report – Valerie Miller Coleman, Senior Pastor

- The Pride event was a joyful experience! She walked with a nicely sized group of Plymouth members, and they were first in the Parade lineup! Plymouth was Integrated into the leadership and mechanics of the event – a very proud moment, indeed.
- She believes being out of the sanctuary during construction is an opportunity to create joy and creativity.
- Caroline returns on August 1. Michael is doing a great job and there was standing room only for his series on Dietrich Bonhoeffer.
- Many blessings moving forward.

Doug asked about the website update timeline. Valerie said Russ is receiving feedback now and her deadline is the end of summer.

10. Adjournment and Lord's Prayer

Doug moved to adjourn; Norine seconded; motion approved unanimously.

11. Important Future Dates

Next Council Meeting: August 26, 2025 at 6:30 pm.

September 23, 2025; October 28, 2025; November 18, 2025; December 16, 2025; January 7, 2026 (tentative); January 20, 2026