

Council Minutes, September 2025
Plymouth Congregational Church – United Church of Christ

Tuesday, September 23, 2025

1. Call to Order – Rich Bireta, Moderator
Rich called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm.

Voting Members Present:

Rich Bireta – Moderator
Jenny O’Brien – Moderator Elect
Stephen Carttar – Treasurer
Doug Eason – At Large Member
David Treviño – At Large Member
Jeanne Fridell – At Large Member
Jeff Eriksen – At Large Member

Voting Members Not Present:

Norine Spears – 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:

Terry Schmidt – Chair, Project Management Committee
John Lord – Plymouth member

2. Invocation – Rev. Caroline Lawson Dean, Associate Pastor
Caroline read scripture from Isaiah 43, then led attendees in prayer.
3. Icebreaker
Attendees shared how they make difficult decisions.
4. Consent Agenda
 - 4.1 Approve Agenda
 - 4.2 Approve Minutes from August Council Meeting
 - 4.3 Receive Financial Reports

Rich said he was adding an Executive Session (11.5) to the agenda.

Rich moved to approve the amended agenda; Doug seconded; motion unanimously approved.

5. Church Treasurer’s Report – Stephen Carttar, Treasurer
 - 5.1 Financial Update

Stephen said we are 67% of the way through the year; have received 69% of projected annual income and have spent 63% of projected annual expenses. He added that the Finance Committee will work on a year-end projection as it will impact next year's budget.

6. Old Business

6.1 Alternate Worship Site Committee Report – Jenny O'Brien

Jenny said the committee needs to communicate more comprehensively with church members, Boards and committees regarding the factors being discussed, the decisions that have been made and the decisions yet to be made. Toward that end a general information and listening session will take place on October 5 between services. The committee is also setting up a worksheet for boards to use. It will include plans currently in place and provide for board input, such as anticipated expenses for board activities during construction.

She said the plan is to begin construction immediately after Easter and construction is expected to take eight months. Worship services will be held at the same times Sunday morning in the Mayflower Room, with overflow space in the Heritage Room. Coffee hour and other activities will take place in the Narthex.

Jeanne asked if the proposed timeline for construction had been communicated to the congregation. Caroline said if Jenny will send information regarding the committee's work to her tomorrow, it will be included in the next issue of "The Rock".

6.2 Alley repair/repaving – Jenny O'Brien

Jenny visited with the engineer in charge of alley repair and learned that repaving was stopped when brick was found. A policy is now in place to address this situation and work on the alley is slated for 2027, as the sanctuary construction would preclude such work in 2026.

6.3 Project Management Committee Update – Rich Bireta

Rich reported that the Sanctuary and Organ Project Survey was a great success, with 145 responses, and written comments on approximately one-half of them. Stephen Carttar and Steve Bradt calculated the survey's statistical outcomes. A summary report was included in Plymouth's Monday/Friday emails. The summary report is also attached to the Council agenda.

Terry said the survey responses were above the PMC's expectations. The PMC has met once since the survey was completed and continues to work with the architects and Mar Lan.

6.4 Youth Service Trip Financial Report – Doug Eason

Doug said they raised \$1,000 more than was needed. He felt good about the trip and when asked where the 2026 trip might be, said they were considering Bentonville, Arkansas.

7. New Business

7.1 2026 Draft Budget & Review of Budget Process – Rich Bireta

Rich thanked Melissa and the Finance Committee for their work on an "aspirational" draft budget, which is the first step in the budget process. The draft budget reflects board, committee and staff requests for

2026 funding and sets the goal for the Annual Appeal, which kicks off with a brunch between services on October 12 and ends on November 23 with the annual Harvest Home dinner. In December, follow-up calls will be made to members who haven't yet responded.

- The aspirational budget will be presented to the congregation between services on December 14.
- The 2025 books close December 31.
- Council and the Finance Committee will meet at 6:30 on January 7 to develop a balanced budget for the congregation's review and feedback on January 11.
- Council will meet on January 20 and Council can adjust the budget based on feedback from the congregation at the January 11 meeting.
- The budget will be adopted at the congregation's annual meeting on February 1, 2026.

Stephen asked members to review the draft budget so they can respond to board representatives at the October Council meeting.

Doug asked for narrative information from boards regarding budget submissions prior to the October Council meeting. Rich will check with Melissa to see if the MAPS included narrative. Doug then requested time to discuss budgeting for the operating reserve. Rich will meet with him regarding this request. Doug also asked about the COLA increase. Katy said it is 2.9%.

As an academic exercise to prepare members for making decisions about the 2026 budget, Rich asked Council to look at the 2025 budget and determine where \$26,000 could be cut. Members are not expected to report their thoughts. The purpose of this exercise is to give Council members an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the format and organization of our budget and to prepare for the budget hearings.

Jenny said she didn't see a line item for capital improvement. Doug said capital expenditures are usually funded by Endowment's annual transfer to Plymouth, so it's an activity fund. Jeannie asked what PLP was. Caroline said it was the Plymouth Language Program but is now the Somos Plymouth Language Program.

David said he was curious about the impact of the Enter In campaign on the 2026 Annual Appeal, which could impact next year's budget.

7.2 Approval Process for "Enter In" Organ and Sanctuary Project – Rich Bireta

Rich said he has been asked several times if the congregation will have an opportunity to vote on the sanctuary design. His response has been "at this time, no". Council has asked the PMC to work with the architects and "develop plan or plans for Council's approval of the design, funding and construction of the improvements."

For the congregation to vote on the final design, two items are required: a called congregational meeting and a completed design. Rich summarized our bylaws concerning the three options for initiating a called meeting. A Called Congregational Meeting of Plymouth will be held by one of the

following methods: (1) On call of the Moderator; (2) On call of Council; or (3) On delivery to the Moderator or Clerk of a written petition signed by at least 5% of Plymouth membership reported at the previous Annual Meeting. Such a petition shall state the purpose of the called meeting, including any proposed language to be adopted.

Terry said the design encompasses the entire project and includes the chancel floor, organ, choir loft and esthetic changes. The PMC's emphasis is to maintain the historical concept of the sanctuary, adding that timing is critical as costs will increase if construction is delayed. Doug added that tax credits could also be impacted.

8. Open Forum

Doug asked about the canceled picnic and associated equipment and supplies. Jeanne said the Fellowship Committee wants to donate the hamburger to LINK. Caroline said Matt will move the equipment and supplies to the basement.

9. Moderator's Report – Rich Bireta

9.1 Main topics for remaining Council meetings added below to item 11.

Rich said he had nothing additional to report.

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

- Caroline expressed her appreciation for Rich and Terry's leadership and for Jeanne's wisdom.
- Plymouth Academy started in mid-September. Three-quarters of one Covenant group are new members, and they are doing quite well!
- She's providing a lot of staff support and doing more high-level work in Valerie's absence.
- She sees and appreciates the wisdom of lay leaders. Plymouth members love the church and come with varying ideas, opinions and passions. She sees love and respect and is grateful for everyone's heart.
- She is grateful for Michael's assistance, too!

11. Important Future Dates:

Next Council Meeting: October 28, 2025 @ 6:30 pm

October 28, 2025 - Budget Hearing – All Boards

November 18, 2025 - Budget Hearing – Personnel

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

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

January 20, 2026 - Regular January Meeting

February 2026 - Council Retreat (tentative)

11.1 – Executive session

At 7:40 pm Rich moved to enter executive session; Doug seconded; motion unanimously approved.

Executive session ended at 7:56 pm.

12. Adjournment and Lord's Prayer

Doug moved to adjourn the meeting; Jeff seconded. Motion unanimously approved.

Meeting adjourned at 8:00 pm.