

Council Minutes, September 2024
Plymouth Congregational Church – United Church of Christ
Tuesday, September 24, 2024

1. Call to Order – Sonia Jordan, Moderator
Sonia called the meeting to order at 6:32 pm.

Voting Members Present:

Sonia Jordan – Moderator
Rich Bireta – Moderator Elect
Scott Morgan – Immediate-Past Moderator
Stephen Carttar – Treasurer
Doug Eason – At Large Member
David Treviño – At Large Member
Christi Houston – At Large Member
Debbie Schmidt – At Large Member
Jeff Eriksen – At Large Member

Voting Members Not Present:

Norine Spears – At Large Member

Ex Officio Members Present:

Valerie Miller-Coleman – Senior Pastor
Caroline Lawson Dean – Associate Pastor

Non-Voting Members Present:

Mark Reedy – Deputy Treasurer

Non-Voting Members Not Present:

Larissa Long, Clerk

Others Present:

Devon Kim – Personnel Committee Chair
Kim Manz – Minister of Music and Fine Arts
Terry Schmidt – Sanctuary and Organ Project Management Committee Chair

2. Invocation – Valerie Miller-Coleman
3. Consent Agenda
 - 3.1 Approve Agenda.
 - 3.2 Approve Minutes from August 27, 2024 Council Meeting.
 - 3.3 Receive Financial Reports.

**Scott Morgan motioned to approve the consent agenda. Debbie Schmidt seconded.
Motion carried unanimously.**

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

4.1 Financial Update

The financial performance of Plymouth Church compared to budget for the eight months ended August 31, 2024 was generally in line with expectations. The dashboard set of reports provide an overview of activity.

- The vitals as of August 31, 2024 follow:
 - 66.67% of the year has passed; 8 of 12 months.
 - 67.09% of revenue has been received and
 - 63.94% of expenses have been paid.
 - In summary, the August financial performance was slightly favorable with Year-to-Date Net Revenue (Income) of \$21,161.
- 2025 Budget:
 - The Finance Committee discussed at length the 2025 Budget and made adjustments and modifications to revenue projections. The expenses were left unchanged as requested by the respective Boards and Committees. The result was a \$116,873 increase in 2025 Budget over 2024 requiring a \$113,953 (13.1%) increase in Pledge to balance.
 - The Committee forwarded the 2025 Budget to Council for consideration.

Doug Eason: QR codes in the bulletin to maximize giving/commitment? Valerie Miller-Coleman: The commitment cards have a QR code included on them, but we are still in an “in-between” state with the technology to maximize this.

5. Old Business

5.1 Project Management Committee Update – Terry Schmidt, Director of Sanctuary and Organ Project Management Committee

Kim Manz was present to review the Schoenstein Company organ proposal. The Organ Committee and the PMC were very impressed with them. There are some slight variations from the current organ to the organ they are proposing. There are a few pieces of the current organ they can reuse or refurbish, including the blower.

Main challenge is that the schedule has been delayed by 7 months to January 2028, scheduled to finish in March 2028. Price is just under \$2 million (\$1,986,000). There is an escalation clause included. Doni Mooberry Slough believes there is likelihood to get sales tax exemption, because the organ is a part of the exempt status.

There are 60 days in which to sign the contract. Kim will be contacted if another church is interested, giving Plymouth first right, but at this time Plymouth is not guaranteed a spot in their schedule.

There was a robust question and answer session for Kim Manz regarding the bid.

Scott Morgan: Is the schedule what is challenging? Kim Manz: Yes. Otherwise the Organ Committee is happy with it, but it is much longer than many people had anticipated.

Jeff Eriksen: Is the Organ Committee making an official recommendation for Schoenstein? Kim Manz: Not at this time. Kim is reaching out to other companies to check their schedule for due diligence. So far, the one that has gotten in touch has the same schedule as Schoenstein.

David Treviño: What is the blower? Kim: It's the big machine in the back that produces the air for the pipes.

David Treviño: They cannot provide an exact amount on the escalation clause, but can they provide an estimate? Kim Manz: They don't have an estimate. The language says, "they are forced to include" the escalation clause. What does that mean? When did it start? Kim Manz: It's the same thing we are hearing from the architect regarding economic costs. They will split the amount with us, and that language is included. Stephen Carttar pulled some numbers together for a quick estimate of what the escalation clause could potentially cost us. He guessed about \$36,000 additional cost (representing the 50% Plymouth is responsible for). Doni Moobery Slough will review and then they will ask Schoenstein to verify if the interpretation is correct or close. Stephen Carttar thinks investment returns from money collected on the project will hopefully be able to cover some of the escalation costs should they occur.

Kim Manz: The current organ can be listed on a selling site, but this is not a guarantee that someone will buy it.

David Treviño: Do they offer any form of protection or insurance that can be obtained?

Kim Manz: There is a 10-year warranty, but he is not sure on whether there is a service plan or an extended warranty or not.

Terry Schmidt then transitioned to provide an update from the Project Management Committee.

Clark-Huesemann provided two starting timelines for consideration: Fall 2024 or Summer 2025. The PMC is inclined to move ahead as quickly as possible due to inflationary cost considerations, even though it would be done far ahead of the proposed organ schedule.

The PMC believes that when the Organ Committee comes with a recommendation, there should be a lot of confidence in the recommendation.

The PMC is meeting again on 9/30/2024 to hopefully vote or make progress on: the Schoenstein bid, the Clark-Huesemann contract, and follow-up on a possible historical tax credit consultant.

There will be an informational meeting with Clark-Huesemann on Sunday, October 20th, 2024 in-between services. The PMC is going to try to make contact and invite all new members to attend.

Future work includes development of a budget for Council approval.

Scott Morgan: Is there a contingency if something happens to Schoenstein? Kim Manz: We would need to find another organ, because it would be an open space in the sanctuary.

Debbie Schmidt: What happens if the PMC votes on a recommendation? Sonia Jordan: There is a possibility of a special October Council meeting via Zoom to vote on recommendations that come from the Organ Committee and the PMC. As with all Council meetings, the meeting will be open to all Plymouth members.

David Treviño: Is this a letter of intent? Or is the contract? Kim Manz: This is a bid, not a contract. They will send a contract.

Caroline Lawson Dean: What are instrument options for the time between construction and removal of the old organ and when the new one can be installed? Kim Manz: He thinks it's a bad idea to not have an organ or an instrument for a long period of time. Renting an organ is an option, but it will be an additional cost.

5.2 Director of Faith Formation Search Update – Devon Kim, Personnel Chair

5.2.1 Update to Kara Horrix's Job Description

Devon Kim: We signed the CYMT contract at the end of July to help with the search for a new Director of Faith Formation. Held a stakeholder meeting at the end of July to gather feedback. The position was listed on August 11th. They interviewed 2 people who were already in the CYMT pipeline. On 9/3/2024, they received 3 additional candidate portfolios and they were really excited about 1 of them. They brought Colton Pasquale in for an in-person interview and he attended church on Sunday. Colton has been made an offer and he has accepted! His start date is 10/21/2024.

Rich Bireta: Did he express any long-term career goals? How long can Plymouth expect him to stay? Devon Kim: She thinks he is looking for a place to learn how to be on leadership in a church.

Valerie Miller-Coleman: He's currently serving in the community from where he grew up. He has worked with kids for many years. He seems like he sticks around at places. He has excellent references from our network.

Doug Eason moved to change Kara Horrix's job description, including change from salaried to hourly effective as of 9/3/2024. Jeff Eriksen seconded.

Discussion of the motion.

Doug Eason: When will Kara's employment end? Caroline Lawson Dean: 10/18/2024.

Stephen Carttar: Need to approve a new job description for Colton? Devon Kim: It will be the same job description, just full-time. Scott Morgan: It's a valid question. Council does have to approve the budget for the job description. Council also approves material changes to the job description. Changing to full-time does not materially change what the job does, just how many hours are devoted to it.

Motion passed unanimously.

5.3 Disaster Response Planning Update – David Treviño, Director of Security

David Treviño does not have a motion for consideration at this time. He has been reviewing the DHS feedback, and thus far, has a conception of a motion, but it is not fully fleshed out. He should have a draft available for the next council review.

Jeff Eriksen: There seemed to be some things that can be knocked out easily? Valerie Miller-Coleman: Yes, that is why the fully fleshed out plan will be important to approve and then Matt can integrate it into his work. Still interested in the grant money available.

6. New Business

6.1 Presentation of Sabbatical Plan – Devon Kim, Personnel Chair

Valerie Miller-Coleman and Caroline Lawson Dean each have a sabbatical as part of their call agreements (identified for 6 years out and both started in 2019). Caroline Lawson Dean is currently scheduled for May - July 2025. Then Valerie Miller-Coleman will be scheduled for September – November 2025. Personnel has budgeted for pulpit supplies (aka, preachers).

Scott Morgan: As an FYI, there is not a personnel policy regarding Sabbaticals, because they are part of the Call Agreements, which supersede personnel policy.

Stephen Carttar: Is it revenue neutral? Devon Kim: Valerie Miller-Coleman will cover Caroline Lawson Dean, but when Valerie is gone, Personnel has budgeted for pulpit supply, because Valerie preaches more than Caroline in a month. Valerie Miller-Coleman: Heather Coates' position does not require preaching. She is the go-to supply preacher. She is compensated for an honorarium, which is \$150, currently.

6.2 Executive Session to Discuss Personnel Budget – Devon Kim, Personnel Chair

Doug Eason moved to go into executive session for 30 minutes to discuss personnel budget matters and protect the privacy of Plymouth staff to include Plymouth Council Members with Devon Kim, Valerie Miller-Coleman, and Caroline Lawson Dean invited to attend; Council will return to open session at 8:22 pm.

Rich Bireta seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Council returned to open session at 8:24 pm.

6.3 Preliminary Discussion of Budget & Annual Appeal Target Goal – Stephen Carttar, Treasurer and Chair of Finance Committee

Sonia Jordan provided context for the discussion and what to expect over the fall-winter for ultimately getting a budget that will go to the congregation for approval. Stephen Carttar: The boards and committees send in their proposals and the work of council and Finance Committee is to just understand the requests. The Finance Committee then looked at the revenue that would be required to meet the requests and the revenue is short \$113,953. All of personnel is included as one line.

Discussion of the potential budget expenses and revenue, including some of the larger budget requests. These are the identified needs of the boards and committees. It's optimistic and it's ambitious, but it's what our boards and committees believe they need. There was a balance in the discussion between the questions on specific budget items, and trusting the board and committee recommendations and moving forward with approving the target goal.

The request is approval of the target goal of \$981,771 for the Annual Appeal and Fundraising Committee.

Doug Eason moves to approve initial draft budget in order for the Annual Appeal and Fundraising Committee to move forward with a target Annual Appeal goal. Rich Bireta seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

6.4. Update from Youth Service Trip – Caroline Lawson Dean & Doug Eason, Youth Service Trip Volunteer

Doug Eason reviewed the three ways for a youth member to attend: (1) Kids pay to attend (2) Donor scholarships, and (3) Fundraising to cover the gap.

Cost ended at a per participant cost that was \$31 under budget.

Caroline Lawson Dean: From here forward, the youth service trip budget will first go to the Finance Committee and then to Council.

7. Moderator's Report – Sonia Jordan

The week before council can be tiring, because there are a lot of moving pieces with the packet, agenda, etc. Ultimately that is a good thing, because it reflects that we are a complex church that is doing a lot and complex organisms are alive and growing. If there weren't a lot of complex and moving pieces, then we wouldn't be growing and thriving as a church.

8. Associate Pastor's Report – Caroline Lawson Dean

Completed confirmation retreat with 24 kids. Women's retreat is coming up. We hired Colton—yay!

9. Pastor's Report – Valerie Miller-Coleman

Attendance at church has been strong! The Gathering of Grace has near 60 on a regular basis, including attendance from some people from GoodLife, which have added a true element of joy to the service.

10. Board Chair Comments - None

11. Open Forum - None

Adjournment and Lord's Prayer

Scott Morgan moved to adjourn. Doug Eason seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

12. Important Future Dates

Next Council Meeting: October 22, 2024 at 6:30 pm