

Council Minutes, August 2025
Plymouth Congregational Church – United Church of Christ
Tuesday, August 26, 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

David Treviño – At Large Member

Norine Spears – At Large Member

Jeanne Fridell – At Large Member

Jeff Eriksen – At Large Member

Ex Officio Members Present:

Valerie Miller-Coleman – Senior Pastor

Caroline Lawson Dean – Associate Pastor

Non-Voting Members Present:

Larissa Long – Clerk

Katy Anderson – Deputy Treasurer

Others Present:

Terry Schmidt – Chair, Project Management Committee

Kathy Bowen – Chair, Music & Fine Arts

James Dunn - Plymouth member

2. Icebreaker

Attendees read their favorite Bible verse or shared how committee work at Plymouth was a part of their faith practice.

3. Invocation – Valerie Miller Coleman, Senior Pastor

Valerie led attendees in prayer.

4. Consent Agenda

4.1 Approve Agenda

4.2 Approve Minutes from June Council Meeting

4.3 Receive Financial Reports

Doug moved to approve the Consent Agenda; Jeff seconded; motion unanimously approved.

Rich said he had items to add to the agenda.

- 7.3 – Report on Council’s electronic vote
- 8.2 – Music & Fine Arts issues
- 8.3 – Staff Update

5. New Business - A

5.1 Contract for pre-construction services – Terry Schmidt

Terry said the PMC held interviews with two contractors, Mar Lan and B. A. Green. Both are local companies and brought staff who were able to respond to the committee’s questions. Following those interviews, the PMC agreed Plymouth should work with Mar Lan. Mar Lan’s proposed agreement was reviewed from a legal perspective by David Treviño and Doni Mooberry Slough who recommended some changes, which were presented and agreed to by Mar Lan. That agreement (attached) is presented this evening for Council’s consideration and approval.

When asked about a start date, Terry said it was April 6, 2026, the Monday following Easter. He was also asked about the sanctuary project survey response. He said 100+ surveys have been received, which he feels is a robust response and will help clarify the process going forward.

Caroline asked how long construction will last. Approximately 8 months, hopefully ending in December 2026.

Doug moved to approve the agreement with Mar Lan Construction; Jeff seconded.

Jeff asked if Mar Lan expects a “product” at the end of the agreement. Terry said there is an opportunity for Mar Lan to bid on the project, but the agreement does not bind Plymouth to have them provide the construction.

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

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

6.1 Financial Update

Through July we are 58% of the way through the year; have received 65% of projected annual income and have spent 57% of projected annual expenses.

Stephen said Plymouth continues to experience favorable trends. An upward trend in “contributions no pledge” suggests a year-end forecast of approximately \$110,000 compared to budget of \$80,000. Plymouth has received the final purchase of tax credits which will be used for solar panels. Idle funds have been reinvested in CDs.

Jenny asked if a reduction in pledged income will result from an increase in “contributions, no pledge”. Yes, pledged income may drop, but “contributions, no pledge” will take their place.

Doug said information regarding the number of individuals pledging vs non-pledging would be helpful during the budgeting process. Stephen said that information is probably available, but he doesn't have it at this time.

7. Old Business

7.1 Alternate Worship Site (AWS) Committee Report – Jenny O'Brien

Jenny said having the sanctuary available for Easter and hopefully Christmas is helpful. The committee did a walk-through of Mayflower and believe it could seat 230 with an additional 50 seated in the Heritage Room. The 9:30 service usually has 250-300 attendees; 50-75 attend the Gathering of Grace service. How might we shift members from the first service to the second?

The Narthex could substitute for after service activities held in the Mayflower Room, as a kitchen is available in South Church. The Harvest Home Dinner cannot be held at Plymouth. Maceli's has offered space at no charge and Building 21 at the Douglas County Fairgrounds has space available at no charge for not-for-profit organizations.

She added that board concerns/suggestions will be incorporated into the plan. The committee's questions for council are who approves the committee's work, such as significant changes, cost and the overall plan.

Sonia suggested creating a buffer for seating. Jenny said ushers would be assigned to assist with seating. Caroline expressed her concern about the stability of chairs Plymouth has for seating and asked if new chairs could be purchased.

Stephen asked about the loss of revenue from Mayflower room rentals during construction. Valerie said the quilters will be offsite but will return following construction. The Mayflower room will be set up for worship and not changed. Stephen said the loss of rental revenue will need to be incorporated into the 2026 budget.

Sonia said it would be helpful to have some chairs placed in the hallway for individuals who are late or for children. With streaming functionality, overflow could also be directed upstairs. Caroline said the nursery has a feed in it now and the adjacent room has a television.

Rich then thanked Jenny and the committee for their work to date.

7.2 Balcony Pew Removal Status – Doug Eason

Doug said each pew was moved back one row, which opened the aisle for better flow during communion. With this change, the back pew cannot be used. The current configuration won't change unless additional space is needed for larger services such as Easter and Christmas.

7.3 Email Vote – Secretary

Larissa reported that Council was asked to vote via email on the following motion made by Sonia and seconded by Stephen. *"To enter into a contract for casework design services with Eric F.*

Keebler CAD & Rendering Services for a cost not to exceed \$3,000.” Nine affirmative votes were received; motion passed.

8. New Business – B

8.1 Basement Clean Up – Doug Eason

South Church – Doug said two workdays were spent organizing the South Church basement. Many items have been taken to Goodwill. A decision regarding items used during past garage sales (coat racks, hangers, etc.) needs to be made. The charcoal stored in the basement will be stored at Norine’s home and used at the upcoming Church picnic.

Doug suggested letting boards and other groups utilizing the basement for storage know that items they remove need to be replaced in the same area.

8.2 Music & Fine Arts

Referencing the board’s minutes, Rich asked Kathy if concerns expressed were regarding congregation/public impact if major works were moved offsite. She said it was a concern of some and included the children’s musical. Jenny said the committee had discussed the board’s concerns from an undesirable perspective, but also as an opportunity to offer the works to the broader community. She added the hope is to limit the number of offsite activities but does feel a combined worship service/major work could be beneficial.

General discussion followed regarding a budget to accommodate offsite costs. Doug suggested the AWS committee develop a budget to include expenses such as chairs, space, sound, etc. Stephen said a budget can be developed but he’ll need such information.

8.3 Staff Report – Valerie Miller-Coleman

Valerie said Jaron Asher will retire near the end of the year. Fortunately, a strong candidate for the position has been identified and although Valerie will be on sabbatical Devon Kim will guide the process. Stephen asked if Plymouth needed to advertise the position opening. Valerie said it wasn’t required, and since we have a strong candidate, she feels comfortable moving forward with the process.

9. Open Forum

James expressed his concerns regarding the alley behind the Church and would like Plymouth to contact the city about the situation. Jenny said she would contact a colleague to see where Plymouth is on the list. Doug said he was told the portion of the alley not addressed earlier is because it’s brick and the City is hesitant about removing them. Jenny said there is a new policy regarding brick streets, which may be helpful.

Sonia displayed a colorful Little Free Library that was contributed to Plymouth and will be placed in the HeadStart area for use by those students and anyone in the Church. Books have been contributed, so the library will be available soon!

10. Moderator's Report – Rich Bireta

- Christi Houston has resigned from her position on the Church Council. He hopes to fill the position soon.
- A survey regarding the sanctuary/chancel remodeling is in progress with a Sept. 1 closing date.
- The pulpit platform will be removed from the sanctuary the week of September 2.
- Larissa will not be at the September meeting; Jenny volunteered to take minutes in her absence.

11. Pastor's Report – Rev. Dr. Valerie Miller-Coleman, Senior Pastor

- Valerie held her last staff meeting today, as her sabbatical begins on September 1. She expressed appreciation for the lay leaders who will be available to assist Caroline during the next three months.
- Referencing Peter Luckey's sermon and Harold Rheim's history of Plymouth on Founders Day, Valerie said the "Thread" was evident on Sunday.
- About 20 individuals attended new member orientation on Sunday.

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

- Volunteer training for Children and Youth
- Fall Plymouth Academy kicking off
- Various Stepping Stones groups beginning
- High School OWL and child care
- Caroline enjoyed her sabbatical and expressed appreciation for everyone who worked while she was gone.
- She encouraged all to come to her if they need anything. Let her know how she can support you and your communities.

13. Adjournment and Lord's Prayer

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

14. Important Future Dates

Next Council Meeting, September 23, 2025 at 6:30 pm

October 28, 2025; November 18, 2025; December 16, 2025; January 7, 2026 (tentative); January 20, 2026 (tentative); Council Retreat February 2026