

Council Minutes: October 2025

Plymouth Congregational Church – United Church of Christ

Tuesday October 28, 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

Sonia Jordan – Immediate Past Moderator

Stephen Carttar – Treasurer

Doug Eason – At Large Member

David Treviño – At Large Member

Norine Spears – At Large Member

Annamarie Hill – At Large Member

Jeanne Fridell – At Large Member

Jeff Eriksen – 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

Nancy Bregman – Chair, Fellowship

Marla Eriksen – Chair, Service & Justice

Kathy Elkins – Chair, Deacons

Melissa Praderio, Staff Accountant

Devon Kim, Chair, Personnel Committee

Scott Morgan, Plymouth Member

2. Invocation – Rev. Caroline Lawson Dean, Associate Pastor

Caroline shared a reading about the theology of worrying, then led attendees in prayer.

3. New Business I – New Council Member – Rich Bireta

Rich said the Pastor/Parish committee has asked Annamarie Hill to fill Christi Houston’s term, which expires in 2026. Pursuant to the bylaws, Council can appoint an individual to fill an unexpired term, subject to confirmation at the next Annual Meeting if the unexpired term exceeds one year.

He then asked Caroline to introduce her. Caroline said Annamarie has been involved in various Plymouth functions and is a new member in the Bible study community. Annamarie provided additional information about her background and then Rich excused Annamarie from the meeting.

Rich moved to have Council appoint Annamarie Hill to fill the remainder of Christi’s term; Jeanne seconded the motion; motion unanimously carried.

4. Icebreaker question

Attendees provided brief introductions of themselves.

5. Consent Agenda

5.1 Approve Agenda

5.2 Approve Minutes from September Council Meeting

5.3 Receive Financial Reports

Rich said he was removing item 8.4 from the agenda as a qualified petition to call a congregational meeting has been received.

Jeff moved to adopt the agenda as amended; Jenny seconded; motion unanimously carried.

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

6.1 Financial Update

Through September we are 75% of the way through the year; have received 76% of projected annual income and spent 72% of projected annual expenses.

Stephen said an additional "Enter In" gift of \$50,000 which is restricted to the organ, has been received.

7. Old Business

7.1 Alternate Worship Site Committee Report – Jenny O'Brien

7.1.1 October 5 review with congregation

Jenny said there were not a lot of surprises and believes most were comfortable with the plan. Boards have been asked for feedback regarding the impact of changes to programs during construction. She was happy to have such "can do" responses. Concerns were primarily around children's programs, making sure they aren't overstimulated. She's still compiling board comments.

7.2 Project Management Committee Update - Terry Schmidt

Rich said the receipt of a petition from a Plymouth member with the required number of signatures asking for a called congregation meeting to discuss and conduct a vote to approve the design of the chancel eliminated the need for Council to call such a meeting.

He anticipates many congregants will have questions and his preference is to hold two meetings - one on Sunday, January 18 and the other on Sunday, January 25.

He then thanked Terry for his work with the committee, who provided a written summary of the PMC's work to date and his thoughts (attached). General discussion followed:

When asked what a default position would be if the PMC's recommended design isn't approved by the congregation, Terry said the chancel would not change, but the PMC would still want to make it accessible.

Jeff asked when the PMC would be prepared to present a design to the congregation. Terry said when Council asks for it. He feels an estimated cost for the proposed design will be available within ten days and his preference is to meet with the congregation in December.

David asked if the contractor has been asked about a possible change to the proposed timeline. Terry said they have met and know the contractor has other projects which could impact the timeline. At this time, Terry feels the construction could begin the Monday after Easter and conclude in December – hopefully by Christmas. If the design must be changed, the additional architectural cost will be billed at an hourly rate.

Sonia asked Terry what he would like from Council tonight? Terry said he doesn't want two consecutive meetings in January and would like Council to ask for an agreed upon design from the PMC by the third week in November.

Jeff asked if a called congregational meeting could be held in December. Caroline said December is a busy month! Valerie returns December 1; the Major Work and bake sale are on December 7; the Christmas pageant and second budget meeting are on December 14; set up and working toward Christmas Eve service on December 21. She said if the meeting is held in December, the most workable date would be December 14.

Devon asked if the petition for a called meeting halts the work of Council. Rich said if Council approves the PMC's recommended design, it could be upheld or overruled at a called congregational meeting. Rich also said if the congregation approves the design, many other approvals will be required before construction can begin, including from the State Historic Preservation Office (needed to receive historic tax credits), the city's Historic Preservation Committee and acoustical improvement details. Construction only begins upon approval by Council.

Caroline said although the petition references the chancel, it's really an opportunity for the congregation to vote on the design.

Terry said they'll ask the "Enter In" campaign committee (Devon Kim, Doug Eason and Plymouth staff) what their committee would like to see Plymouth do. Stephen added they have a good idea of campaign revenue, which is currently \$3,550,000. The major unknown at this time is the impact of historic tax credits.

Jenny said if the meeting is held in December, clear communication will be required so congregants understand what is being asked of them. Jeanne said information should include the number of design iterations to date and the original reasons for the sanctuary changes.

Sonia asked what the bylaws require for a called meeting notice. Rich said notice is to be provided (1) in a method to reach as many members as possible at least ten days prior to the meeting date and (2) announcement during worship for a minimum of two Sundays prior to the meeting.

Jenny suggested Council consider the PMC's recommended design and language for the called meeting at the November meeting. Terry reminded Council that the PMC is representative of the congregation, and not all members may agree on the design.

Rich moved for Council (1) to request the PMC's recommended design with estimated costs and (2) consider called meeting language at the November 18 Council meeting; Jenny seconded.

Following discussion, Rich rescinded part 2 of the motion.

Rich then moved for Council to request the PMC's recommended design with estimated costs; Jenny seconded; motion carried unanimously.

Rich recessed the meeting at 8:05; meeting resumed at 8:15

8. New Business II

8.1 Coordinating/Communications items from Board

8.1.1 – No items were brought forward.

8.2 Budget Hearing w/Board Chairs

8.2.1 Board Spending policy review – Rich/Stephen

Rich reminded board chairs they have the flexibility to move funds from one line item to another, except for any funds related to personnel (salary or benefits).

8.2.2 What decreases and increases to the line items in your board's budget are you requesting?

Deacons - Kathy said additional acolyte robes need to be purchased in a variety of sizes and the stoles need periodic cleaning. Rich suggested they look now for line items that will be under budget and utilize those funds.

Fellowship - Nancy said expenses for coffee hour are increasing, as approximately 20 dozen cookies are provided each week.

Primary activities include the Church picnic, Pride Event and the Harvest Home dinner.

A new endowed fund is to support an annual 50-year member event. Fellowship will work with Membership on this activity.

Service & Justice – Marla said they are moving toward a modern pledge of 5% to OCWM and 5% to local organizations.

They want to grow their relationship with Kansas Interfaith Action (KIFA) an advocacy organization that Plymouth partners with on various issues.

SPLP Language Program – They are adding childcare, which will make it possible for more individuals to participate in the program.

Stephen said Service and Justice is working to move support for OCWM and SPLP from fund-raising activities into budgeted expenses.

Sonia asked who benefited from the 5% given locally. Caroline said it includes volunteer hours such as LINK, church space for organizations such as Head Start and the Pastor's Emergency Fund, which isn't part of the operating budget. She acknowledged the need to better quantify and track this information.

General discussion followed regarding Plymouth's financial support for OCWM and how OCWM supports Plymouth. David said with the possibility of the SNAP program ending is there anything Plymouth can do to help? Caroline said she's meeting with Service and Justice to discuss options.

8.2.3 Does your board plan to spend funds from your activity funds?

No reports

8.3 Speaking in the Name of Plymouth Policy update – Rich Bireta

8.3.1 See attachment to agenda

Rich said the proposed changes relate to draft issue position statement communications.

- Drafts would be sent to both the Clerk and Moderator Team.

- Four communication options are suggested, the website, Sunday bulletins, announcement from the pulpit and all church email.
- Council can decide which communication method is preferable, on a case-by-case basis.

Doug moved to approve the proposed amendments to Council Procedures -Draft Position Statements; Jeff seconded; motion carried unanimously.

9. Open Forum

10. Moderator's Report – Rich Bireta

Rich had nothing further to report.

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

- Valerie returns December 1.
- Advent preparation.
- She expressed her appreciation for the PMC and all lay leaders

12. Adjournment and Lord's Prayer

Meeting adjourned without objection, followed by the Lord's Prayer

13. Important Future Dates:

Next Council meeting: November 18, 2025 at 6:30 pm

November 18, 2025 – Budget Hearing – Personnel Committee

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

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

January 20, 2026 – Regular January Council Meeting