

Council Minutes: June, 2023
Plymouth Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
Tuesday, June 27, 2023

1. Call to Order - Scott Morgan, Moderator
Scott called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm.

Members present:

Scott Morgan – Moderator
Devon Kim – Immediate-Past Moderator
Larissa Long – Clerk
David Ambler – At Large Member
Becky Eason – At Large Member
Valerie Miller-Coleman
Caroline Lawson Dean
Debbie Schmidt – Stewardship
Linda Thompson – Fellowship
Kelley Stillings – Membership
Brandy Ernzen – Mission & Service
Dick Orchard – Endowment
Susan McCarthy – History

Members not present:

Sonia Jordan – Moderator Elect
Doni Mooberry Slough – Treasurer
Rich Bireta – Deputy Treasurer
Susan Osborn – At Large Member
Korey Kaul – Christian Education
Sue Denning – Deacons
Kathy Bowen – Music & Fine Arts
Annas Boyer - Personnel

2. Invocation - Valerie Miller-Coleman
A Celebration of Life for Marcia Fisher was held in the sanctuary last week. Valerie said it was a beautiful service and reflective of Marcia's life. She read Wendell Berry's "The Peace of Wild Things" and Mary Oliver's "The Summer Day", poems which were included in the service program.
3. Consent Agenda
 - 3.1. Approve Agenda
 - 3.2. Approve minutes from May 28, 2023
 - 3.3. Receive Financial Report

Scott added the following item to the consent agenda:

- 3.4 Approve appointment of Marty Reeves to fill a vacant position on membership through January, 2024.

David moved to approve the consent agenda as amended; Devon seconded; motion carried unanimously.

4. Church Treasurer's Report – Debbie Schmidt
 - 4.1. Financial Update and Fun Fact

Debbie gave the following report provided by Rich:

"I have two fun facts to share with you today. The first one is the "three number financial report". Through May we are 42% of the way through the year; have received 41% of planned income and spent 36% of planned expenses.

The story behind this concise report dates back to 2006 in my first year as Treasurer. It was my third Council meeting and I was presenting a financial report that consisted of a page full of numbers. This was a comprehensive report, with 72 numbers on the one page report. It compared this year to last year for each income type and for each Board and showed the remaining income and budget for the year. In my third month as Treasurer I finished presenting the report. There were no questions and I noticed that two people were asleep.

I decided that something drastic needed to be changed and ever since that meeting Stewardship and Council have received a three-number report and the more detailed financial information as soft copy documents.

This three-number report does a good job of reporting our financial progress through the year, but does nothing to look forward. That is where the 8% rule comes in.

Donation and pledge payments to the church are inconsistent in any given month. They seem to depend on factors like the number of Sundays in a month, when Easter falls on the calendar and when people travel or otherwise do not attend church in the summer. As we get to October it becomes important to more accurately project our income and expenses for the year in order to end the year with a small surplus.

In reviewing several years of historical data we noticed some larger trends. We noticed that the income in any given month is inconsistent, but that, on the whole, the average income for the months of January to November average out to about 8% of the annual income and that income in December is about 12% of the annual total, or 150% of the income of the other 11 months. This led to the "8% rule".

Simply stated, that rule is: In January through November we'll receive about 8% of our annual income each month (88% through November). The remaining 12% will be received in December.

Applying this rule this month (through May) you can see that we received 41% of our planned income where we would expect to receive 40%. That is how we can say with some confidence that we are in good shape financially at this point of the year.”

5. Old Business

5.1. Goals and Strategy Update - Scott Morgan

Finances

A steering committee will be created to prepare a 5-year plan focused on increasing revenue and/or adapting to new pledging formats. Language will be developed to include proposed members, which will be appointed by Council. Debbie will organize the committee structure over the next few months, but will probably include Stephen Carttar, Debbie, Rich, and Doni. Council will receive the proposed structure and names in August.

Susan asked if other committee changes are being considered now, specifically History. Scott said no other committees are being changed or created at this time, but under the proposed bylaw changes, History will be a stand-alone committee, not a Council committee.

5.2. Goals and Strategy Update - Valerie Miller-Coleman

Membership

Valerie expressed appreciation for those who have worked on and contributed to the goals and strategies that have been developed. The following is a broad overview of Valerie's presentation. Please reference the attached presentation for timelines and supporting activities.

Excellence in Membership Defined

- We offer a warm and well-coordinated welcome to all newcomers.
- We define clearly marked pathways into community for newcomers and re-engaging members.
- Our congregational care ministries enfold members in well-coordinated, meaningful experiences of Christian caregiving.

Strategies

- A - Build on strength of Sunday morning welcome teams.
- B – Refine pathway into membership experience for newcomers.
- C – Expand and strengthen small group offerings.
- D – Launch new congregational care ministry to reach homebound members and those in care facilities.

Comments

- Like emphasizing welcome table.
- Kelly appreciates having a plan to follow.

5.3. Bylaws and Policy Update - Scott Morgan

The draft constitution and bylaws were approved by Council in May, as well as a proposed called congregational meeting on September 10. Council will receive draft policies in August and if approved the “then” policies would not go into effect until the bylaws become effective. A fourth and final information session is planned prior to the September 10 meeting.

Scott requested feedback on a proposed agenda for the congregational meeting. Should it be held between services? If so, it wouldn't be a long meeting – will that trouble members?

He'll prepare the agenda which will reference the meeting timeline, including discussion. If the agenda is approved, a vote will be taken at the end of the stated time. If the agenda is rejected, a motion could be made to recess until the following week.

The following points/observations were discussed:

- Intent is to have good attendance, representative of congregation. Must organize to achieve.
- How much time is needed for the meeting?
- Preference is to hold meeting between services, rather than following a combined service.
 - Combined service doesn't seem fair to Gathering of Grace attendees
- Suggested 20 minutes for discussion w/3-minute limit only provides opportunity for 7 to speak.
 - Concern that some who are pro, con or neutral, may not have the opportunity to speak.
- Voting should be by ballot, but where – in sanctuary or Mayflower Room?

The following steps were agreed upon:

- Scott will speak during the “Moment for Mission” on August 20.
- Fourth & final information session will be held in the Heritage Room on August 20.
- August publication of “The Rock” will be mailed to all members and should include information about the meeting with a QR code providing access to proposed constitution/bylaws.
- Make very clear that:

- The final information session is August 20.
- Four information sessions for the congregation have been held.
- Council reviewed the proposed drafts line-by-line in March, April and May.
- Changes/edits have been made to address concerns/issues.
- Council has approved the language.
- The Sept. 10 vote will be “up or down”.
- A three-minute elevator speech could help clarify the changes.

Scott will email his thoughts to Council regarding the meeting time frame and agenda and asks for feedback prior to the August meeting.

6. New Business

6.1. Personnel Policy - Valerie Miller-Coleman and Devon Kim Part-time employee health insurance

Devon explained the proposed language change eliminates the ability of part-time employees to purchase health insurance through the church. However, by doing so, we are providing those employees the opportunity to access better priced coverage through the HealthCare.gov marketplace, which can only be accessed if their employer doesn't offer coverage. Plymouth will provide the employee a stipend equal to what has been paid on their behalf to participate in the church's coverage. The two employees impacted support the change.

Devon moved to accept the language as proposed; Becky seconded; motion carried unanimously.

Scott said the employee policy handbook will be incorporated into the Plymouth policy book.

7. Moderator's Report - Scott Morgan Nothing additional to report.

8. Associate Pastor's Report - Caroline Lawson Dean

- Youth and adults will join Kara in this year's youth mission trip to New Mexico. Caroline won't attend, as she's joining family members for a vacation in Alaska.
- Working on fall programs.
- Brandy gave an overview of the Community of Care Fair, a collaboration between Mission, Community of Care and Fine Arts to provide information regarding volunteer opportunities through Plymouth or directly with agencies, such as Link, Just Food, etc. It will be held on August 27.

9. Pastor's Report - Valerie Miller-Coleman

- Annual staff retreat held on June 26 at the Unitarian Church

- Theme was “Rest”
- As staff shared stories of their journeys to Plymouth, Valerie and Caroline realized that with the exception of Kim, who has been at Plymouth longer than them, the staff they are now leading is what they have built and they are amazing!
- Planning worship services through Epiphany.
- Christmas Eve falls on a Sunday, which will require thoughtful consideration regarding services that day.

10. Open Forum

Meetings of the Church Council are open to all Plymouth members.

This open forum allows any church member to address the Council regarding Plymouth Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, programs, plans or policies.

11. Adjournment and Lord’s Prayer

Devon moved to adjourn the meeting; Dave seconded; unanimously approved.

12. Important Future Dates

Next Council Meeting: (NO JULY MEETING) – August 22 at 6:30 pm. This meeting will be in person.

Tentative 2023 Council Dates (fourth Tuesday except third in November and December):
September 26, October 24, November 21, December 19.

Respectfully submitted by
Larissa Long, Clerk