

Council Minutes: January 2024
Plymouth Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
Tuesday, January 23, 2024

1. Call to Order – Scott Morgan, Moderator
Scott called the meeting to order at 6:33

Members present:

Scott Morgan – Moderator
Devon Kim – Immediate Past Moderator
Larissa Long – Clerk
Doni Mooberry Slough – Treasurer
David Ambler – At Large Member
Susan Osborn – At Large Member
Doug Eason – At Large Member
Valerie Miller-Coleman
Caroline Lawson Dean
Debbie Schmidt – Stewardship
Korey Kaul – Christian Education
Sue Denning – Deacons
Kelley Stillings - Membership
Kathy Bowen – Music & Fine Arts
Dick Orchard – Endowment
Susan McCarthy – History+

Members not present:

Sonia Jordan – Moderator Elect
Rich Bireta – Deputy Treasurer
Linda Thompson – Fellowship
Brandy Erzen – Mission & Service
Annas Boyer – Personnel+

2. Invocation – Valerie Miller-Coleman
Valerie read excerpts from Joan Chittister’s book “In a High Spiritual Season”. A Benedictine nun, she reminds us that acts of love are important and encourages all to look for opportunities to bring warmth, light and joy into the world.
3. Consent Agenda
 - 3.1 Approve Agenda
 - 3.2 Approve Minutes from December 19, 2023
 - 3.3 Receive Financial Reports

Scott said there was an addition to the Consent Agenda – 5.3 Solar Panels - Doug Eason

Devon moved to approve the Consent Agenda as amended; Doug seconded. Motion approved unanimously.

4. Church Treasurer's Report – Doni Mooberry Slough, Treasurer
4.1 Financial Update and Fun Fact

Through December 31 we are 100% of the way through the year; we've received income to cover 102% of budgeted expenses and spent 100% of our budgeted expenses. We ended 2023 with a surplus of \$24,926. Doni said 2024 pledged income looks good and she's very grateful for that.

She has been studying the changing nature of church income and considering how she can help Stephen Carttar in his transition to Treasurer. Some information from various 2023 studies included:

- As a church grows, average giving decreases.
- Individuals giving on a recurring basis give 42% more than those who don't.
- 17% of Americans tithe.
- Constant feedback is needed – individuals give more when they know where their dollars go.
- Churches offering hybrid services have seen increased attendance.
- Average church churn rate is 10-15%.

She added that we're on the right track and that this information will be helpful as we continue to build financial stability.

5. Old Business

5.1 Goals and Strategy Update Facilities, next steps for capital campaign

1. Capital campaign steps – Valerie Miller-Coleman and Devon Kim

Scott thanked those who were able to attend the Called Meeting and said it was an exciting time for Plymouth.

Valerie said she's visited with Alan Wildes and a blueprint for moving forward is in place.

2. Approval of contract with Generis – Valerie Miller-Coleman and Debbie Schmidt

Debbie said the Generis contract is for \$40,000, which will be paid in eight monthly installments of \$5,000. Alan Wildes will walk senior staff through the campaign strategy and timeline. At its December meeting, the Stewardship Board voted to send the contract to Council for approval, following Generis' agreement to modify the contract language to follow standard mediation practices.

Debbie moved to approve the contract with Generis Partners, LLC as approved by Stewardship in December; Doug seconded; motion approved unanimously.

3. Create Sanctuary and Organ Capital Campaign Steering Committee as a Council ad hoc committee

Scott provided a Memorandum of Understanding (attached) and said that Valerie as Senior Pastor and he as Moderator had asked Devon to chair the campaign. He is asking Council to approve her appointment.

David asked how many would be on the committee. Devon said Generis has job descriptions for the “technical” campaign. The committee will be about how we make the ask – not necessarily how the work gets done. The members are:

1. Devon Kim – Executive Director
2. Doug Eason – Project Manager
3. Russ Ware – Communication, Video and Digital Media Director
4. Ann Lounsbury – Print Coordinator & Project Administrator
5. Jeremy Winfrey – Video Coordinator
6. Valerie Miller-Coleman – Writer
7. Janice Toebben – Events Director
8. Fred Kandeler – Spiritual Awareness Director
9. Kara Holcombe – Children’s Coordinator
10. Caroline Lawson Dean – Student Coordinator

Devon said the steering committee will hold its first meeting with Alan Wildes on February 1. The campaign kickoff (stakeholder event) will take place on February 17, include food and all will be invited to attend. Hospitality Committee and RSVP volunteers will be needed for the event. Valerie added that the steering committee is relatively lean, but will have subcommittees working with them, providing many opportunities for participation.

The February 17 stakeholder event occurs first and the “big push” begins after Easter (March 31). Subsequent events will follow. Commitment Sunday will be on Pentecost, May 19. The theme “Enter In” based on the Parable of Tenants, found in the Book of Matthew, will be the Sermon Series during the 7-week time frame.

Scott asked if there is a group that would be making the “big asks” (lead gifts). Devon said that will take place following the February 17 stakeholder event. The Senior Pastor will lead, but others will be involved. Campaign language will be introduced “around the table” at the stakeholder event.

Doug moved to approve the Memorandum of Understanding and create an ad hoc council committee known as the Sanctuary and Organ Capital Campaign Steering Committee; David seconded.

Kathy asked if the steering committee oversees the entire campaign and will actual fundraising take place during the campaign. If so, where do answers about the facilities come from – or when?

Doug said the goals are the organ, HVAC and accessibility but we don’t know what is possible until we have an idea of what can be raised.

Kathy then asked what is the vision – what are we going to get. How do we share more specific information with the congregation?

Scott said the architects will provide more information about the sanctuary cost. Doug said the big unknown is the organ. Scott responded that someone must pull the details together. Valerie said we can have the architects provide sight line options to address member concerns.

Sue said raising money and what can be accomplished needs to occur simultaneously.

Scott said Alan has worked on multiple campaigns, so he should be able to assist in bringing this together. Valerie added that as information becomes available, it must be shared with the congregation.

Devon said responding to the congregation's feelings about details will be challenging. Scott added that the design will change as we move forward.

David said we must be cognizant of not pitting one area against another. The entire project is the priority – not just the organ, HVAC or accessibility.

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

5.2 History Committee regarding placement of informational sign – Susan McCarthy

Susan provided Council with a photo of the final design of an aluminum 10"x12" plaque and said there will be no quotes around the text.

Devon moved to approve the final plaque design commemorating President Obama's visit to Plymouth; Doug seconded.

Scott then expressed his appreciation for Susan's work on this project.

Motion carried unanimously.

5.3 Solar panels – Doug Eason

Doug recently met with the Lawrence Historic Resources Commission regarding proposed solar panels for South Church. The project was approved by the committee on a 7-0 vote, so all necessary city approvals have been received.

The approved design (presentation attached) does not change the roofline of South Church and utilizes horizontal, black solar panels. Upon completion, it is estimated that South Church electrical consumption will be reduced by 42% over a 30-year period. Annual utility savings are estimated to be \$4,120. In addition, over one million pounds of carbon will be removed from the environment over the 30-year time frame.

After obtaining bids from two vendors, Cromwell Solar has been selected for the project. The project cost of \$88,785 is fully funded:

- 30% Federal Tax Refund
 - (returned to Plymouth in 2025) \$26,636
- 30% Historical Credits
 - Need to sell credits, assuming 10% discount \$23,972
- Rice Foundation \$22,000
- Plymouth Family Foundation \$16,177
- Total \$88,785

Doug said invoices will be paid from Rice Foundation funding first, followed by the Family Foundation, historical credits sale and federal tax refund. Depending upon the timing of income from historical tax credits and the federal tax refund, reserve funds may need to be utilized as a no-interest bridge loan.

Doug moved to approve Cromwell Solar’s proposal to install \$88,785 of solar panels contingent upon approval of the state historical tax credit; Debbie seconded the motion; motion unanimously approved.

- 5.4 Budget: “Source: Fundraising” recipients update: OCWM, Language Program, Justice Matters– Debbie Schmidt, Chair of Stewardship

Debbie presented the Fundraising Report/Disbursements (attached).

Debbie moved to approve the Report of Source Fundraising as approved by Stewardship; David seconded the motion.

She said the Annual Report will include a report of all 2023 fundraising activities. Doug suggested a review in 2024 of target areas might be helpful.

The motion was approved unanimously.

- 5.5 Budget Consideration – Debbie Schmidt, Chair of Stewardship and Don Mooberry Slough, Treasurer

Debbie said the Stewardship Board approved the proposed 2024 budget to go to the congregation for review and discussion. Doni asked that changes be made to the proposed budget to reflect the possibility of reserve funds needed for the solar project. She suggested that the line item “Interest Earned” be decreased by \$4,000 to \$31,300 and that line item “Transfer CY Operating Reserve (if required) be increased by \$4,000 to \$19,884.

Debbie added that cost of living increases were included in the proposed budget.

Doug asked if there is a year-end deficit, what is the priority for utilizing reserves - the PPP Reserve or CY Operating Reserve. Doni said it would be PPP – for staff expenses.

Scott said \$20,000 is still allocated to reserves and although the operating budget is for \$1.1 million, it doesn't reflect all of the financial support provided by Plymouth each year.

Debbie moved to approve the proposed budget as amended to reflect a decrease of \$4,000 interest income and increase of \$4,000 operating reserve expense to be presented to the congregation at the Annual Meeting on February 4. Doug seconded the motion. Unanimously approved.

6. New Business

6.1 Nomination update – Scott Morgan for Sonia Jordan

Scott shared his appreciation for the work Sonia has done to prepare slates of nominees.

1. Approval by Council of nominations for Council Committees and Church Historian

Scott explained the intent of the list of nominees (attached) and said it will be included in the annual report. Short bios will be included for officers and Council members.

Kathy asked why all Governance Committee members had 3-year terms. Scott said the structure is still being determined, taking into consideration what will be needed to maintain and update policies, etc. Scott noted that looking into aligning the terms of the Governance Committee with other Council Committees would be one of its first tasks.

Sue asked (1) will the congregation be provided both the Overview and Recommended Ballot sheets and (2) will an explanation be provided as to who they're voting for and why it's changed. Scott responded yes to both questions.

Susan McCarthy asked if nominations can be made from the floor for those positions elected by the congregation. Scott said yes, the new Bylaws allow for nominations other than those made by the Nominating Committee but that there are specific requirements that must be met.

Doug moved to appoint the positions Deputy Treasurer to Boards, as listed; Kelly seconded; motion unanimously approved.

2. Presentation of nominations for congregation-approved positions. Council does not approve the nominations for those positions elected by the congregation. The Bylaws require that these nominations be published 10 days prior to the Annual Meeting. That meeting will be held February 4. Ten days before that is Thursday, January 25.

6.2 Plymouth Language Program Update – Caroline Lawson Dean

- Welcoming more people into the building.
- Welcoming PLP back but that a MOU regarding specifics still needed to be agreed to – the PLP administration is going through changes.

- Caroline also noted that they are also working on a MOU with Head Start and hoping for another Head Start classroom to open.

7. Moderator's Report – Scott Morgan

Scott thanked each member for the work they've contributed to activities including (1) bylaws and policy reviews/changes; (2) capital campaign feasibility study and approval; (3) facility updates and (4) goal setting for governance, communication, facilities, and membership. He encouraged the members to stay focused and continue to learn.

8. Associate Pastor's Report – Caroline Lawson Dean

- Working on Plymouth Academy –
 - Valerie will teach a class
 - Two adult reading circles
- OWL classes
- Hosting the Reverend Dr. Jennifer Harvey and reading her book "Dear White Christians"
- Confirmation Classes
- Kara Holcomb has created classes for families

9. Pastor's Report – Valerie Miller-Coleman

- She deeply appreciated her recent vacation.
- New member class coming together and will join Plymouth on February 4.
- Shared her appreciation for Heather Coates' leadership with new members and work on nominating committees.
- Expressed gratitude for her colleagues and Council members.
- Gave special thanks to Doni for 6 years of leadership and visionary gifts.

10. 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, program, plans or policies.

Susan McCarthy took a group photo to historically record the last Council meeting in this organizational structure.

Scott thanked Devon for the years she's served on the Moderator team – what a journey she's had!

11. Adjournment and Lord's Prayer

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

12. Important Future Dates

Next Council Meeting: February 27, 2024 at 6:30 pm – this meeting will be in person.