

Council Minutes, January 2025
Plymouth Congregational Church – United Church of Christ
Tuesday, January 28, 2025

1. Call to Order – Sonia Jordan, Moderator
Sonia called the meeting to order at 6:30 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
Norine Spears – At Large Member
Christi Houston – At Large Member
Debbie Schmidt – 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
Mark Reedy – Deputy Treasurer

Others Present:

Devon Kim – Chair, Personnel Committee
Melissa Praderio, Staff Accountant
Kathy Bowen, Music & Fine Arts

2. Invocation – Valerie Miller-Coleman
Valerie led Council in prayer.
3. Consent Agenda
 - 3.1 Approve Agenda
 - 3.2 Approve Minutes from December 17, 2024 Council Meeting
 - 3.3 Receive Financial Reports

Sonia said Doug Eason will provide the Sanctuary & Organ Project Management Committee report on behalf of Terry Schmidt.

Doug moved to approve the consent agenda; Debbie seconded; motion unanimously approved.

4. Church Treasurer’s Report – Stephen Carttar, Treasurer
 - 4.1 Financial Update
The financial results for the year ended December 31, 2024 follow:
 - 100.0% - The year concluded on December 31
 - 99.3% - Total revenue is \$12,194 favorable to budget
 - 98.1% - Total expenditures were \$22,252 favorable to budget

Resulting in \$14,561 of revenue over expenditures. The primary factors contributing to favorable financial results were:

- \$ 10,619 – Net contributions and one-time gifts were over (favorable) to budget
- \$ 9,518 – Organ tuning and repairs were under (favorable) to budget
- \$ 11,296 – Utilities were under (favorable) to budget
- \$(12,726) – Staff expenses were over (unfavorable) to budget

Stephen said the “Enter In” Campaign received \$1,084,314 and paid the first installment of \$283,922 on the organ in 2024. He added that the December 31, 2024 balance sheet reflects a significant increase in assets due to campaign funds received, interest earned and properly recognizing the historical cost of the building. With the assistance of Susan McCarthy, Church Historian, the original cost of the building and subsequent campaigns are now reflected on the balance sheet. He said Plymouth ended the year in good condition.

5. Old Business

5.1 Project Management Committee Update – Doug Eason (PMC member)

Doug said the committee continues to meet every two weeks with Clark-Huesemann and is currently focused on sight lines. They are looking at various platform heights and configurations – perhaps 2’ tall, with the number of steps to be decided (3 or 4). They hope to meet with the State Historical Society sometime in February. A “Plan B” is being developed, in the event tax credits are not available. Valerie added that the Historical Society is very partial to accessibility so that should be a focus as well.

5.2 Finalize 2025 Recommended Annual Budget – Stephen Carttar, Treasurer and Sonia Jordan, Moderator

Sonia reminded Council they are to recommend a budget to present to the congregation, but do not approve it. She also expressed her appreciation for the congregation’s generous response to the Annual Appeal.

Stephen, with Melissa’s assistance, provided an update of the 2025 proposed budget. Pledges of \$11,300 received after 12/31/24 reduce the proposed budget’s deficit to \$38,232. Stephen said annual pledged income is trending higher, but expenses are growing faster, and the intent is to match revenue growth with expense growth. He added that some current revenue sources will expire in coming years and although we have excess reserves at this time, that will eventually change.

He then led the review of options to balance the budget (attached), adding that Music & Fine Arts have said a \$3,000 reduction in organ maintenance is acceptable.

Doug said Facilities can live without \$67,000 and a \$10,000 reduction is acceptable. Valerie added that tax credits and possibly a grant to upgrade Church security may offer additional revenue possibilities. David, referencing the President’s temporary suspension of federal grants and loans, said funds for security enhancements may not be available.

Melissa said office technology funding is needed to replace the current server so file access/sharing can be utilized. New laptops can’t access the current server. Plymouth is working with M Cubed Technologies on a proposed upgrade. Technical support is around \$8,000; \$4,000 is estimated for a new server, which would be a one-time expense. Valerie added that she expects significant IT expenses going forward, especially if the Church moves to an on-line giving program.

Scott said Council placed a one-time gift of \$10,000 in a Council Restricted Fund, with the idea it could be utilized for one-time expenses. He also suggested the OCWM increase be phased in over time and that the 2024 surplus of \$14,561 be rolled into the 2025 budget.

Caroline said Service and Justice originally wanted to work toward building OCWM support, so a phased increase would be acceptable.

Doug asked why the line for the Annual Appeal and Fundraising Committee was increased by \$7,800. Part of the increase is because of the merger of the former Endowment Committee into Annual Appeal and Fundraising so that Endowment's \$2,000 budget line was also merged into the Annual Appeal and Fundraising Committee's line. The remainder is for the development of a promotional video for the Church, which would be used going forward for various fundraising purposes.

Debbie asked if volunteers could be trained to take on some of the Business Manager's responsibilities. Rich said from his six months experience in that role, it doesn't work. Devon agreed.

Devon then advocated to retain the personnel budget as presented. Increasing staff hours for existing staff is not an option as existing staff do not want additional hours. They are currently working extra hours, because they want the work done correctly, but we're wearing down their trust and good will.

Doug asked if Council needs to approve staff positions. Scott said Council approval is required. He added that he personally supports continued support of the professional staff. The Church is growing, and finances are becoming more complex.

Rich expressed his concern regarding utilization of one-time gifts – should they be set aside for the future? Scott said he knows what we're considering is risky, but not overly risky. He likes showing the one-time gift as revenue and knowing where it will be spent. Regarding personnel expenses, he feels staff is where much of the Church's mission occurs as it provides the necessary support for all of our efforts.

Rich suggested reducing the OCWM increase to \$8,500 and rolling the 2024 surplus into 2025 revenue. Doug said the congregation wasn't happy about rolling over surplus in prior years but acknowledged that the Church had debt and no reserves at that time. Rich added that debt reduction was the focus then.

Following further general discussion, Sonia moved to approve the recommended 2025 budget with the following modifications:

Revenue Adjustments

- Prior year pledge payments received – Increase \$11,300
- Prior year surplus – Increase \$14,560
- Recognize one-time gift from Council Restricted Fund - \$8,000
- Loose offerings – Increase \$172.86

Expense Adjustments

- Ordinary Maintenance & Repairs – Decrease \$10,000
- Organ Repairs & Maintenance – Decrease \$3,000
- Our Churches Wider Mission
 - Synod request – Increase \$3,000
 - Phased increase – Decrease \$5,000

Scott seconded the motion.

Doug said the \$20,000 budgeted for reserves is expensed over 12 months. If it's needed, it's brought back to offset operating expenses. However, once it's in reserves, no one wants to touch it. He'd rather

have more flexibility than making a transfer each month. Scott said Council should send his suggestion to Finance for consideration. He's not comfortable making a decision now, especially since this has been the process for a number of years.

There being no further discussion, motion approved unanimously.

- 5.3 Disaster Response Planning Update – David Treviño, Director of Security
David attended a Zoom meeting with the Kansas State Patrol last week and reviewed the application process. Plymouth must have management in place at the time of application or it will be denied. A security committee needs to be formed.

6. Nomination Update – Rich Bireta, Moderator Elect

- 6.1 Approval by Council of nominations for Council Committees and Church Historian

Rich moved to accept the nominations for Council Committees and Church Historian as printed, with the following additions: Larissa Long will serve on the Annual Appeal and Fundraising Committee; Jane Bireta will serve on the Governance Committee, which leaves one opening on Annual Appeal. Doug seconded. Motion approved unanimously.

- 6.2 Presentation of nominations for congregation-approved positions. Council does not approve the nominations for positions elected by the congregation.

Rich presented the ballot of nominations and provided the following changes: Amanda Nagengast – Christian Education – 1 year term; James Jordan – Fellowship; Jane Bireta - Kansas Oklahoma Conference Delegate.

7. Moderator's Report – Sonia Jordan

She's working with Valerie on the February 9 Congregational Meeting. She then expressed her appreciation to Debbie for filling a one-year Member-at-Large term and to Scott for his work on Governance.

8. Associate Pastor's Report – Caroline Lawson Dean

- Caroline reminded members that she'll be on Sabbatical in May, June and July and said she is very grateful for having that time. She added that information about the pastors' sabbaticals has been included in the annual report, in anticipation of questions from the congregation.
- Currently involved in long-range worship planning.

9. Pastor's Report – Valerie Miller-Coleman

- Valerie's sabbatical is in September, October and November. She's also expressed her appreciation for having that time.
- Pastor of Care - Michael Brecke is still celebrating his role.

10. Board Chair Comments

11. Open Forum

David said he has been receiving many inquiries regarding the current immigration situation.

12. Adjournment and Lord's Prayer

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

13. Important Future Dates:

Annual Meeting – February 9, 2025

Next Council Meeting – February 25, 2025