

Council Minutes: August, 2023
Plymouth Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
Tuesday, August 22, 2023

1. Call to Order – Scott Morgan, Moderator
Scott called the meeting to order at 6:34 pm.

Members present:

Scott Morgan – Moderator
Sonia Jordan – Moderator Elect
Devon Kim – Immediate-Past Moderator
Larissa Long – Clerk
Doni Mooberry Slough – Treasurer
Rich Bireta – Deputy Treasurer
David Ambler – At Large Member
Doug Eason - At Large Member
Valerie Miller-Coleman
Caroline Lawson Dean
Debbie Schmidt – Stewardship
Sue Denning - Deacons
Linda Thompson – Fellowship
Brandy Erzen – Mission & Service
Harry McDaniel – Music & Fine Arts
Dick Orchard – Endowment
Susan McCarthy – History+

Members not present:

Susan Osborn – At Large Member
Korey Kaul – Christian Education
Kelley Stillings – Membership
Annas Boyer – Personnel+

2. Invocation – Valerie Miller-Coleman
Valerie read “Reflections on Dreams” from Plymouth member Judith Galas’ book, *Living the Ancient Psalms*. Judith reminds us that while we may dream of tomorrow, we should recognize that today is a gift. Psalms 118, Verse 24 “This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it”.

3. Consent Agenda
 - 3.1. Approve Agenda.
 - 3.2. Approve Minutes from June 27, 2023.
 - 3.3. Receive Financial Report.
 - 3.4. Appoint Linda Mannering to Fellowship Board to replace Phil Cauthon until next Annual Meeting.
 - 3.5. Accept the resignation of Becky Eason as an At Large Council member.
 - 3.6. Appoint Doug Eason as an At Large Council member to serve until the next Annual Meeting.

Debbie asked that consideration of a grant application to the Rice Foundation be added to the agenda. Scott said the item would be considered as New Business, 6.2.

Devon moved to approve the Consent Agenda; Brandy seconded; motion passed unanimously.

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

Through July we are 58% of the way through the year, have received income to cover 61% of budgeted annual expenses and have spent 58% of budgeted annual expenses.

Doni is estimating a slightly positive ending at year-end. She had anticipated a \$40,000 shortfall, but due to an unexpected one-time gift of \$21,000 and savings from staffing changes and other operating expenses the current outlook is close to “flat”.

She then shared information from a 2019 Lilly Family School of Philanthropy survey on how membership and revenue growth are related to how often a church (1) teaches about giving and (2) how proactive leadership is in financial analysis.

The study analyzed 1,231 congregations with annual revenues ranging from \$3,000 to \$41,000,000.

- Forty-three percent reported teaching on giving either annually or never.
- Of churches reporting teaching monthly, 73% reported financial growth.
- Among the 9% reporting teaching weekly, 90% experienced financial growth.
- For congregations whose clergy look at giving records, 58% reported an increase in the amount of giving received, with 42% reporting an increase of 10% or more.

The survey was based on annual giving, not planned gifts. Dick said that based on his research, “gentle nudging” appears to work best for planned giving.

5. Old Business

5.1. Goals and Strategy Update – Scott Morgan Governance, Called Meeting on September 10

Scott provided information regarding the September 10 Called Meeting. One hundred members are required to participate to reach a quorum. Two-thirds must vote favorably to approve the constitution; a simple majority is needed to approve the bylaws. Voting will be by ballot and counted in the Mayflower Room. He asked Council to attend the meeting and encourage other members to participate as well.

If approved, the constitution, bylaws and policies will become effective at the Call to Order at the next Annual Meeting. But work will begin this year to provide the congregation with nominees for offices, boards and committees under the new structure. If a decision isn't made, the meeting will adjourn at 11:10 and a second meeting could be held the following week. If rejected, a review will be made to determine next steps.

Scott spoke during both services on August 20. The Bylaws Task Force held an information session which was attended by approximately 30 members. A few attendees were clearly opposed, but several expressed appreciation for the task force's work. David Bergeron conveyed his concerns about the communication of the 2014 bylaws changes and how the pastor's annual review is conducted. If anyone has questions regarding the handout John Lord distributed during the session, Scott is happy to visit with them. He then reminded Council that the pandemic coincided with pastor transitions and that's when it became apparent that more clarity was needed for the church to function properly and effectively.

The following are thoughts/suggestions from Council members:

- A total of 20 minutes allowed for comments only.
 - No questions.
 - Amendments not permitted.
- Limit comments to 2 or 3 minutes; cannot give remainder of time to another.
- Use a timer to maintain 2- or 3-minute time frame.
- Have members line up and speak at a microphone.

- Remind attendees:
 - Only members can vote.
 - Voting on two questions – constitution and bylaws.
 - Paper ballots – signatures not needed.
- Suggested names to count ballots.
 - Rich Bireta, Doug Eason, John Lord, Erika Dvorske

5.2. Goals and Strategy Update – Scott Morgan

Finance – Scott intended to have a draft proposal for the creation of a Council committee on fund-raising but felt it should wait until a decision is made on the bylaws. He plans to have something for Council’s consideration in September.

5.3. Goals and Strategy Update – Valerie Miller-Coleman

Facilities – Valerie provided an update for Phase 1 (paint, carpet, technology, solar panels assessment, capital campaign feasibility).

- Bids have been solicited for:
 - Paint (vendor selected).
 - Carpet (neutral color and still looking for suitable match for Narthex).
 - Audio-visual system for Mayflower Room – two bids (have information needed to evaluate).
 - Solar panels – two bids (have information needed to evaluate).
- Capital campaign feasibility for Phase 2 – under 6.1 New Business

6. New Business

6.1. Generis Contract – Valerie Miller-Coleman and Debbie Schmidt

Valerie said the last assessment gauging the feasibility of a capital campaign was in 2000. To determine what might be achievable in Phase 2, a new assessment is needed. Generis Partners, LLC has proposed a Consulting Agreement in which a Generis consultant will converse with members in small groups over a 2-day period. Some will receive invitations, but any member can participate. Using public as well as giving information, an assessment report will be prepared that provides an estimate of what might be achievable.

Debbie said the assessment cost is \$12,000 payable in three installments. Travel, lodging and meal expenses are estimated to be \$2,000 for a total of approximately \$14,000. Stewardship recommends approval of the proposal. The funds for the assessment will come from endowment funds (activity) allocated to Stewardship.

Susan asked if the firm might provide guidance for a future campaign if needed. Valerie said they could if Plymouth chose them. A brief discussion ensued regarding the approval process needed for a capital campaign. Many felt a Called Congregational meeting would be required.

Devon moved to approve the Generis proposal; Sue seconded; motion carried unanimously.

6.2. Rice Foundation Grant – Debbie Schmidt and Doug Eason

Doug and Sarah have visited with two firms who are working to complete bids for solar panel installations. Plymouth can apply for federal and historical credits and would like to apply for a Rice Foundation grant for about 25% of cost. The balance is to be paid by a donor.

South Church - Doug said panels on the roof facing west and facing south to parking lots would provide about 37 kilowatts for an annual estimated savings of \$4500. Panels on the North church flat roof facing

south and a little on the west would provide about 45 kilowatts for an annual estimated savings of \$5,200. The panels are angled.

Due to Plymouth's historical designation, they are working with the city to gain approval for installation. Plymouth can apply for a 30% federal tax credit (based on total expense) in 2025 to receive an IRS refund. State tax credits will be applied for and sold. Stewardship wants to apply for a Rice Foundation grant in anticipation of having panels installed in 2024. The due date to submit the application is September 10.

Rich explained that when Ethel and Raymond Rice established the foundation, they stipulated that Plymouth be an annual recipient of the funds. Rice Foundation grants have funded projects such as window and roof repairs/replacement, renovations in the Church basement and the purchase of playground equipment.

Debbie moved that Council approve a grant application for a solar installation project to be submitted to the Rice Foundation by September 10. Doug seconded the motion.

When asked about the current condition of the flat roof, Valerie said the roofing company will verify it is in good shape and can support the panels. Regarding the impact of panel installation and future building changes, Doug explained that nothing proposed in Phase 2 will be impacted by the panels, but if Phase 3 is ever implemented there could be potential impact on the South Church panels.

The motion carried unanimously.

7. Moderator's Report – Scott Morgan

- Scott suggested Council incorporate a planning and coordinating discussion at the September meeting and asked board representatives to be prepared to provide updates (5 minutes or so).

8. Associate Pastor's Report – Caroline Lawson Dean

- Confirmation year kicking off August 27 – 25 volunteers (29 students 6-8 grade).
- 9th grade creating small group.
- Launching supper circles – 5 weeks of dinners – deepening relationships around food.
 - A Kindergarten – 1st Grade Stepping Stone Circle
 - Parents of Young Adults Supper Circle
 - A Young Adult Supper Circle
 - Plymouth-Wide Supper Circles
 - An LGBTQ+ Supper Circle
 - A Justice & Advocacy Supper Circle
- Head Start update – Cassandra Matthew is the new director.
 - Opening two classrooms in September with teachers in the building.
 - Successful backpack drive.

9. Pastor's Report – Valerie Miller-Coleman

- Exterior signs – getting bids at this time, but design is completed. Hopefully up in a month.
- 394.9– average summer attendance.
- 491 – August 20 attendance.
- MAP budget worksheets due (consider bringing to September Council for planning/coordinating discussion).
- Membership goal of communicating with members unable to attend Plymouth (homebound and nursing home residents) initiated.

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.

- Debbie reminded Council that donations are being solicited for the annual auction. If your board hasn't talked about, please do so.
- Brandy said 33 groups are participating in the Ministry Fair this week-end.
- Thanksgiving is on November 23 this year. Council will meet on the 4th Tuesday, November 28.
- The December meeting will be held on December 19.

11. Adjournment and Lord's Prayer

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

12. Important Future Dates

Next Council Meeting – September 26, 2023 at 6:30 pm – This meeting will be in person.

Tentative 2023 Council Dates: (Fourth Tuesday except third in December): October 24, November 28, December 19.

Respectfully submitted by
Larissa Long, Clerk