

Council Minutes: February 2026
Plymouth Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
February 24, 2006

1. Call to Order – Jenny O’Brien, Moderator
Jenny called the meeting to order at 6:30

Voting Members Present:

Jenny O’Brien – Moderator
Doug Eason – Moderator-Elect
Rich Bireta – Immediate Past Moderator
Katy Anderson – Treasurer
David Treviño – At-Large Member
Annamarie Hill – At-Large Member
Jeff Eriksen – At-Large Member
Norine Spears – At-Large Member
Jeanne Fridell – At-Large Member
Emily Sharp – At-Large Member

Ex Officio Members Present

Valerie Miller-Coleman – Senior Pastor
Caroline Lawson Dean – Associate Pastor

Non-Voting Members Present

Caroline Rothnie – Clerk
Sonja Erickson – Deputy Treasurer

Others Present

Susan McCarty, Plymouth Historian
Terry Schmidt, PMC Chair
Elise Higgins, Plymouth Member
Devon Kim, Plymouth Member
John Burch, Plymouth Member

2. Invocation – Rev. Valerie Miller-Coleman, Senior Pastor
Valerie led attendees in prayer.
3. Consent Agenda

- 3.1. Approve this agenda
- 3.2. Approve the minutes from the January 20, 2026 Council meeting
- 3.3. Receive monthly financial reports
- 3.4. Approve amendments to Call Letters for the Senior and Associate Pastors
- 3.5. Approve a corporate resolution supporting a change in those authorized to conduct business with United Church Funds and act as authorized signers for the church bank accounts at Intrust Bank and Silver Lake State Bank.
- 3.6. Approve the following Committee nominations:
 - Jonathan Becker, Governance, three-year term
 - Daniel Jones, Facilities, three-year term
- 3.7. Approve the following Board nominations::
 - Jeff Gieger, Music and Fine Arts Board
 - Hannah Miller, Christian Education Board

Doug Eason moved to approve the consent agenda, Jeff Erickson seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

4. Church Treasurer's Report – Katy Anderson, Treasurer
 - 4.1. Financial Update

Through January, we are 8.3% of the way through the year, we have received 16.6% of our projected annual income and have spent 11.4% of our projected annual expenses. Early year activity included approximately \$63,000 in 2026 pledges paid in full in January, \$26,551 in Unrestricted Endowment Income, and \$63,416 in Designated Endowment Income. As a result, net revenue for 2026 reflects a \$65,581 surplus. Planned actions include reinvestment of CDARS for the operating funds and updates to bank access for the treasurer, deputy treasurer, and staff.

Doug asked about the pledge line. \$63,000 came in through people who paid their entire year pledge upfront.

5. Old Business
 - 5.1. **Consider reclassifying the History Committee as a regular Council Committee, making appropriate changes to the Policy Book to reflect the change, and approving the slate of nominees.**

Susan McCarthy spoke about the history committee. She became Plymouth historian 15 years ago. The history committee has been an outlier committee, doing things at their own pace. She doesn't want the parameters to change, but without term limits, there is no graceful way for

members to exit if they want to retire. In consultation with Valerie, they decided that formalizing the committee and adding term limits would help.

Doug noted that most committees are six or nine members, but this recommendation says seven. Susan said it's more like five now. Doug said that with the structure we have, six or nine would be better to be consistent with other committees. He recommended six. Doug asked when the clock starts for Susan McCarthy's term on the History Committee. Since it's a new committee, the clock might be able to start now. Rich said he will take to governance

Doug moved to approve, Norine seconded.

Jeff wanted to make sure that someone on Council will help Susan with the transition. Rich said that the proposal said members would make this decision.

Susan said that someone approached her with something that had not been added to an annual report 10 years ago. It was a wedding conducted in 2015 that did not make it into the annual report for the year. She will send Rich the specifics.

Jenny called for a vote. Motion carried unanimously.

- 5.2. Status of the Plymouth website – *Valerie Miller Coleman*.
Russ Ware is preparing the new version of the website for launch on Holy Week.
- 5.3. Update on naming the Harvest Home/Thanksgiving Dinner naming – *Caroline Lawson Dean*
The Service and Justice Board and Fellowship Board are meeting together in March.
- 5.4. Debrief from the February 22 Called Congregational Meeting
Council members shared their impressions of the Called Congregational Meeting.

Norine commended Jenny and thanked her for doing an excellent job. Thanked everyone who spoke, showed up, showed respect and grace.

Jenny said she wanted to hear the hard things too.

Annamarie said she was grateful this is over and there is a clear decision so we can move on to the next thing with more open lines of communication.

David thanked everyone. He appreciated hearing people's points of view and was glad that it was respectful. However, the hard cut off meant that some people who wanted to speak were not able to. He wonders if we should consider adding more time in the future.

Doug said we need to think about when people cast ballots. The longer the meeting goes, the more people will have to leave and not be able to cast their votes. It was positive to see 250 people participate, that is a sign of a healthy congregation. He received an email from someone who supported the project based on accessibility, and feels we need to address these concerns.

Rich agreed it was good to have a decision, and that there should be a plan to extend the comment period if we do this again. Noted that there was a lot of work behind the scenes to resolve parliamentary questions, which was why we voted at the end. More ballot access would be something to look at in the future.

Jeanne said that people didn't realize how much work the PMC had put into this. It can be difficult to communicate the behind-the-scenes work to the congregation. She wondered if we need more communication in the future. Providing more details so people understand the considerations.

Caroline said that the most important next step is to talk about accessibility. Name it, claim it, and think theologically about it. It has not been lost, but some may feel that it has been. We need to raise it up.

Valerie said she was glad for the PMC meeting last night. She has received many emails from congregants concerned about accessibility, some who wanted refunds for pledges or are thinking that Plymouth may not be their home. She says we are working on an accessibility solution. It may not be elegant, but it will be functional. We will make good on that

promise. The PMC met with the architect last night and will look at all options. She was glad to be able to tell concerned people that the PMC was working on it. It would be naive to not think the congregation is discontent. She spoke about concern over side communications around the meeting.

Jeff thought the meeting went well. Wants to know if there are plans in place to let the congregation know that accessibility is a priority going forward.

Jenny said she had received many emails. Some joyful, many concerned that accessibility has been thrown under the bus. She was dismayed and frustrated to hear that there was information being circulated in the sanctuary before the meeting and was concerned that it interfered with her mandate for a trustworthy process. She wished there was a chance for everyone to speak, and thinks all remarks should be part of the record – whether or not people got the chance to deliver them. She said she has opened up office hours each Wednesday afternoon.

6. New Business

6.1. **Approve forwarding a letter to the Kansas Oklahoma Conference in support of Julia Gaughan's ordination** – *Julia Gaughan, Ordination Candidate*

Julia shared her journey to ministry. She has been a Plymouth member since 2009, and has been engaged in many ways: Racial Justice Team, Stephen Minister, Moderator. She served on the National Board of the UCC and felt called to seminary. She spoke with Valerie about this, and entered seminary at Phillips. She has been certified through the KS/OK conference, and has served a designated term at Peace UCC, and is currently serving a designated term as an Associate Conference Minister for the Kansas Oklahoma Conference. She finished school in December.

Terry Schmidt, Kim Booth, and Elise Higgins, members of Julia's discernment committee, spoke of their experiences with her. They described her grounding, prayerful presence and what a joy it has been to watch her in this process.

Doug moved to approve. Emily seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

6.2. Update from Terry Schmidt, Project Management Committee Chair.

Terry yielded to Doug, because he was not in attendance at last night's meeting. Doug said they spent 30 minutes with the architects. They are charged with, based on the existing chancel, what we can do to make it accessible. Explored ramp options. Thinking about stairs – can stairs be replaced with a ramp, or do we have to respect the stairs? Asked architects for several options. They will find out what options are available for lifts. They are charged with finding as many options as possible.

The PMC needs more informed opinion and structure on what the accessibility needs are and what the church needs. They are recommending (informally) a subcommittee specifically focused on accessibility for the chancel and maybe for the church as a whole. Members would be Dot Nary, someone from Council, and Val McGhee from the PMC.

They got a report back on the choir elevator. It becomes more and more complex the more they work, and the price continues to go up. PMC will continue to explore, but are committed to making the loft accessible. The elevator is displacing some pipes.

Jenny said that an action item would be to make a recommendation to form the subcommittee to look at accessibility. Valerie clarified that the role of the committee would be to make recommendations, not just to hear from the congregation, but to bring in expert advice.

Jenny wanted to know if the committee would be a part of the PMC, or would report directly to Council. Terry said it hadn't been determined, but he sees the PMC as being charged with the heavy lifting of bringing the findings of the subcommittee to Council.

Jeff volunteered to be the Council member on the committee.

Doug moved to formally establish an accessibility subcommittee to the PMC with Dot Nary, Val McGhee, and Jeff Erickson as members.
Jeanne seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Terry said there would be lots of heavy lifting to create a workable plan. Once we start, Council needs to think about a recommendation that we would not have a twelve-member PMC running this project once we start construction. There would be a role for an advisory council for day to day operations for making this project work. We need a nimble group. This is not a recommendation at this time, just something to think about.

Jenny asked about phased construction – some construction this year, another sprint next summer, so we wouldn't have such a long time in the Mayflower room, would have more time with the organ, and be less likely to miss major holidays.

Doug said we could do easy stuff this summer. Floors and paint, everything in front of the walls. Carpet. There would be a 6-8 week window to do those things. Then, in 2027, when Easter is 2 weeks earlier, we could do the rest. They haven't talked to construction people, but it is a concept that would allow us to get our feet wet, take some of the burden off the larger project. The contractor may not be willing to do it. Stephen thinks it is probably a net neutral expense. We may be able to submit 2 historic tax credit proposals, rather than one, so we could start one earlier for the first phase.

Jeff asked, in light of the conversation about the construction committee, would we start with a project manager who we can feed all this to and let them put something together. Is there someone in the congregation who can become the lead?

Terry said they have not spent enough time talking about it. But there is a tentative plan. Doug said he wasn't sure one person should have to bear all the decisions but there probably does need to be a point person.

6.3. Assign Board Liaisons

Rich explained that each at-large member is assigned a board, acting as a pipeline between board and Council. This may mean attending some or all board meetings, but that is up to board and liaisons. All members except Emily have boards.

Jeanne would like to switch with Annamarie and serve as liaison for the membership board.

The liaisons are:

Jeanne: Membership

Annamarie: Fellowship

Jeff: Music and Fine Arts

Norine: Service and Justice

David: Deacons

Emily: Christian Ed.

Caroline Rothnie will serve as liaison for the history committee.

6.4. **Approve Personnel Policy Updates** – *Devon Kim*

Devon asked if there were any questions about the policy updates.

The personnel committee respectfully requests Council approval of the new policy book, with an effective date retroactively set to Jan 1, 2026.

Emily moved to approve, Doug seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

7. 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.

Devon Kim spoke about her concern about the vote at the Called Congregational Meeting. As the chair of the Enter In campaign, she noted that she put together a timeline of the campaign that was included in the annual report. This has been documented publicly for the course of years. She put the timeline together by going through that documentation, so she feels it is unfair to say there was no communication. She expressed concern about the side communications, saying that she did not receive communications from the opposition group, and that it would have been fair for someone to talk to her. She apologized to the congregation for anyone who participated in the campaign and did not get what was promised.

8. Moderator's Report – Jenny O'Brien

8.1. Jenny said we have identified the date for the Council retreat. Saturday 3/21, 9 AM - noon. Location TBD. Doug and Jenny will put together an agenda, and the focus will be on membership.

9. Associate Pastor's Report - Rev. Caroline Lawson Dean, Associate Pastor

Caroline shared some important numbers:

65+ adults for Plymouth Academy

19 students in OWL K-5

6 kids in childcare

25 signups for the Women's Retreat

8 families in 8th grade Stepping Stones.

And we have new members and many baptisms. She concluded by saying: "It is Lent. Come hang out at Plymouth Academy."

10. Senior Pastor's Report - Rev. Valerie Miller-Coleman, Senior Pastor

Valerie gave an attendance update (combined online and in-person) – the January average was 320 (with an outlier due to snow.)

She spoke about what we learned from the Congregational Meeting: we have an outstanding moderator, an engaged congregation, good process, bylaws, parliamentarian. And also, fear and anxiety about the world, about our neighbors, even in the pews. She encouraged vigilance in how we speak about our neighbors, speaking for ourselves, not others. She wants to focus on cultivating the healthy things. "What we focus on is what grows."

11. Important Future Dates:

Next Council Meeting: March 24, 2026 @ **6:30 pm** in the Mayflower Room

March 24 – Regular Council Meeting

March 21 – Council Retreat

April 28 – Regular Council Meeting

May 26 – Regular Council Meeting

June 23 – Regular Council Meeting

July – No Meeting

12. Adjournment and Lord's Prayer
Meeting was adjourned at 8:08