

Council Minutes: September 2023
Plymouth Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
Tuesday, September 26, 2023

1. Call to Order – Sonia Jordan – Moderator Elect
Sonia called the meeting to order at 6:33.

Members present:

Sonia Jordan – Moderator Elect
Larissa Long – Clerk
Doni Mooberry Slough – Treasurer
Rich Bireta – Deputy Treasurer
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
Beth Chambers – Mission & Service
Kathy Bowen – Music & Fine Arts
Dick Orchard – Endowment
Susan McCarthy – History

Members not present:

Scott Morgan – Moderator
Devon Kim – Immediate-Past Moderator
David Ambler – At Large Member
Linda Thompson - Fellowship
Kelley Stillings – Membership
Annas Boyer - Personnel

2. Invocation – Valerie Miller-Coleman
Valerie read passages from “Irresistible Faith: Becoming the Kind of Christian the World Can’t Resist” by Scott Sauls. Some thoughts from the passages:
What would it look like –
 - To live compellingly and lovingly?
 - When local churches are diverse and welcoming?
 - Could we become the best kind of friend to have and the best kind of enemy as well?
3. Consent Agenda
 - 3.1 Approve Agenda
 - 3.2 Approve Minutes from August 22, 2023
 - 3.3 Receive Financial Reports

Kathy Bowen moved to approve the consent agenda; Doug Eason seconded; motion unanimously approved.

4. Church Treasurer's Report – Doni Mooberry Slough, Treasurer

4.1. Financial Update and Fun Fact

Through August we are 67% of the way through the year, have received income covering 70% of expenses and spent 66% of budget expenses. Some pledges were paid in full this month, so income is looking good.

Fun fact – Doni shared some unusual ways congregations have raised funds.

- Sold small squares of dirt to see who could “charm” the most worms.
- Paid to throw pies at pastors.
- Used insurance proceeds to rebuild after the church was destroyed by fire from a lightning strike. Perhaps heavenly intervention as the church was deeply in debt?

5. Old Business

5.1 Goals and Strategy Update Facilities – Valerie Miller-Coleman and Debbie Schmidt

Listening Sessions

Valerie said the Listening Sessions conducted by Alan Wildes with Generis have been well attended and thanked Debbie for coordinating food and beverages for participants. He'll provide a report within two weeks after analyzing notes from the sessions and general financial information from annual reports and budgets. She said the report will provide guidance on next steps regarding a capital campaign, although it generally sounds like more information will be needed to establish the cost and timeline.

The report will be sent to Valerie, then to Stewardship and then to Council.

Rich met with Alan prior to the listening sessions and shared information about Plymouth's financial history and trends, including the capital campaign 23 years ago. He participated in the first session and said he was very impressed with Alan's skills and ability to get people to talk.

Sonia attended the morning session and said it seemed to her the organ was a non-negotiable item, even if a capital campaign isn't recommended. It was suggested that a session targeted on the Organ Committee and its work to date could be helpful. Kathy said the organ budget needs to be increased. Some parts are so old it's difficult if not impossible to repair.

Rice Foundation Grant Request

Debbie said the grant request was submitted timely to the Rice Foundation. Stewardship is still waiting for a response from the City of Lawrence regarding the installation of solar panels on South Church.

5.2 Bylaws and Policy Update – Rich Bireta, Larissa Long and Doug Eason

Doug said the vote on the Constitution was 104 Yes; 48 No. A two-thirds majority was required for passage or 102 affirmative votes. The vote on the Bylaws was 92 Yes; 59 No. A simple majority required 76 affirmative votes.

Fifty-nine no votes sends a strong message, so a successful implementation of the changes is imperative. We must ensure an open nominating process which is inclusive of various opinions and skill sets. We should evaluate ourselves in a year and make adjustments if needed.

Rich said he was surprised and a little disappointed in the large percentage of no votes. Not a point-by-point rebuttal, but we will need to transition well to the smaller Council format.

Sue and Matt DelVecchio (chair-elect of Deacons) reviewed the changes and have some questions. Deacons have specific areas of responsibility, but they couldn't find them. She suggested that guidance be provided to board chairs regarding the changes. Dick thinks they are listed in policies and procedures, but Sue said she couldn't find them. Doug suggested she contact Scott as Council has not yet approved the policies and they need to be seamless.

Susan Osborn suggested consideration be given to someone who wasn't supportive of the bylaws change, but had appropriate skill sets and qualifications. She also thought we should look for people who have some business skills or have served on other boards or organizations. And we shouldn't forget individuals who may not have been involved.

Sonia, who will chair the nominating committee is working to establish the nominating committee with members representing diverse perspectives and she's getting close to a finalized committee. She believes it is important to have the committee be a congregant-led effort. Heather will be the staff representative. Sonia said she values diversity of opinion and is quite open to a diverse Council. Members from both services, ages and membership status should be considered.

Debbie asked if nominations from the floor would be by written ballot. The answer was yes.

5.3 Revenue Committee, possible approval of new Council Committee – Debbie Schmidt

Debbie isn't seeking action today but did give her thoughts regarding a revenue committee. Referencing the 5-year plan developed by Rich, Doni and Stephen, she said it needs to be strategic. How can we be financially viable in the future? She wants to spend time doing research and will come to Council in October with a plan for consideration.

6. New Business

6.1 Planning and Coordinating Session

Christian Education - Korey Kaul said the board oversees adult, youth and children's Christian education programs. The focus currently is on youth and children. Curricula has been developed for children, but the real surge is in youth. How do we encourage high school students to come to church? The board is looking at evangelical churches, as those youth are very involved. The messages are different, but is it the message or the method that makes the difference?

In October, Caroline, Kara and two other Plymouth representatives will attend the one-day "Orange Conference" in Kansas City, which focuses on youth ministry.

Deacons – Sue explained that the Deacons are spiritual lay leaders and responsible for everything in the sanctuary. The areas they manage or support/coordinate include lay leaders;

special services; members in discernment; prayer teams; Stephen Ministries; ushers; We Care; and acolytes. Valerie is the staff representative. Goals include writing lead and liaison descriptions and codifying procedures. They would like additional financial support for Stephen Ministries and staff development.

Rich said the Doug and Ginny Beene endowed fund specified funding for Stephen Ministries. He also thanked Doug Eason for his work on securing the endowed fund.

Endowment - Dick said messages regarding planned giving have been placed periodically in "The Rock" and church bulletin. The book "Faithful Giving" suggests gently nudging people to think of the church in their planned giving. A reception for members of the *Cordley Circle of Giving* (members who have indicated in writing their intent to include Plymouth in planned giving) is being considered.

Fellowship – Valerie said participation in coffee hour is increasing and the cookies are a big hit. The annual picnic was enjoyed by many, and LINK benefitted from what was left.

Membership – Valerie said 24 adults joined the church on Sunday. Heather is doing a great job with new and prospective members and working with welcome teams. Although she's a part-time Assistant Pastor her role is an important one and we're working to keep her salary equitable.

Mission and Service - Beth Chambers and Caroline – They are working to create a culture of gratitude for those supporting mission and service. Activities include the ministry fair; volunteer engagement; racial justice; earth care work and an upcoming Open and Affirming forum. The Easter offering supported the language program, Head Start and disaster relief. A successful backpack drive just ended.

Music and Fine Arts - Kathy – Choir members are involved each week in a variety of activities including culinary, knitting, crafts, weekly worship music, youth engagement, and dinner theatre. They seek opportunities to develop relationships and coordinate with other boards.

Stewardship – Debbie said the annual appeal will kick off in October and we need to have a better understanding of the demographic differences of givers and how to reach them via different platforms.

6.2 Goal Setting – Sonia Jordan

Sonia wants to make progress on the facilities plan and help with an effective implementation of the new bylaws. There is also the possibility of a capital campaign. Communications and transparency will be required.

7. Moderator's Report – Sonia Jordan

The updates she gave on the listening session and nominating committee are her report. But she added that she loves the Holy Season and is looking forward to December.

8. Associate Pastor's Report – Caroline Lawson Dean

- Six Supper Circles, with 70-80 total participants
- Confirmation class is starting.

9. Pastor's Report – Valerie Miller-Coleman

- Faith Foundation retreat this weekend.
- New class between services – The M Word (Money)
- Blessing of congregational care visitors
- 490 in attendance on Sept. 24

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

Doug moved to adjourn; Sue seconded; motion carried unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 8:51.

12. Important Future Dates:

Next Council Meeting: October 24, 2023 at 6:30 pm – this meeting will be in person

Tentative Future Council Dates (fourth Tuesday, except third in December):

November 28, December 19, January 23, 2024