

Plymouth Congregational Church

United Church of Christ Annual Meeting Minutes

Sunday, February 9, 2025

1. Call to Order – Sonia Jordan, Moderator

Sonia called the 170th Annual Congregational Meeting to order at 10:57 am. She appointed Mark Simpson meeting parliamentarian, who said a quorum was present. Sonia then entertained a motion to accept the agenda as printed in the Annual Report.

Cindy Carttar moved to accept the agenda as presented in the Annual Report; Ann McElhenny seconded; motion carried unanimously.

2. Invocation – Rev. Dr. Valerie Miller-Coleman, Senior Pastor

Rev. Dr. Valerie Miller-Coleman led the congregation in prayer.

3. Approval of Minutes from the February 4, 2024 Annual Meeting – Sonia Jordan

Scott Morgan moved to accept the February 4, 2024 Annual Meeting minutes as printed in the Annual Report; Kathleen Morgan seconded; motion carried unanimously.

4. Approval of Minutes from the January 11, 2024 Called Meeting

Doug Eason moved to accept the January 11, 2024 Called Meeting minutes as printed in the Annual Report; Devon Kim seconded; motion carried unanimously.

5. Recognition of Boards, Officers and Committees – Sonia Jordan

Sonia expressed her appreciation for all who served in various positions during what was a transitional year, due to a new governance structure. She then thanked Scott Morgan for his service on the Moderator Team and Terry Schmidt, for stepping into the leadership role of the Project Management Committee.

6. Project Management Committee (PMC Update – Terry Schmidt

Terry began by recognizing and thanking Susan McCarthy, Church Historian, for the historical building documentation she provided.

He said the PMC has seven voting and four non-voting ex officio members who are working diligently to meet the “Enter In” campaign goals. The committee first met in July, 2024 and has continued to meet about every two weeks, as well as meeting informally and in one-on-one meetings with the architects. Multiple design concepts have been viewed and although they don’t have anything to present yet, they may have something by late February or early March. Terry said he can guarantee that 100% of the congregation won’t agree on what is presented, but they will do

their best to bring a plan that meets both the financial and campaign mission goals. A current challenge is determining the possibility of historical tax credits. He then asked Stephen Carttar to provide financial aspects of the project.

Stephen thanked Devon Kim and the “Enter In” committee for a successful campaign, raising more than \$3.2 million. Forty percent of campaign pledges (\$1,277,000) have been received. Expenses totaling \$293,000 have been paid, including all campaign expenses, the organ downpayment of \$198,600 and some architectural fees. The project was estimated at \$4.5 million with the anticipation of historical tax credits providing \$1.3 million. Historical tax credits are not currently budgeted, but other funding opportunities are being explored.

Terry then asked if there were questions from the congregation. Geraldo Sousa asked (1) what can be accomplished with \$3.2 million if additional funding isn’t raised and (2) what is the project sequence – the design first? Then what? When construction begins, where will services be moved?

Terry said if \$4.5 isn’t available, costs will have to be reduced. There isn’t a definitive answer at this time, but we do have finite dollars to work with. The timeline begins with the “end”, when the organ is installed in January 2028 and working back from that. There are two ideas – start construction in August 2025 or perhaps in January 2026. Based on recent information, the PMC is more inclined to begin in 2026 at this time. They will make a recommendation to Council a little further in the process.

They are leaning toward keeping services in the Church and are working with the Facilities Committee on determining space possibilities - perhaps in the Mayflower Room. They want to keep the congregation together as well as possible, especially because of the growth in youth and various church education programs.

Sonia thanked Terry and the PMC for their work on the project. It’s a complex project and she shared her immense gratitude to committee members.

7. Presentation and Approval of the 2024 Financial Report – Stephen Carttar, Treasurer

Stephen wanted the congregation to understand the Church’s financial statements and asked them to turn to Page 54 of the Annual Report. He provided an overview of the Statement of Revenue and Expense by Class, adding that this information is published each month on the Church website and encouraged them to review it. Stephen then pointed out that in 2024 the congregation was exceptionally generous, contributing a total of \$1,930,815 (\$875,092 pledges/gifts and \$1,055,723 “Enter In”). He also pointed out that although it was a challenging year, it ended with a surplus of \$14,560.

Linda Mannering moved to accept the 2024 financial report as presented; Jackie Lord seconded; motion carried unanimously.

8. Approval of the 2025 Budget – Stephen Carttar, Treasurer

Stephen thanked Council for their work on putting together a balanced budget for the congregation's consideration. He said the following items were used to cover the shortfall:

- 2024 surplus of \$14,560 carried forward
- \$8,000 of a \$10,000 one-time gift
- Payroll Protection Program (PPP) revenue - \$22,000
- Recognizing a \$20,000 provision for operating reserves
- 2024 pledges received in 2025 - \$15,300

He added that no changes were made to the requested personnel budget - all reductions were in operations.

David Bergeron, referencing Page 52, asked why there was a Director of Operations (\$35,000) and a new line item for Business Manager (\$40,000). Sonia said Jaron's workload is such that it prohibits him from engaging in strategic work on future growth and development. He came up with a plan that reduces his hours but provides opportunities to realign responsibilities as the Church grows. Defined job descriptions aren't available at this time, as positions can't be in place until the budget is approved.

Scott, who serves on Personnel, added that much of the staff are part time, they like those hours and don't want to change their part-time status. However, due to the size of the budget and the Church's growth, they are working overtime, and we risk losing valuable staff due to burnout.

Sonia then asked for a motion to approve the 2025 budget as presented.

Jonathan Becker moved to approve the 2025 Budget as presented; Scott Morgan seconded.

Geraldo thanked Council for their work on the budget. He said the balanced budget looks good, but he has concerns about using a one-time \$25,000 gift, money from reserves and the PPP to do so. The PPP funds will run out eventually and utilizing reserves is a concern. How much are we using of one-time revenue sources?

Stephen said we always want provide transparency, and we are using funds that will decrease over time. The \$25,000 one-time gift decreases by \$5,000 each year and was given as seed money for the Director of Faith Formation position. The youth program is strong and growing and the intent is to support the youth growth momentum. We are using short-term funds to start funding a long-term budget item – “prime the pump” mentality. This year we are using approximately \$90,000 of one-time or decreasing revenue sources.

Stephen also said recent growth in the line item “Contributions No Pledge” is due to younger members who don’t tend to pledge but do provide financial support. It’s an increase, but not enough to offset expenses. The PPP reserve of approximately \$50,000 will be gone in two years. The operating reserve was established after debt was retired and since then yearly transfers of \$20,000 plus any annual carryover have been made. There is currently about \$400,000 in reserves and we have been advised to have 3 months operating expenses in reserves. We spend about \$100,000 each month and have just under 4 months available. We are keeping the practice of funding for reserves but know we don’t have to increase the amount at this time. However, as the budget grows, we will expect the annual reserve amount to increase as well

John Lord said he likes the initiative of “priming the pump” – using short-term funds to do a long-term hiring and assumes the position is not a one-year position. He feels the challenge is to make sure the goals they are given and challenges they are asked to address be given in such a way that it’s more of a short-term project so we can then evaluate usage and the guidance they are able to provide going forward. He just doesn’t want to be in a situation in a few years where the budget isn’t where it needs to be and staff are impacted. Stephen said Council and the Finance Committee will continue to monitor but remember we’re a Congregational Church, so be involved and reach out if you have questions or concerns.

Sonia echoed Stephen’s comments, adding that these questions and concerns were discussed by Council.

Motion carried, with one dissent.

9. Nominating Committee Report and Election of Officers – Rich Bireta, Nominating Committee Chair

Rich thanked the Nominating Committee - Sonia Jordan, Scott Morgan, Sarah Whitten and John Lord, for their work and Valerie for her consultation with the committee. Referencing the Nominating Committee Ballot, he said an asterisk following a name indicated a congregational vote was needed. Names without asterisks will continue in a multi-year appointment.

Rich asked that the following changes be made on the Nominating Committee Ballot: An asterisk should follow Amanda Nagengast’s name, who is filling a one-year term on Christian Education; Rachel Goossen’s name should replace Beth Chambers’ name, on Service and Justice.

He introduced Jenny O’Brien, Moderator Elect, adding that she has served on Music and Fine Arts, Service and Justice, the Plymouth Auction Team and is a Management Analyst for the City of Lawrence.

Rich then moved that the Nominating Committee Ballot be accepted with the corrections previously noted; Doug Eason seconded; motion carried unanimously.

Rich said the Nominating Committee also recommended members to serve on committees and other appointments, which were approved by Council at the January meeting.

10. Open Forum

David Bergeron asked who prepared the Endowment report on page 45, because all other reports had names. It's a Statement of Endowment but doesn't provide any information on earnings – just a list of names. What were the 2024 earnings?

Doni Mooberry Slough and Dick Orchard, Annual Appeal and Fundraising Committee members, said they didn't realize a written report was needed. Scott told Doni it wasn't her fault, as the Annual Appeal and Fundraising Committee's work is to manage the Annual Appeal and encourage long-term gifts.

Scott said there is not an Endowment Committee as it was absorbed into the Finance Committee under the new governance structure. The Finance Committee is responsible for oversight and management of Endowment.

Dick Orchard said the Endowment balance is \$2,252,000 compared to \$2,147,000 at 12/31/23 (4.9%) increase. However, the actual gain was 8.9% because Endowment paid 4% (\$74,675) to Plymouth in 2024. The funds are managed by United Church Funds, which can also handle charitable annuities.

David would like that information provided separately in the report.

Sonia said the discussion was a good reminder of information needed on the 2025 Annual Report. Stephen said Endowment's financial information can be found on page 61 of the Annual Report, adding that a \$100,000 gift to Plymouth Endowment is not included in the report, as it hasn't yet been received.

Sarah Whitten asked Terry and the PMC to remember the "shorter than average person" and those seated in the in back of the sanctuary as the project moves forward. Sonia said they are working to maximize sight line access as much as possible.

Valerie expressed appreciation for Sonia's leadership and guidance as Moderator and for serving with grace. In gratitude, a contribution in her name will be given to the City of Lawrence Parks & Recreation Scholarship for Youth Sports.

11. Presentation of 2025 Moderator – Sonia Jordan

Sonia thanked God for the opportunity to serve and the congregation for being easy to work with, adding that she's learned a lot. She gave a special thank you to her husband, who was home

watching their daughter, for his help and support throughout the year. She said she had a note reminding her to say nice things about Rich, which is so easy! She did wonder why he didn't talk at Council, adding that wiser people might say it's a sign of wisdom, not to speak until you have something to say. Then she met with him for lunch and they talked for several hours.

She thanked Scott for his assistance and covering for her when she was absent. She looks forward to continuing to work with Rich and getting to know Jenny.

12. Response – Rich Bireta, 2025 Moderator

Rich, on behalf of the congregation, thanked Sonia and looks forward to working with her for one more year. He thanked Scott for his three years of service, pointing out his work on a policy book and bylaw changes. He's leaving the church in much better shape because of that work.

He and Jane have been members for over 30 years, raised six children in the church and for 15 years he was a "Sunday Morning" member, happy to sit in the congregation. However, he has been the Church Treasurer, served on Stewardship and Fellowship boards and participated in various faith formation groups. He encourages other "Sunday Morning" members to volunteer or say yes when asked to serve. He is humbled to serve as Moderator. It will be a busy year, but the Church is in good financial shape with a growing membership. He asks that you not hesitate to contact him as he looks forward to hearing from you.

13. Adjournment – Rich Bireta

Geraldo Sousa moved to adjourn the meeting; David Bergeron seconded; motion carried unanimously.

14. Benediction – Rev. Dr. Valerie Miller-Coleman

Valerie gave the benediction.

Submitted by Larissa Long
Plymouth Church Clerk