

Due to the COVID-19 virus pandemic, the elders and staff met via a video-conference Session meeting that began at 7:00 PM.

MINUTES

PRESENT: Teaching Elders: Senior Pastor The Rev. Dr. Stephen D. McConnell (Moderator), and Congregational Life Pastor The Rev. Dr. Lal Hmingliani Browne. Ruling Elders: Jeanne Asakura, Marcia Baarson, Linda Calvert, Joan Emrich, Gerry Hailey, Andrea Jackson, Cliff McHenry, Jason Morton, Sandi Stewart, Matthew Straeb, and Pam Williams. Clerk to the Session Linda Getzen, Executive Director of Operations Pam Gillespie, Music Director Genevieve Beauchamp, and Director of Outreach & Families Sarah Soboleski. **EXCUSED:** Family Life Pastor The Rev. Laurie Haas and Ruling Elder Lou Stern.

QUORUM, CALL TO ORDER, AND OPENING PRAYER: A quorum was established. Dr. McConnell served as Moderator. He called the meeting to order and opened with prayer and a devotion based on Mark 6:47-52. In the midst of the storms, please know that Jesus is always nearby. Particular prayers were asked for Bruce and Cindy Hedgepeth, and their son Will who is now under hospice care at home.

MOTION MADE, SECONDED, and PASSED: To approve the Agenda for the Meeting with the addition of a New Business discussion on re-opening preparations.

CORRESPONDENCE AND CLERK'S ANNOUNCEMENTS: *The Clerk to the Session emails to Staff and Elders pertinent correspondence received between Session Meetings.* The Clerk reported the following:

- New Member: Pastor Hmingi held another new member class in June – this time for Donna Marie Kesten. Donna was asked the required questions and affirmative answers were given. **MOTION MADE, SECONDED, and PASSED: To receive Donna Marie Kesten as a Member of Church of the Palms.**
- The Clerk was a Commissioner to the called Presbytery meeting held via video conference on June 3, 2020. She provided a summary of the results of that challenging meeting.

STAFF REPORTS:

Executive Director of Operations Pam Gillespie:

- See written report in Session package for financial details
- Palms Preschool - initial re-opening went well last week.
- Food Pantry – Somewhat fewer customers as other area food pantries begin to re-open.

Music Director Genevieve Beauchamp:

- The four singers who provide music for the video Sunday services may join COP!
- Keeping in touch with the choir.
- She and Sarah are taking a Presbyterian polity class in seminary – good luck!

Director of Outreach & Families Sarah Soboleski:

- Outreach: Trying things in fresh ways – ex., weekly reading discussions based on the Daily Devotions on the Book of Mark, Facebook conversations about the readings, an MLK book discussion signup.
- Communications: Being nimble with technology is key - getting better and better.
- Youth and Families: Carol Homeister continues to engage with the children of the church. Beginnings of the search for a new Youth Director.

Congregational Life Pastor The Rev. Dr. Lal Hmingliani Browne:

- Congregational Life: 51 callers are devoted to reaching out to our elderly and homebound. Pastor Hmingi sends cheery notes to 300+ single members. So many have responded how profoundly grateful they are for these caring touches. The congregation is thankful for the daily devotions, video worship, and music. Very positive responses.

Senior Pastor The Rev. Dr. Stephen D. McConnell:

- Pastor Laurie is on vacation.
- Additional comments in Old/New Business below.

OMNIBUS MOTION: MOTION MADE, SECONDED, and PASSED: To pass the following Omnibus Motion (Items A-F), as presented in the Agenda:

A. TO APPROVE THE FOLLOWING MINUTES:

1. Stated Session Meeting: 05/18/2020

B. TO APPROVE THE CLERK'S REPORT:

1. Assignments and Meetings:
 - a. Sunday Morning Prayers for the Pastors: Month of July: **Matthew Straeb**
 - b. Session Meeting Storyteller: Tentative July 27: **None scheduled**
 - c. Deacons' Exec. Comm. Meeting: Tentative July 6 at 7 PM: **Lou Stern**
 - d. Special Session Meeting to Receive New Members: Tentative Sunday, July 12 at 11 AM, Chapel: **Group 3 Elders (G. Hailey, S. Stewart, P. Williams)**
2. Membership Statistics, Baptisms & Weddings, and Home Communion (see attached Clerk's Report)

C. TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM:

1. Elder attending Deacons' Exec. Comm. meeting in June: Cancelled.
2. Commissioner attending called Presbytery meeting on June 3, 2020 – Linda Getzen

D. TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM SESSION COMMITTEES:

1. Administration and Finance: Ch. Andrea Jackson (includes Building and Grounds Team)
2. Global Partner Mission: Ch. Matthew Straeb
3. Personnel: Ch. Joan Emrich

E. TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM MINISTRY TEAMS:

1. Family & Student Ministries (includes Palms Preschool) *See staff reports above*
2. Contemporary Worship Service Leadership *No written report this month*
3. Presbyterian Women *No written report this month*
4. Stephen Ministry Leadership

F. TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM CONGREGATION COMMITTEES:

1. Deacons' Executive Committee: Ch. Carol Washchuk
2. Memorial Garden Board: Ch. Sue Angle *No written report this month*
3. Nominating: Ch. Marcia Baarson

OLD BUSINESS:

1. Finance update: Administration and Finance Committee Chair Andrea Jackson reported. Monthly giving vs. expense is leveling off as predicted. June may end with a negative. The Palms Preschool re-opened at 60% occupancy, but is incurring the expense of a full staff. COP is in a great cash position and has reserves. Financial commitments are being met. But she reminded the Session to remain realistic in the face of so much uncertainty. The federal PPP rules keep changing, but she expects the loan COP received to be forgiven in full. There is a good management of expenses by staff. The Moderator mentioned that it is important to keep the

importance of continued support before the congregation. Sustainability is the goal, but it is difficult to plan for as the year of the pandemic progresses.

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Strategic Planning Update. Pastor Steve reported. The staff is trying to assess what will be the “new normal” of church life and what sustainability of our ministries will look like. The staff is brainstorming on how to build on the good that is happening now. For instance, how does COP use the immensely popular on-line ministry in the best way? Focusing more attention to on-line engagement is a must.
2. Reopening Plans. The Moderator facilitated a broad discussion about strategies for re-opening, assessing the ever-changing situations in Florida and in our local communities, and dealing with the contagion uncertainties as the COVID-19 virus continues to spread. In the Session package, each ministry area has prepared written transition plans for re-opening various parts of church life. These plans are beginning road maps that must remain fluid to adapt as the pandemic environment changes.
3. Audio/Visual Project Request. Sarah Soboleski reported. She provided a slide presentation about the status of Audio/Visual communication at COP. We have the opportunity to grow our popular digital ministry. She showed snippets of what COP might look like with enhanced audio/visual equipment. In preparation for a Grant Request to the Foundation, interviews have been held for project managers and bids have been requested. Sarah reported on various areas on campus that have needs for upgrades and room for innovation. For example, the Campus Center has the most urgent needs – being able to broadcast services and programs from there, also creatively setting up a dedicated studio space to do recordings. The Sanctuary needs better, more flexible lighting and additional camera angles to promote a better on-line worship experience. The Chapel (under renovation) and the Children’s Worship Space also need audio/visual attention. Sarah and the staff are preparing the Grant Request for the Foundation. The request will come before the Session in July.
4. July Session meetings. **Moved, seconded and passed: (1) to call a Special Session Meeting for Wednesday, July 8, 2020, at 7:00 PM via video conference for the purposes of: (i) receiving and acting upon a grant request to the Foundation for the Audio/Visual project, (ii) officially appoint Liaisons for our two Inquirers [see item 5 below], and (iii) addressing any COVID-19 related matters needing Session attention; and (2) to confirm that a regular monthly Session meeting will be held on Monday July 27, via video conference, for general business purposes. Either meeting is subject to being cancelled by the Moderator as needs change.**
5. Inquirer Applications. The Moderator explained that seminarians Genevieve Beauchamp and Sarah Soboleski wish to come under the care of the Peace River Presbytery Committee on Preparation for Ministry as Inquirers. He explained the role of the Session when a church member wishes to enroll with the presbytery as an Inquirer. The Applicants submitted themselves to the Session for examination and provided their written answers to their Questions for Reflection. They explained their faith journeys and their passions for continuing to grow in ministry. **MOTION MADE, SECONDED and PASSED: To recommend that Genevieve Beauchamp and Sarah Soboleski be enrolled with Peace River Presbytery as Inquirers.** Each Inquirer will have a Liaison appointed by the Session to walk with her. That Ruling Elder will participate with the Inquirer and the Session as they explore and evaluate the Inquirer’s progress. The Inquirers are in conversation with potential Liaisons, so official appointments will be made at the next Session meeting.
6. Race Conversation. Pastor Steve reported that the *Race and the Church* group at COP, which was formed well before the recent national and worldwide racial protests and escalating tensions,

has found new urgency in their work. Pastor Steve and this group have made the first steps to join in social justice ministry with the Light of the World International Church, a multicultural church in Sarasota, and their Pastor Kelvin Lumpkin. Session members are encouraged to give their feedback as COP explores this challenging opportunity to examine and improve our relations with each other.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND CONCLUDING REMARKS:

1. Nominating Committee Forms – Marcia Baarson reported. She will email nominating forms to the Session and encouraged all to respond with the names of potential nominees for the various church elected offices.
2. Reading: *Strength to Love* by Martin Luther King Jr.
3. The suggestion was made for the congregation to be provided with updates on the various Open Palms capital projects that are progressing around campus.

There being no further business to come before the Session, **MOTION MADE, SECONDED, and PASSED:**
To adjourn the meeting at approximately 9:00 PM with prayer by Pastor Hmingi Browne.

By: _____
The Rev. Dr. Stephen D. McConnell
Moderator

By: _____
Linda R. Getzen
Clerk to the Session

Attachment to official minutes:
Clerk's Report (statistics)