

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

**QUORUM, CALL TO ORDER, AND OPENING PRAYER:** A quorum was established. Dr. McConnell served as Moderator. He called the meeting to order, opened with a devotion inspired by *Hidden Christmas*, by Timothy Keller, and offered the prayer. **CONSENSUS: To approve the Agenda for the Meeting.**

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

- **MOTION MADE, SECONDED, and PASSED: To receive the following new members who attended Pastor Hmingi's December New Member Classes: Edgar T. Lawton, III, David Byrd, and Gemma Estimada.**

### STAFF REPORTS:

#### Director of Outreach & Families Sarah Soboleski

- Families – The search goes on for a Youth Director. Youth activities continue.
- Communications – New Director of Digital Ministry Matt Liddell has been a pleasure to work with!
- Analytics – There has been a steady presence of both on-line and in-person worshippers. Averaging 600 unique IP addresses – of which many have multiple viewers per address. In-person attendance on Sundays is about 200.

#### Music Director Genevieve Beauchamp:

- The Advent video conference series on Wednesday has been well attended.
- Working on the many events occurring in December.
- Finishing school!

#### Family Life Pastor The Rev. Laurie Haas:

- The pre-school *Christmas Under the Stars* outdoor event in the courtyard was delightful.
- All of the various services this Advent/Christmas season have felt so different due to the pandemic.

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

- Groups are meeting to discuss *Hidden Christmas* by Timothy Keller.
- Writing cards, cards, notes, and more cards. This “feeds her soul.” Calling those who are not well or who have lost loved ones. 2 graveside funeral services.
- Had a nice study leave – reading and started fishing again.
- Happy 60<sup>th</sup> to Hmingi!

**Executive Director of Operations Pam Gillespie:**

The Staff Christmas party was held last week - outside. Their first time all together in 9 months. Serenaded by the preschoolers.

- The Palms Preschool continues to add students.

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

- Christmas week brings a full array of worship experiences – in person and via video technology.

**OMNIBUS MOTION: APPROVED WITH NO OBJECTION: To pass the following Omnibus Motion (Items A-G), as presented in the Agenda:**

**A. TO APPROVE THE FOLLOWING MINUTES:**

1. Stated Session Meeting: 11/23/2020

**B. TO APPROVE THE CLERK'S REPORT:**

1. Assignments and Meetings:
  - a. Sunday Morning Prayers for the Pastors: Month of January (until further notice, please email prayers before Thursday's taping of service): **Joan Emrich**
  - b. Session Meeting Storyteller for Jan. ~~Tentative Cancelled~~: **Hmingi Browne**
  - c. Deacons' Exec. Comm. Meeting: ~~Tentative~~ Mon. Jan. 4 at 7 PM: **Gerry Hailey**
  - d. Special Session Meeting to Receive New Members: ~~Tentative~~ Sunday, Jan. 10 at 11 AM (may be cancelled or date changed by Pastor Hmingi Browne or done via teleconference: **Group 1 Elders (M. Baarson, A. Jackson, C. McHenry)**)
2. Membership Statistics, Baptisms & Weddings, and Home Communion (see attached Clerk's Report *as revised - to correct middle name of a baptized child*)

**C. TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM:**

1. Elder attending Deacons' Exec. Comm. meeting in December: Cancelled.

**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 below*
2. Contemporary Worship Service Leadership *No written report this month*
3. Presbyterian Women *No written report this month*
4. Stephen Ministry Leadership *No written report this month*

**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

**G. TO ELECT FOUNDATION DIRECTOR: Andrew McFall as a Class of 2024 Director for the Foundation for the Church of the Palms.** The Foundation has 7 directors with staggered 3-year terms that begin after the annual meeting in January. 4 are elected by the Session. The Session is empowered to elect 1 director to the Foundation for the 2024 Class,

**OLD BUSINESS:**

1. **Annual Meeting of the Congregation and Corporation.** Dr. McConnell and Director of Outreach & Families Sarah Soboleski provided an updated on continuing preparations and logistics of presenting the annual meeting of the congregation and corporation both in-person and through

interactive video conferencing. The time for the annual meeting on Sunday, January 31 is still uncertain. **MOTION MADE, SECONDED, and PASSED: To delegate authority to Dr. McConnell to set the time for the annual meeting on January 31.** Notice of the meeting will be announced from the pulpit on consecutive Sundays and placed in churchwide communications.

2. **Food Pantry Update.** Executive Director of Operations Pam Gillespie and Dr. McConnell reported. A written summary of the Food Pantry protocols was provided in the Session package. Thanks to generous donations from the congregation, there is a large balance in the Food Pantry account. In addition, food supply provider All Faiths Food Bank has announced that it will provide their supplies at no charge during 2021. The church will use the Food Pantry funds to supplement those supplies. In addition, the church staff is eager to find ways to honor donors' intentions and put the funds in the Food Pantry account to good use.
3. **Survey Results:** Dr. McConnell reported. A full report of the congregational survey was made available to the Session by email.

#### **NEW BUSINESS:**

1. **Pastoral Statement.** Dr. McConnell provided an overview intended to start a discussion about issues raised by the PCUSA stances on divestment from investment in Israel and LGBTQ matters. Several years ago, the Session then in office had a period of discernment about these issues. A copy of the October 30, 2014 letter to the congregation was provided to the current Session. Because several years have passed and new Session members are in service, the pastoral staff felt that review and discussion would be helpful. Additional statements will be provided to the Session by the pastors and further discussion will take place at the January Session meeting.
2. **Financial Update and 2021 Budget.** Administration & Finance Chair Elder Andrea Jackson reported. The church finances are doing well and there is still an overall surplus. In mid-January, the Administration & Finance Committee will present recommendations on how any surplus funds might be allocated. She then provided an overview of the 2021 operating budget presented by the Administration and Finance Committee. There is a 3% increase from 2020 and the figures do not reflect any PPP loan forgiveness that might occur in 2021. **MOTION FROM THE ADMINISTRATION AND FINANCE COMMITTEE and PASSED: To adopt the 2021 operating budget as presented**
3. **2021 Contract with Visitation Pastor.** Executive Director Pam Gillespie reported. The proposed contract with The Rev. Dr. Alan Rodda for 2021 for his part-time services provides for a 3% increase in salary with cell phone allowance. It covers his pastoral visitations. His voluntary participation in church services and devotions is always welcome and is at his option. **MOTION MADE, SECONDED, and PASSED: To approve the 2021 contract with Visitation Pastor The Rev. Dr. Alan Rodda as presented in the 2021 budget.**
4. **Compensation Matters for Pastors.** The pastors and staff excused themselves from the meeting. The Clerk to the Session chaired this portion of the meeting. Personnel Chair Elder Joan Emrich presented the Personnel committee recommendations for the 2021 terms of call for the called pastors, Stephen D. McConnell, Lal Hmingliani Browne, and Laurie Haas, as those terms pertain to the 2021 operating budget. She explained that the 3% increase in the combined salary and housing allocations for Dr. McConnell and Dr. Browne is consistent with the overall raises of the staff of the church. The committee took notice that the two Associate Pastors have a salary difference of about \$18,000. This gap would get wider each year if the same increase is awarded to each pastor. After analyzing the job descriptions, the length of service to COP, the difference

in duties regarding sermons and Contemporary Service leadership, the Committee set a goal of closing the salary gap over the next 5 years and work towards parity. Therefore, the Committee proposed an 8% increase in the combined salary and housing allocation for Rev. Haas. This 8% increase would decrease the salary gap by \$6,000. This proposal has been discussed with Dr. Browne, who voiced her support. Elder Emrich also explained that figures from another large church in the presbytery for similar pastor positions had been reviewed.

- a. **2021 Pastors' Terms of Call. MOTION FROM THE PERSONNEL COMMITTEE and PASSED: To approve for the 2021 operating budget the following: A 3% increase in the combined salary and housing allocation [includes the pastor's 403(b) contribution] for Dr. McConnell, a 3% increase in the combined salary and housing allocation for Dr. Browne, and an 8% increase in the combined salary and housing allocation for Rev. Haas.**
- b. **2021 Housing Allowance Allocations. MOTION MADE, SECONDED, AND PASSED: To accept the 2021 housing allowance allocations made by each called pastor.** Figures provided by the pastors to the Personnel Chair are as follows: Dr. McConnell \$65,000, Dr. Browne \$50,000, and Rev. Haas \$43,200.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

1. Nominating Committee update from Chair Marcia Baarson – the slate also includes 50 Shepherding Deacons!
2. Reading: *Good News for Anxious Christians* by Phillip Cary (read the entire book).
3. The virtual Advent dinner benefiting Samaritan Counseling Services will be on Tuesday at 5 PM on the church website.
4. Pastor Laurie Haas and her husband are grandparents to just born baby Brooks (son of Morgan)!

There being no further business to come before the Session, **MOTION MADE, SECONDED, AND PASSED: To adjourn the meeting** at approximately 8:15 PM with the sharing of prayer concerns and prayer by the Clerk to the Session.

By: \_\_\_\_\_  
The Rev. Dr. Stephen D. McConnell  
Moderator

By: \_\_\_\_\_  
Linda R. Getzen  
Clerk to the Session

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