

FELLOWSHIP

The Rev. Dr. Stephen D. McConnell welcomed the Session at 6:00 PM in the Campus Center for dinner and discussion based on the parable of The Pharisee and the Tax Collector. The Session then moved to Room 206 of the Education Building for the Session meeting that began at 6:50 PM.

MINUTES

PRESENT: Teaching Elders: Senior Pastor The Rev. Dr. Stephen D. McConnell (Moderator), Family Life Pastor The Rev. Laurie Haas, and Executive Pastor The Rev. Sarah Soboleski. Ruling Elders: Linda Calvert, Lesley Conzelman, Diane Curtis, Al Jeffrey, Keith Maddox, Andrew McFall, Fee Mercer, Maxine Perry, Marlene Petro, Steve Rowe, and Dimitrios Vafeas. Also present: Clerk to the Session Linda Getzen.

EXCUSED: Congregational Life Pastor The Rev. Dr. Lal Hmingliani Browne and Pastor of Music and Worship The Rev. Genevieve Beauchamp.

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. **Motion made, seconded, and passed unanimously: 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 that:

- Foundation Grant Request for facility upgrades (hurricane windows & seed money for Sanctuary renovation) approved \$156,576 for hurricane windows only (remaining funds under 2023 grant guidelines). The capital reserve fund can pay for any shortfall on the hurricane windows project. Pastor Sarah explained that the Sanctuary renovation project is in its infancy, and seed money funding can be postponed.

STAFF REPORTS:

Congregational Life Pastor The Rev. Dr. Lal Hmingliani Browne [report read by the Clerk in her absence].

- Wednesday Night Life with Pastor Steve's lectures are well attended.
- All 127 Deacons are working hard and well.
- Tables of Six or Eight dinner fellowship is growing.
- COP continues to grow with new members.
- Pastor Melvin has been doing a great job as our Visitation Pastor.
- Pastor Stu returned to us at the end of October and is visiting our sick as a volunteer Visitation Pastor. Both Visitation Pastors are well-received and loved by those they visit.
- Pastor Hmingi went on study leave and learned how congregational care is done in 3 larger churches - 4th Presbyterian Church in Chicago, 5th Avenue Presbyterian Church in NYC, and Peachtree Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, GA. She read their websites and interviewed their associate pastors. She was happy to learn that all of them have similar systems. COP has the highest number of Deacons caring for the Congregation. She learned the same about our Stephen Ministry. As she thanks God for our volunteers at COP, she knows we still have room to grow. Her goal is to help us grow still.

- She is thankful to God and to COP for vacation time. Last week, Pastor Hmingi and her husband Will had an enjoyable trip to celebrate their 25th anniversary.

Family Life Pastor The Rev. Laurie Haas:

- Family Ministry- The nursery on Sunday is growing (16 kids), as is the children's group. On the Monday of Thanksgiving break, 33 kids and their families served in the Food Pantry.
- Church member Barbara Ingram-Rice has been hired as the Health & Well-Being Coordinator.
- The Contemporary Service has a new experience in Advent - 30 seconds of silence after the sermon. Conor Peters will preach this Sunday.
- The Homecoming Hoedown was a fun success. Food-eaten statistics were astonishing! All pie servers were new members.

Executive Pastor The Rev. Sarah Soboleski:

- Barbara Ingram-Rice as the Health & Well-Being Coordinator.
- The Facilities team has a new part-time staff member.
- Pastor Sarah continues to meet with various committees regarding governance documents.
- 90-day check-ins were held with the staff.
- The 2024 Budget is in draft form.
- Boundaries training was held for the staff.
- Staff gathered for a Thanksgiving fellowship and meal. They will do the same for Christmas.
- The staff Christmas door decoration competition is set to begin!
- Pastor Sarah values her opportunities to preach on Sundays and present at the Gather And Grow series.

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

- Speaker David French had to postpone due to a family emergency. We hope to reschedule.
- Thanksgiving Eve joint service at Temple Sinai. Excellent attendance by COP. Support for these friends is needed now more than ever.
- Advent and Christmas Eve preparations are underway.
- The Samaritan Counseling Advent dinner is sold out.

FINANCIAL UPDATE: Administration and Finance Chair Dimitrios Vafeas reported:

- Cash and reserves continue to be strong through October.
- Capital Reserve - no large sums spent in 2023 - looking to 2024.
- Summarized the status of Restricted Funds. ERC funds will move to Restricted Funds in 2024.
- 2023 expenses are better than budget. Good controls.
- Building & Grounds Team - no meeting this month. Keith Maddox reported that the new street sign has been installed.

OMNIBUS MOTION: Motion made, seconded, and passed unanimously: To pass the following Omnibus Motion (Items A-F), as presented in the Agenda.

A. TO APPROVE THE FOLLOWING MINUTES:

1. Stated Session Meeting: 10/23/2023
2. Special Session Meeting to Receive New Members: 11/09/2023

B. TO APPROVE THE CLERK'S REPORT:

1. Assignments and Meetings:
 - a. Sunday Morning Prayers for the Pastors @ 8:15 AM: Month of December: Maxine Perry
 - b. Deacons' Exec. Comm. Meeting on Monday 12/4 @ 7 PM: Lesley Conzelman

- c. Storyteller for December Session meeting: Fee Mercer
- 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 November: Maxine Perry
- D. **TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM SESSION COMMITTEES:**
 - 1. Administration & Finance: (includes Building & Grounds Team) **INCLUDING RECEIPT OF THE 2022 FINANCIAL AUDIT FROM THE INDEPENDENT AUDITOR AT KENNETH F. KANDEFER CPA:** Ch. Dimitrios Vafeas
 - 2. Global Mission Partners: Ch. Lesley Conzelman *No written report this month*
 - 3. Personnel: Ch. Diane Curtis *Written report submitted by Executive Pastor*
- E. **TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM MINISTRY TEAMS:**
 - 1. Family & Student Ministries (includes Palms Preschool) *See staff reports above*
 - 2. Contemporary Worship Service Leadership *See staff reports above*
 - 3. Presbyterian Women *No written report this month*
 - 4. Stephen Ministry Leadership
- F. **TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM CONGREGATION COMMITTEES:**
 - 1. Deacons' Executive Committee: Ch. Elizabeth Dexter
 - 2. Memorial Garden Board: Ch. Judy Armitage
 - 3. Nominating: Ch. Marlene Petro

OLD BUSINESS:

- 1. Strategic Plan Review. The Moderator led a discussion regarding the Strategic Plan, focusing on the possible 2024-2026 Strategic Initiatives and an overview of funding sources. Some miscellaneous points mentioned for 2024-2026:
 - a. The Sanctuary renovation has many moving pieces, including improving acoustics and replacing the organ. This looks to be a several-year project.
 - b. Pastor Sarah explained the growing needs of the Food Pantry ministry. An advisory team has been formed to assess the mission and vision of this ministry, its processes and facilities, and ideas for improved space within the church Master Plan.
 - c. Developing a plan to address future pastor housing needs.
 - d. Exploring and identifying COP's missional and theological identity.
 - e. Creating a 3-5 year plan to grow in environmental stewardship as a congregation. This item led to a lengthy initial discussion of what environmental stewardship may mean within COP's missional and theological identity.

NEW BUSINESS:

- 1. Foundation Restricted Funds Request – Student Intern Scholarships. Elder Andrew McFall reported on this annual request from Family Ministry. Funds are available from a Foundation restricted account for scholarships and have been used for spring and summer interns. The scholarship payments will be made to the students' colleges to assist with their college tuition. **Motion made, seconded, and passed unanimously: To approve submission to the Foundation of the Restricted Funds Request for \$12,320 for scholarships for three student interns.**

2. Church Investment Policy. Administration & Finance Committee Chair Dimitrios Vafeas presented the Operating & Reserve Funds Investment Policy Statement approved by the A&F Committee. The conservative policy codifies many investment policies already in place and provides more complete direction for the church finance staff. **Motion coming from the Administration & Finance Committee and passed unanimously: To approve the Operating & Reserve Funds Investment Policy Statement, as presented.**
3. Session-elected Foundation Director. **Motion made, seconded, and passed unanimously: To elect John Harkey as a director (Class of 2027) of The Foundation for the Church of the Palms – Presbyterian (USA), Inc.**

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

1. [*Mentioned during Old Business*] Saturday 01/27/2024 is the Palms Men’s breakfast featuring Rays pitching coach Kyle Snyder.
2. Reading: The Laborers and the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16) – Chapter 7, *Short Stories by Jesus* by Amy-Jill Levine.
3. The December Session meeting is one week early – December 18.

There was no further business to come before the Session. **Motion made, seconded, and passed by consensus: To adjourn the meeting** at approximately 8:30 PM to a Circle of Prayer.

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

By: _____
 Linda R. Getzen
 Clerk to the Session

Attachment to official minutes:
 Clerk’s Report (statistics)
 Foundation Request for Restricted Funds – Student Intern Scholarships