

FELLOWSHIP

The Rev. Dr. Stephen D. McConnell welcomed the Session at 6:00 PM in the Campus Center for dinner and discussion around the Parable of the Persistent Widow and the Unjust Judge. The Session then moved to Room 206 of the Education Building for the Session meeting that began at 6:47 PM.

MINUTES

PRESENT: Teaching Elders: Senior Pastor The Rev. Dr. Stephen D. McConnell (Moderator), Congregational Life Pastor The Rev. Dr. Lal Hmingliani Browne, 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: Family Life Pastor The Rev. Laurie Haas and Pastor of Music and Worship The Rev. Genevieve Beauchamp

GUESTS: Student and Family Ministry Director and Inquirer Conor Peters.

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.**

STORYTELLER: Elder Keith Maddox told his story about his winding road to discover Mere Christianity within himself. Prayers were given for the storyteller.

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:

- **Motion made, seconded, and passed unanimously: To receive into membership as of 1/22/2024, the seven members listed in the January Clerk's Report who attended Pastor Hmingi's recent New Member Classes.**
- Foundation Grant Requests for Restricted funds – Internship Program and Food Pantry fund transfer- pending until the next meeting of the Foundation.
- PCUSA 2023 Statistical Report presented. See the Omnibus Motion below.
- Correction to terms of 2024 Contract for Visitation Pastor Rev. Melvin Christian. The increase should have been based on mid-2023 figures. Terms are correct to be \$23,188 (\$22,048 salary and \$1,140 cell phone and travel). See the Omnibus Motion below.
- Change the March 2024 Communion date to 3/10/2024. See the Omnibus Motion below.
- The Session annually approves Special Offerings. See the Omnibus Motion.
- Commissioners for the 2/22/24 Presbytery meeting. Rev. Laurie Haas is the 2024 Moderator.

STAFF REPORTS:

Congregational Life Pastor The Rev. Dr. Lal Hmingliani Browne: All is busy in Congregational Life:

- Stephen Ministry Training Class 2024 has started with six new trainees.
- 55 Shepherding Deacons Class of 2027 ready to be elected. Forty-two of them are new. Yay!
- Seven new members in January.
- Pastor Steve, Pastor Laurie, and Pastor Hmingi hosted 23 new members.
- Tables of Six Dinner Fellowship Groups continue to grow.

- Pastor Steve’s Wednesday Night Life Lecture series on Matthew is well attended in person.
- Many memorial services are being held, and several are in the planning stage.
- Wine tasting with Steve Soboleski is Feb 2nd at 5:30 PM.

Executive Pastor The Rev. Sarah Soboleski:

- Preparing for the annual meeting on 1/28.
- Staff systems are being reviewed – looking for more efficiency.
- HR Ministries Solutions – Pastor Sarah is taking a class for administrative specialists.
- The first book club event at Temple Sinai was well attended. There is a desire to continue.
- Thank you to Elder Keith Maddox for his work in developing the attendance report graphics.
- See also the Executive Pastor’s Reports on pages 25-27 of the Session package.

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

- After COVID disrupted the routines of church life, attendance trend lines are moving in different ways as many people return to in-person church attendance and others continue to participate online. The discussion of how to “be church” continues. Family Ministry continues to grow. 2023 was a good year for Church of the Palms, and we have a strong foundation upon which to build.

Student and Family Ministry Director Conor Peters reported for Family Life Pastor Laurie Haas:

- The Sunday morning nursery continues to grow.
- The Children’s Ministry consistently sees new families.
- Students attended the recent Rock the Universe event in Orlando.
- The Confirmation Class has 19 participants.
- Job posting for the position of Student Ministry Coordinator.
- Student Intern Morgan Wilson has started. He is also the YAAD representative from the presbytery to the 2024 General Assembly this summer.

FINANCIAL UPDATE: Administration and Finance Chair Dimitrios Vafeas reported:

- For details, see the A&F committee report beginning on page 19 of the Session package.
- 2023 was a blessed year in finances. The year ended with \$116K over budgeted giving. The staff is working on recommendations to present to the A&F Committee for the use of a \$438K surplus (which includes one-time government-granted funds).
- Elder Keith Maddox reported for the Building & Grounds Committee that the procurement policy had been enacted (see page 24 of the Session package), and that hurricane window bids were received and one accepted.

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: 12/18/2023

B. TO APPROVE THE CLERK’S REPORT:

1. Assignments and Meetings:
 - a. Sunday Morning Prayers for the Pastors @ 8:15 AM: Mo. of Feb.: Keith Maddox
 - b. Deacons’ Exec. Comm. Meeting on Monday 2/5 @ 7 PM: Diane Curtis
 - c. Storyteller for February Session meeting: Al Jeffrey
2. Membership Statistics, Baptisms & Weddings, and Home Communion (see attached Clerk’s Report)
3. Appointment of Elder Commissioners to the Peace River Presbytery stated meeting at

9:00 AM, Thursday, February 22, Trinity PC, Venice). To serve until the next appointment of elder commissioners. The Clerk is authorized to complete the appointment of elder commissioners in the event of a vacancy:

1. Linda Getzen 2. Al Jeffrey 3. Lesley Conzelman 4. _____

C. TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM:

1. Elder attending Deacons' Exec. Comm. meeting in January: Fee Mercer

D. TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM SESSION COMMITTEES:

1. Administration & Finance: Ch. Dimitrios Vafeas (includes Building & Grounds Team)
2. Global Mission Partners: Ch. Lesley Conzelman
3. Personnel: Ch. Diane Curtis

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
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 *No written report this month*

OLD BUSINESS: None.

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Conor Peters - Application as Candidate. The Moderator reported that the Director of Student and Family Ministry and Inquirer Conor Peters wishes to become enrolled under the care of the Peace River Presbytery Committee on Preparation for Ministry as a Candidate. Inquirer Conor Peters explained his current travels through ordination exams and his continued passion for growing in ministry. **Motion made, seconded, and passed unanimously: To endorse the request by Conor Peters that he be enrolled with Peace River Presbytery as a Candidate.** *Note from the Clerk: Ruling Elder Andrew McFall will continue as his Liaison.*
2. Foundation Grant Request – Faith and Society Speaker Series. Dr. McConnell reported on this request from the Leadership Team and presented some speakers for Fall-Spring 2024-25. **Motion made, seconded, and passed unanimously: To approve submission to the Foundation of the Grant Request for \$75,000 for the Faith and Society Speaker Series.**

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Reading for next Session dinner: The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16;19-31), Chapter 9, Short Stories of Jesus by Amy-Jill Levine

There was no further business to come before the Session. **Motion made, seconded, and passed unanimously: To adjourn the meeting** at approximately 8:38 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 Grant Request – Faith & Society Speaker Series