

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 Rich Man and Lazarus. 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), Congregational Life Pastor The Rev. Dr. Lal Hmingliani Browne, Family Life Pastor The Rev. Laurie Haas, Executive Pastor The Rev. Sarah Soboleski, and Pastor of Music and Worship The Rev. Genevieve Beauchamp. Ruling Elders: Linda Calvert, Lesley Conzelman, Diane Curtis, Al Jeffrey, Keith Maddox, Andrew McFall, Fee Mercer, Maxine Perry, Steve Rowe, and Dimitrios Vafeas. Also present: Clerk to the Session Linda Getzen.

EXCUSED: Ruling Elder Marlene Petro

GUESTS: Bill Reynolds and Don Schalekamp - members of the Organ Committee who arrived at 7:55 PM

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: Al Jeffrey told his story - a spiritual diving quest. 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 call a Special Session Meeting for Saturday, April 27, at 6:00 PM, for the purpose of receiving the 2024 Confirmation Class into church membership.**
- Minutes of the 01/28/2024 Annual Congregational/Corporation Meeting are included in the package for information only.
- Foundation Requests for Restricted funds – Internship Program and Food Pantry fund transfer- approved by Foundation 01/23/2024.
- Foundation Grant Request for Faith & Society Speaker Series – \$75,000 approved by Foundation 01/23/2024.
- 2024 Foundation Grant Guideline (unrestricted funds) is \$320,778.
- Corrections will be made to Clerk's Report for 02/26/2024 member names and count.

STAFF REPORTS:

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

- All is well and busy in Congregational Life
- 10 new members in February
- 35 people attended the Wine tasting dinner on Feb 2nd. A third of them were new members. Steve Soboleski, our wine expert, was busy answering questions during his lecture on each wine.
- Presbyterian Women, under the moderator Janet Steenrod, hosted the Peace River PW Annual Retreat on Saturday, Feb 3, with 71 in attendance from 12 congregations. It was a great success.
- Five of six Stephen Ministers are still in the Class of 2024. It is going well with Anne Owens' leadership in teaching/training them.

- 39 Care Receivers are being cared for by 39 Stephen Ministers.
- Training of new Deacons, including 42 Shepherding Deacons Class of 2024, in March.

Pastor of Music and Worship The Rev. Genevieve Beauchamp:

- Organist Jonathan Spivey has recovered from arm surgery and is back!
- The recent Noontime Concert was very well attended.
- There are now 14 tenors in the choir – unheard of! John Rutter’s Requiem is this Sunday.
- The scholarship recipient is doing great and was accepted at the Interlochen Center for the Arts.
- The Handbell choir is full!

Family Life Pastor The Rev. Laurie Haas:

- Director of Student and Family Ministries Conor Peters became a Candidate at the Presbytery meeting, where Pastor Laurie served as the 2024 Moderator.
- Elder Fee Mercer and Pastor Laurie are working on an event highlighting the labyrinth.
- Senior Well-Being is collaborating with other churches on a caregiver respite project.
- Pastor Laurie performed her first wedding in the Sanctuary last Saturday.

Executive Pastor The Rev. Sarah Soboleski:

- Communications is trying innovative platforms to reach people. Sermons and short clips are posted on Instagram, YouTube, etc. Look for the *Latest Shorts from Church of the Palms*
- Kristin Kobes Du Maz, author of *Jesus and John Wayne*, was the latest speaker in The Faith & Society series.
- A successful Love, Life, & Celebrate event on Pledge Sunday.
- The Operations Manual and Employee Handbook updating process continues with the outside consulting company.
- Property Director Robert Land has brought valuable innovations to the buildings and grounds work. He has gathered information on the useful lives of significant property items throughout the church and is computerizing the capital depreciation schedule.
- The pastors have been invited to the Seder dinner at Temple Sinai in April.
- See also the Executive Pastor’s Report in the February Session package.

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

- The Faith & Society Speaker series has brought a diverse audience from the community to COP.
- Kudos to Pastor Hmingi and her husband, Will, for hosting regular dinners in their home for new COP members. Warmth and welcome!

FINANCIAL UPDATE: Administration and Finance Chair Dimitrios Vafeas reported:

- A&F welcomed Dave Bossman and Dennis Geer as new committee members.
- January held a strong cash position. \$1.8 M in unrestricted funds. See the Administration & Finance Report in the Session package for additional information.
- Upon evaluation of submitted RFPs, the accounting firm of Suplee & Shea was selected as auditors beginning with the 2023 audit. [*Note from the Clerk: That action of A&F was deemed approved by Session as part of the Omnibus Motion below.*]
- Uses for the 2023 surplus of \$431,344 were recommended in consultation with staff as follows (rounded):
 - Capital Reserve -\$250,000.
 - New Ministry Initiatives – \$75,000

- Board-Designated Strategic Mission Fund – The Global Partners Mission Committee has spent all but \$3,000 of their board-designated funds. In the past, surpluses have been directed to this area - \$60,000.
- Generosity/Communications Consultant – to focus on communications improvements, planned giving, and annual giving - \$40,000.
- Wilkinson School Fund is exhausted (under \$1,000) - \$5,000.

[Note from the Clerk: Those uses recommended by A&F were deemed approved by Session as part of the Omnibus Motion below].

- Uses for \$254,955 in a board-designated account from the ERC tax credit, including interest. A & F discussed using these funds (in part) for personnel-related expenses as follows
 - Sabbatical Leave - preachers and church expenses related to clergy sabbatical leave - \$75,000.
 - Preschool bonuses – signing and retention bonuses - \$50,000.
 - The Personnel Committee strongly favored staff bonuses, including pastoral staff. - \$50,000.

[Note from the Clerk: Those uses recommended by A&F were deemed approved by Session as part of the Omnibus Motion below].

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: 01/22/2024
2. Special Session Meeting to Receive New Members 02/13/2024

B. TO APPROVE THE CLERK’S REPORT:

1. Assignments and Meetings:
 - a. Sunday Morning Prayers for the Pastors @ 8:15 AM: Month of March: Lesley Conzelman
 - b. Deacons’ Exec. Comm. Meeting on Monday 03/04 @ 7 PM: Keith Maddox
 - c. Storyteller for March Session meeting: Fee Mercer
2. Membership Statistics, Baptisms & Weddings, and Home Communion (see attached Clerk’s Report as corrected)
3. Required trainings for incoming Elders (3/9) and Deacons 3/2
4. Invitation to attend the March 25 Session dinner and meeting: Incoming Elders: Marcia Baarson, David Bossman, John Kennedy, John McQueen, and Sandy Snyder
5. Ordination and installation of Elders, Deacons, and Shepherding Deacons: Sunday, April 21 at 9:00 AM Sanctuary service

C. TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM:

1. Elder attending Deacons’ Exec. Comm. meeting in February: Diane Curtis
2. Commissioners attending the Presbytery Meeting on 02/22: Al Jeffrey

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 AND NEW BUSINESS:

1. **Report from the Organ Committee.** Keith Maddox, Bill Reynolds, Don Schalekamp, and Pastor Genevieve Beauchamp (FYI - other Committee members are Jonathan Spivey and Judy Lutz) presented detailed written and oral reports regarding the Organ Committee recommendation that a pipe organ replace the existing aging digital organ in the Sanctuary. Acoustic engineers and pipe organ consultants Scott R. Riedel & Associates, Ltd. would assist in the design and specification of the organ and the selection of an organ builder or vendor for the purchase of a new or heritage/vintage used organ that is primarily a pipe organ but may have some hybrid/digital components. Other services may be requested later. The A&F Committee has approved the Phase One consulting agreement, which has a fee of \$24,200 plus travel expenses (to be funded from an existing donor-restricted donation). According to the consultant, the cost of a pipe organ may range from \$1,600,000 to \$2,300,000, with a probable cost of \$1,825,000. This cost is separate from the costs for renovations needed to the aging interior of the Sanctuary. A&F Chair Elder Dimitrios Vafeas indicated that funding for the multi-year, multi-million dollar project could come from several sources, including an existing \$1M donation, Foundation resources, and the congregation. **Motion made, seconded, and passed unanimously: To approve the research and acquisition project for a pipe organ, including the Phase One memorandum of agreement with Scott R. Riedel & Associates, Ltd.**
2. **Strategic Priorities Update.** Executive Pastor Sarah Soboleski provided written and oral updates on the 2024 Strategic Priorities approved by the Session last fall. Goals have been met or are on the way to being met in all areas: Attendance, Engaging Time & Talents, Digital Engagements, and Well-Being Ministries. She noted estimates are used in places where attendance is not tracked regularly; however, improvements are being made to better track progress toward the goals established. Work is being done to become more intentional about such tracking. A new church management software program may prove helpful soon.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

1. Answered questions about the pathway to ordination for newly made Candidate Conor Peters.
2. John Rutter's Requiem on Sunday – invite a friend!
3. Reading for next Session dinner: Lenten Daily Devotional. Discuss a devotion from the booklet that spoke to you.

There was no further business to come before the Session. **Motion made, seconded, and passed unanimously: To adjourn the meeting** at approximately 8:49 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)