

Plainfield Congregational Church United Church of Christ

PCCUCC Congregational Meeting Minutes

February 16, 2025

Designated Moderator: Shawn Hillman

Designated Secretary: Mark Gerth

Meeting was called to order at 11:35 am. The members signed in and a Quorum was established of 20 members in attendance, with additional guests. A brief purpose of the Congregational meeting was provided, and it was contrasted with the scope and purpose of regular council meetings.

Opening Prayer: Pastor Joe Newton

Shawn called for a motion to approve the Agenda

Bill Caton made the motion; Joan Caton seconded the motion; the Congregation gave a verbal vote to Approve (20 Aye, 0 Nay, 0 Abstain)

1. Review and vote to approve the 2024 Congregational Meeting Minutes from Feb 18, 2024
Comments were made including:

- Diane Peterson asked that we add in specific comments Eileen D. made during the meeting, which related to discussion involving "Removing the Pews"
- A typo was noted in the record 305H should be 30th

Barb Newton made a motion to approve the 2024 minutes with the addition of Eileen D. comments and typo correction. Elizabeth Ormes seconded the motion; the Congregation gave a verbal vote to Approve (20 Aye, 0 Nay, 0 Abstain)

2. **Review of the 2024 Finances (see the church financial documents the Abbreviated Financials, Treasurer's Report, Balance Sheet, Fund Report, 2024 Memorial Funds Report)** – Provided by PCCUCC CFO Pat Herman

Executive Summary: It was a good year for PCCUCC. Spending was controlled well and the stock accounts performed well, in fact the land sale proceeds funds with Stofan and Agazzi went up \$12,300

2024 Total Income \$128,160

2024 Total Expenses \$110,672

Difference (includes the stock increase): \$17,489

Giving directed at Mission/Ministry Programs

5 for 5 UCC Fund programs - OCWM, Neighbors in Need, Strengthen the Church, One Great Hour of Sharing, and the Christmas Fund. PCCUCC members designate specific funds to go directly to the UCC and we just act as a pass through) \$1862.00
Micropantry - \$492.00 (fundraiser money) \$3807.00
Hope Day (member giving) \$2057.00
Local Needy \$588.00
Pastor's discretion \$372.00

Comments and Discussion:

Pat clarified what the financials mean and what "funds" are; i.e. designated funds (restricted to certain use) and not available for general operating expenses of the church. Pat emphasized we should be very proud of how well we've done with giving, including gifts in kind.

Question was asked about Hope Day's funding. It is both a restricted fund and is funded by a Grant, so some expenses are a pass through whereby we pay but are reimbursed through the Grant. Hope Day has various expenses, and a large part is spent on distributing toiletries and gift cards to participants who attend in need.

Question was asked about funds sitting not being used. Designated fund money can be reallocated by the church, as approved by the church council if funds have excess that is not being spent for intended purpose. Council will review the reason for reallocating the funds, if it is in keeping with the church's mission, vision, and values, and other factors before reallocating the funds. The church council doesn't reallocate funds for general operating purposes only other mission/ministry work.

Elizabeth Ormes made a comment and questioned that we aren't tracking **all** of the giving. She noted that some organizations track all types of contributions in the gifts in kind, including volunteer time as some grants will ask for matching donations and volunteer time spent can meet that obligation, especially when it is something that we would have had to pay for like doing Payroll, Acct Payable/Receivable, Maintenance, Landscaping, etc. The giver is not able to claim this on taxes but it benefits the church, especially if we seek more grants.

Question was asked by Joan Caton: If the Blessing Bucket has months for Hope Day and Feed My Starving Children (FMSC)? Pat confirmed Blessing Bucket has months for both these missions.

Question was asked by Diane Peterson: What is the Local Needy fund? Pat reviewed past designation for "Local Needy fund" and the changes it underwent during and after COVID pandemic. Shawn spoke about those funds going to Hope Day, the Micropantry, Crest Hill family outreach/drive-through, Plainfield area food pantry, as well as to some individual people. PMA asks and we participate in that. It was clarified that both Darrell Herman and Shawn Hillman approve fund requests and distributions. Then the approval is shared during the council.

Question was asked by Joan Caton: how is the "local needy" fund funded? Shawn confirmed members make specific donations that are allocated for the local needy fund.

Question was asked by Joan Caton: Some people, like her, give to the church for both general operating and split donations for multiple missions. How does her giving get split? Shawn shared that the Local Needy fund is a blessing bucket monthly rotation and if she splits giving into 12 months to use the blessing bucket calendar to designate giving.

Question by Bob Mason: Regarding the total giving of \$12k, does this include what is made by faith promises? No, it is only the total for the specific things listed there. Pat shared that the statements we get at the end of the year include everything we've given (faith promises/general giving, gifts in kind, specific missions) that can be tracked through EFT, personal checks, paypal, or bank checks like donating stock dividends.

3. **The 2025 Budget** was presented (see 2025 budget document) – PCCUCC CFO Pat Herman. She provided a brief explanation about the terms budget and why the actual financials differ. The 2025 budget is what we plan for 2025 based on historical records and Pat's knowledge of giving income and expenses but no one can be 100% accurate.

2025 Budget

Expenses - \$139,918.00

Income - \$142,550.00

Comments/Questions/Discussion:

Question was asked regarding why Apple Tree AT was given a building use rental waiver for 3 months from Nov 2024 into Jan 2025.

Apple Tree (AT) Directors Michelle and Elaine were in attendance and shared some issues that AT had regarding meeting their expenses during the 2024-2025 school year. Enrollment was down due to uncertainty that came up from past AT board members making statements that AT was going to be closed during the 2024-2025 school year and thus they didn't have the income to meet agreed rent. They shared that although AT did have the waiver approved by the church council they still continued to meet other financial obligations in partnership with the church. One item was they contributed half the cost for floor cleaning (waxing and carpet cleaning).

Elizabeth Ormes made a comment to remind everyone that AT is a mission of the church as they are a valuable contribution to our community for young children, being a quality early learning program.

Bill Caton made a comment that not everyone knows all they contribute, besides the benefit to the community, they share in other PCCUCC building expenses outside of the building use rent, e.g. pay for playground upkeep, window fixing, etc. The staff help with tasks that come up during the day, such as letting people in as needed – e.g. inspections.

Joe Newton shared that he has heard much about AT in the past, and parents at fundraisers talk about when they were students. He shared that he saw what they've gone through this last year and people are still upset by what took place in the past year. They've had to struggle being told they were going to be shut down. They've overcome that. They thought that they didn't have the support of the church. Since this all came to light the church council has been making an effort to make sure it is clear we do support them. Joe asked members to talk to him if there are questions about the 3 month rent waiver. Joe emphasized that we want them to know PCCUCC wants them to be here.

Question was asked by Elizabeth Ormes: Will we revisit the amount designated in the budget for a pastor? In past work on pastoral search committees the recommendation is that potential

pastors are going to ask to see our financials. We don't have anything in the budget which might "scare off" potential pastoral candidates. If we are looking for a pastor for the end of 2025 into beginning 2026 we may need to start our budget discussion earlier in the year. Shawn acknowledged the concern but we won't be calling a settled pastor this calendar year. We know that 2026 will be different. Shawn expects the conference to help us with the process of determining a budget and finding potential candidates that fit our need and funds.

Shawn called for a motion to approve the 2025 budget with no more discussion.

Joan Caton made a motion to approve. Sue Davis seconded the motion. The Congregation gave a verbal vote to Approve (20 Aye, 0 Nay, 0 Abstain)

Approved – 22 (20 + 2 by proxy)

4. **The 2024 Vital Statistics were reviewed** (baptism, birth, death, membership add/transfer, weddings).

A special note was made that both Craig Theimer and Ken McBeth resigned their memberships at PCCUCC and we're thankful for all they did.

5. **Staff, Ministry Reports were Reviewed:**

5 a. Office Manager Report: Sharon provided a written record of her work during the year. Shawn highlighted a few items of note that she accomplished on behalf of the church.

5 b. Apple Tree (AT) Report: Since Directors Michelle and Elaine were in attendance they added to the report by sharing, thanking us for welcoming them here today. They shared that their kids attended AT and it is a special place for them, as well as the other staff who have or had children that attended.

They shared that Apple Tree has always been able to stay full with returning families with multiple children. But now that is not sufficient. They are looking for ways to attract more or new families. But they run into problems such as "Many can't afford the cost" or "They need daycare so both parents can work, i.e. families are looking for full day care." They confirmed that the registration is lower than expected this year and there has been a decrease since Covid. They were transparent that Registrations are behind after December.

Question/Comment: They would like PCCUCC help and support: they are open to suggestions to draw attention and get increased numbers of students registered.

Shawn noted we hadn't had to think about supporting AT as they were self-sufficient.

We may have to discuss what that means for the church for budget and funding.

Question from Bob Mason: Many Christian schools are funded/staying open, what about emphasizing or changing the pre-school model to include a Christian/UCC theology?

Shawn disagreed that all religious schools are doing well, staying open.

Joe Newton shared that the program opened with a belief that religion wouldn't be a guiding influence and would not be a part of their mission or curriculum. The tradition of PCCUCC support without interference is something that many people want to keep it that way.

AT Directors were concerned that some families would be turned off or away because they are of other faiths if Christianity was emphasized.

Question from Elizabeth Ormes: Have they made cooperative agreements with local daycares that don't have a preschool to provide the all day aspect (maybe home based daycares)? AT

Director Michelle shared that a few families have kids in daycare places that do some drop off/pick up.

Question from Juan Millian (JP): He asked about their use of social media.

Michelle said they are active on a few FaceBook groups, including Moms in Plainfield which is a very active page, and they have the website.

Suggestion from Joan Caton: Make sure events and information is put in Patch.

Question and Suggestion from JP: Have they tried contacting hospitals/maternity wards and obstetrician offices to add Apple Tree information with any "Welcome New Baby" information, as well as to contact Pediatrician offices as good places to make connections.

Michelle shared they advertise within the local libraries.

Question from a member: What about walking/advertising in local parades?

Michelle shared that they didn't seem to get much response from being in St. Patrick's day parade this year.

Suggestion from Joan Caton: You should have info on card stock that parents and staff can give out/share in the community.

Michelle spoke about what happened last year in more detail. It hurt our reputation. People are asking if they'll be staying open. They lost some trust in the community. They lost some trust with staff as well.

Michelle shared that they will be going through DCFS licensing renewal in the coming months. There are a lot of requirements. They were concerned with communication between AT and Operations. They mentioned that there is upcoming testing (radon/CO2) it will be Friday – Monday setting up in FH and AT area. There can't be any open windows.

Bob Mason shared a concern about them testing in the basement. It was confirmed that's not part of it. Only where AT goes.

Shawn took accountability with the communication process to improve "closing the loop" with all parties to work cooperatively with AT and all of the Operations team.

Rhea Joy Simonich (AT Board liaison with the Council/Congregation) shared that AT has made an extensive list of all they do. She asked members/friends to take a list.

Fundraisers for AT will be on-going, including nights for % of sales from Dining Out at restaurants and they will put fliers out for church members to also support these fundraisers. She wanted to bring to Congregation's attention that purchasing mulch for the playground will be needed for next school year and this is a mutual AT and PCCUCC expense.

5 c. Congregational life Report, Leadership Ginny Noble who reported about past and upcoming events, such as Easter breakfast, Rally Day, Thanksgiving Dinner that have good turn out and consistent support from the Congregation.

Comment by Joan Caton: she liked the inclusion in the Congregation worship service of Children's moment again by Pastor Joe since we have children attending (Bradon and Max).

Comment by Matt (parent of Brandon and Max) said that they feel included "this is their church now." They had asked Pastor Joe about children's time during church service, not necessarily "Sunday School program".

Question by Pastor Joe: would anyone be willing to call any of the PCCUCC families with kids, talk about including Children's moment again and share that he is planning weekly Children's moments.

Question/Comment by Susan Winter: She shared that she'd like more church member events and experiences here - community gathering. She thinks people are missing that in their lives, including for themselves.

Comment by Elizabeth Ormes: Why not use the community room for more things? There were concerns about not meeting during AT time. But that is not true as other groups meet in the community room during the day. It needs to be organized and people sign up to gain access.

Comment/Suggestion by Joan Caton: Ginny is organizing game nights starting in March. Ginny would like to see whole families with something for everyone. The first one will be March 9 from 4:00 – 7:00. Susan said evenings are tough for them, especially in winter (night time driving).

Comment by Andrea H. she would volunteer to help coordinate and host more Congregational events in the day for members.

Comment by Shawn H. that maybe doing more meals and these can be fundraisers to support miscellaneous groups.

Comment by Andrea H: She wanted everyone to be aware and acknowledge the work that Karen B has done on the update project for that room. As well as the other people who've done work on projects such as Mark Gerth and JT and Andrea H. and Tim who did the painting.

5 d. Operations report - Leadership Shawn Hillman

Shawn opened by acknowledging all of the work, time, effort and leadership that Craig Theimer did as the head of operations for many years. He shared specific examples of updates - cameras, security, and other improvements. He mentioned that Craig was supportive even after he left the church to ensure the transition went somewhat smoothly. The members shared in Shawn's sentiment of Craig's contributions.

Shawn shared he is focused on transitioning from Moderator to head of Operations. Shawn acknowledged the work of others on Operation's team including Bob M. and Mark G. are doing. Shawn shared things accomplished - Floor cleaning, upgrades on some cameras, but there is more to do.

Shawn acknowledged the cleaning of the church continues to be mixed with the quality/cost but he is continuing to work with them to improve their quality to our satisfaction.

Shawn shared that the addition of our new on-call handyman (Todd) has had beneficial results for the church based on his expertise and ability to oversee projects from beginning to end. There are lots of projects on the to do list.

Question from Pastor Joe: What is happening with securing the dumpsters vs recycling bins. He shared that last week someone dropped off TV's. He thought there was a camera to capture people "dumping". We have a sign letting them know about surveillance and we will pursue them getting fined.

Mark G. - there is a sign present on the dumpster but the nearby cameras aren't able to capture that area.

Comment: We have to pay \$70 extra to the garbage company if the lids don't close.

Comment: There are dumpsters that lock, with us and the garbage company having the keys to unlock.

Shawn: We'll look into this as an option.

Question by member: Can we move the different bins so they are differentiated - recycle for community is up front and church garbage is away from them - make it more clear what is for what?

Comment: Maybe we could host a recycling day event so those people who need support with getting rid of things like TVs aren't dumping them with us?

5 e. Outreach report - Leadership Joan Caton

Joan gave a recap of her written report on Hope Day (HD). People all over know about it. Other churches have been pitching in. Donations have been great. We're reliable and helping the needy, so people feel good about donating to HD.

We are continuing the Kindness movement. There has been more talk about getting it out in the community. Covid really hurt that. The Plainfield Community Alliance, which is led by Mohamad and Joan is a member of it, is holding a Kindness Art Contest for kids and adults, trying to get everyone involved in March-April. People can submit essays, poems, art, photography, etc. for each age group and there will be winners with prizes and acknowledgement. This is being supported by other Plainfield organizations (Mayor/Village).

5 f. Membership report – Leadership Barb Newton

Barb enthusiastically reported that “it has been an exciting year.” New people have been coming, checking out if we are who we say we are, and returning.

5 g. Pastor's report – Pastor Joe Newton

Pastor Joe shared that he has been conducting Confirmation. The group consists of 5 people - Tina, Mars, Samantha, Peg, and Kyle. This is his first Confirmation, and probably only one he will lead. People's schedules make it tough to be consistent. He plans to go through to October, and then we need to plan an acknowledgement and have an incredible celebration. He shared “it's been a great experience with them so far.”

6. Other Business (including updated and new)

6 a. Shawn called upon Bill Caton to share updates on the “Building Replacement project”

Bill Shared he had a phone call with the developer. They indicated to him that they are still very interested in exploring the ideas of land exchange/build us a church and we sell you land. They are redoing a proposed mock up of a “site plan”, it is nearly done. Bill shared that they apologized for lack of communication. Bill will look at the mock up of the proposed plan and it will be presented at council when available. The big question will be “Can we make this work for PCCUCC financially?”

6 b. Shawn addressed comments made, which keep coming up for a few years now, that “Sharon needs to be here (in person in the office) more than once a week at a regularly scheduled time.”

Shawn began by reviewing and remarking on the job description/tasks that are the responsibilities of the Office Manager, which is what Sharon was hired to do. These responsibilities and tasks are done and can be done remotely. She does some things in person which are required, such as bulletin printing. She may meet with AT from time to time.

Shawn addressed that beyond the fact that the position doesn't require her to be in person to accomplish the fundamental tasks and responsibilities she has some mobility and transportation issues. We should focus on what a blessing it is to have someone competent who loves the church willing to work way under market value to give us all that she does. By PCCUCC being flexible with her work space, it has helped us make the tasks work for us, at a below market value cost. Shawn [and some others] feel strongly that this arrangement is working because we have people to fill gaps when needed (inspections, etc.) such as AT Directors, volunteers on Operations like Bob and now we have Todd who can also meet with people as needed.

Comment by Elizabeth Ormes: It feels like we are looking at this issue from the wrong perspective. Why is it about "Sharon needs to be here more" if that is not necessary to get her work done? Can't we frame this discussion as "what do we need a person here to do, when, and what are we willing to pay?" Is it that people want "set office hours" but for what purpose/for who? The community? The members? Let's organize as a church if we want someone here at specific times.

Comment by Samantha Gerth: the role of Office Manager should be able to use technology to accomplish tasks. She does her work effectively. Many people have never been in the same place and are able to do what is needed.

Comment by Joan Caton: She has been someone who comes down when needed, since she lives close and her phone number has been posted. She mentioned that if we have Todd cover these meetings with people we will have extra expenses.

Comment by Pat Herman: She strongly emphasized "we need an on-site presence." Pat believes that Sharon agreed to be here 9-1. Pat shared that Sharon is not here when it was agreed or she's late because Pat is here during those times and Sharon doesn't show up. Pat wants more consistent communication when someone will be here (posted office hour day/time) and then she needs to be here.

Comment by Sharon Kuzel: I appreciate my inclusion on this topic since it stimulates much conversation, and the ability to reply to concerns of some church members. We have addressed all of the concerns, and I have agreed that Thursdays are my "office days" when I come in to print, although at times because of holidays, and access to transportation, I have to be flexible. I don't ever recall, however agreeing to a 9-1 time frame, unless the reference is to many years ago when I used to work mornings when my daughter was in in elementary and high school when I would work usually 7:30 to 1 pm. Also, to reiterate, if anyone wants to meet me at a specific time at the church, please communicate with me directly and I will make every effort to accommodate all requests.

Comment: But don't DCFS guidelines prevent anyone from being here during the AT time? [This is not true - people who will be here on site on a regular basis when the preschool is in operation need to be background checked by DCFS - just like the directors and teachers; individuals known to AT (such as AT parents are allowed into the building) as well as PCCUCC members and friends who need to access the building; vendors and maintenance can be disallowed in the building but identification should be obtained; it is just random community members who should not be allowed into the building during the AT hours when children are on-site.]

Comment: There are reasons that no one should be on-site “alone” as there was a past incident, when Sharon was here by herself and a situation with a community member escalated with the individual pushing his way into the church asking for assistance. This has created discomfort for Sharon to be in the building by herself. Remember, pre-COVID we had settled pastors who were also on-site.

Comment by Ginny Noble: Maybe 1 day a week someone may be willing/able to be here with her so she can have office hours and not be here alone.

Comment by Andrea Hendron: I have met Sharon at her house, and we were able to work on some things. Andrea shared that Sharon’s mobility would be an issue for on-site work as she is limited physically.

Comment by R-J: What about coordinating so her on-site time is when others are here, such as HD organizing, although that would only cover 1 day per month.

Comment by Bob M. and Diane P.: What incident are you referencing? We weren’t aware of an issue involving a community member. Shawn provided additional details regarding the incident.

Comment by AT: We don’t have RING access so when the doorbell rings they can’t “see or access the intercom” before opening the door. This is an issue that hasn’t been shared. [Shawn made a note to fix this access issue with AT.] The church averages 1 or 2 visitors per week during the same hours, mainly looking for some support from the church. They have been given some supplies from church to give out to those in need. They have had some occasions when they had to call 911 due to concerns about community members’ behavior. When AT does ALICE training yearly with the police they suggest that a wall with a door separate the AT space from the rest of the church.

Comment by Andrea H.: We need to recognize how things are now, let go of how they used to be, and be compassionate toward each other about this process.

Comment by Madelyn V.: We could have fliers with information for people on the church and accessing support on the pantry.

Comment by Pat Herman: She is here on Tuesdays to PCCUCC meeting and stays most of the day to work on financials. She can be a help for community people who come by when she is here.

Comment by Elizabeth Ormes: The Congregation should think about what they want vs need from having someone on-site for “office hours” and we should discuss this in more detail as a Congregation at another meeting. Elizabeth, and Samantha G. would be willing to be on-site in the afternoon/evening (half a day) once per week.

Shawn called for a motion to close the meeting if there was no other business.

Ginny Noble made the motion to adjourn; Andrea Hendron seconded the motion; the Congregation gave a verbal vote to Approve (X Aye, 0 Nay, 0 Abstain)

Closing Prayer – Rev. Joe Newton

Meeting was adjourned at 1:52 pm.