

First Congregational Church of Palo Alto
United Church of Christ

CONGREGATIONAL MEETING MINUTES
April 24, 2022

Next scheduled Congregational Meeting: June 5, 2022

Call to Order: Anne Campbell

Moderator Anne Campbell called the meeting to order at 11:22AM. Members gathered for the meeting in the social hall and remotely on Zoom. Anne reviewed the guidelines for online and in-person comments, questions, and voting. A quorum was established. Parishioners in attendance were encouraged, if possible, to stay at the meeting after the asking budget vote to hear about the stewardship campaign. The meeting was recorded to assist the Church Clerk with writing the minutes. The recording will be removed once the minutes are completed.

Opening prayer: Eileen Altman

Pastor Eileen Altman offered the opening prayer. David Howell was at home recovering from COVID.

Approval of Minutes – Anne Campbell

The minutes from September 26, 2021, were presented. There were no comments or questions.

Action: The minutes were unanimously approved.

Anne thanked the Clerk.

Proposed 2022-23– Ben Roberts

With the help of PowerPoint slides, Ben presented an overview of the FY23 Asking Budget, saying that the intent is to return Church operations to a more normal pre-covid status. The budget limits the pledge increase to 3.5%, includes substantial increases in income from rentals, maintains transfers from directed funds at 5% except for Community Grants and Outreach, provides a 4% cost of living increase for all staff, sees modest increases in expenses requested by boards and committees, and expands capabilities in AV, marketing, and online events. The budget shows a 9.2% increase in income (\$111,500) and a 4.4% increase in expenses (\$55,800). The reason for the difference in income over expense is that last year we showed a \$55k loss which we covered with the PPP loans. We won't have that loss this year. We project a truly balanced budget. Ben showed a slide detailing the changes in directed funds from 2013/14 to the present and there have been healthy increases, providing us with a cushion to cover future needs. A slide showing a summary of available cash and operating reserves showed them projected to be \$609 for fiscal year-end 2022, compared to \$820k for 12/31/2021. Available operating reserves are projected to be \$214,026 at fiscal year-end 2022. In response to a question concerning the outstanding loan balance, Rita replied that the balance is \$950k and we have earmarked funds to continue paying the interest and principal on the loan. Those earmarked funds will be depleted by April 2025. Anne thanked the Budget Policy Committee for its work. She added that we need approval of the asking budget pending success of the stewardship campaign.

Proposed resolution:

- *The Church asking budget for 2022-2023 is approved for use in the stewardship campaign.*
- *The final operating budget based on stewardship results will be presented to the Congregation for approval at its annual meeting.*

Action: The asking budget was approved unanimously by members in the social hall and attending via Zoom.

Stewardship Campaign – Bing Heckman

Bing encouraged members to submit their pledge cards sooner rather than later. Participation is very important, so he asked members to give at whatever level they are comfortable with. The name of this year's campaign is "Meeting the Moment Together". Bing underscored the important things that we are all investing in when making our donations to the Church. Members of the Congregation wished Bing Godspeed with his upcoming surgery.

Asking budget discussion: Following Bing's stewardship remarks, a couple of questions were asked concerning the proposed budget. One question concerned the expected cash deficit at Heritage Bank of \$19k at fiscal year-end 2022. Rita pointed out that the slide shows an expected deficit because more of our cash is being invested than previously. The cash account at Heritage will never actually be negative. Sherilyn Stolz wondered about expected income from live events and what would happen if that income does not materialize. Ben answered that we would have a negative result at the end of the year, but our reserves would help us cover that possibility.

Safe Parking Update – Eileen Altman

Eileen gave a brief description of Safe Parking Program in which Palo Alto permits up to four automobiles with inhabitants to park on authorized properties. She said that Anne Campbell and Wes Chow have been working on moving the Church through the process of getting approval from the City for Safe Parking at FCCPA. They have done a lot of research and have had some preliminary contact with the Church neighbors. The designated parking spaces will be in the area behind the kitchen. The neighbors on that side of the Church property have been especially anxious about the program. There will be a neighborhood meeting with all neighbors who live within 600ft of the Church. We are complying with all the requirements, so we feel confident of City approval. Individuals in the program will be allowed to be on Church property from 7pm to 7am. There will be a high-grade Port-a-Potty on site for them to use. **Safe Parking discussion:** Lucinda Lenicheck wondered why we are not considering the front parking lot instead of the back parking lot. Eileen responded that the back lot spaces offer more shelter and privacy. Toward that end, Wes added that we have already moved the designated spaces further away from Embarcadero. Bill Reller wondered who will host the next meeting with neighbors. Eileen replied that it will be hosted by the Palo Alto Planning Committee. John Grundy wondered what would happen if the vehicle dwellers violate the time restrictions. Eileen answered that a social service management program will monitor the dwellers, who are supposed to maintain a distance from the Church of 1.5 miles for the rest of the day, outside the 7pm to 7am timeframe. She added that the meeting with the City will be public and the Congregation will be encouraged to attend. One member asked if the dwellers will be the same people all the time. Eileen said that Move Mountain View will oversee a vetting process for each vehicle dweller. The individuals should be predictable and vetted. Wes pointed out that the City has a Safe Parking webpage. There are 3 – 4 churches that have already applied and recordings of their meetings with neighbors are online. Permits were approved for those churches. Another member asked about what kind of amenities the dwellers will have, such as lighting, the ability to cook outside, and distance between spaces. Eileen replied that the vehicle inhabitants will not be able to cook outside or hang around their vehicles. The expectation is that most of them will come in when they are ready to retire for the evening. She said that the Church parking space will primarily be a place for them to sleep, an expectation that was also confirmed by Anne. There will be a hotline for complaints and motor homes will not be allowed. A member of the Congregation who had been at another church with such a program said that most of the dwellers were women with small children who were seeking a safe place. Eileen observed that families with children generally get moved by Move Mountain View into a housing program as soon as possible. Anne underscored that this program is designed to transition folks from vehicles to permanent dwellings.

Ohlone Justice Project Update – Marty Dreher and Maria Daehler

Marty presented several slides to the Congregation and said that the Ohlone Justice Project is a part of formalized program within the UCC. She said the Church comes from a denomination for which indigenous justice is a big goal. In 2020, the Northern California Conference wondered what it could be doing locally with the issue. At FCCPA the committee has been meeting regularly for 18 months and between meetings

has been doing a lot of work to dig deeply into the topic. Committee members spent the first 14 months learning what they could, then in subsequent months, lamenting – sharing how they were affected and motivated by what they learned. Now, they are in the listening phase – engaging with Ohlone leaders and peoples of numerous independent tribes. Meanwhile, the committee has been working on a *land acknowledgement statement* that will be presented on June 5 at the Congregational Meeting. Over the course of the coming month there will be opportunities for the Congregation to learn more. *The statement* is stating that we are acknowledging that the land on which the Church sits was once occupied by indigenous people and it has been ceded. We state what we intend to do moving forward. Dr. Jonathon Cordero, a Raymatush Ohlone scholar, has been helping us. The journey continues with many future activities that are already planned or are in the works, and are all self-funded. The committee wants to develop relationships with, engage with, and participate in a variety of activities with local Ohlone peoples. One of the planned activities is a lecture series. The committee hopes to have something for everyone. Marty said specific activities with times and dates are listed on a handout that is available for people to take. Robyn Crumly asked if the committee speaks for the Church. Maria responded by saying that there are openings for everyone to join and the committee encourages people to come forward with input and questions. So far there have been about 40 people involved.

Capital Campaign Possibilities – Rob Lenicheck

Rob reported that the trees in the courtyard have a lot of dead branches and we will probably need to take some of the trees down in the fall. This possibility has led to talk about another capital campaign to raise money for several goals: to redo the whole courtyard, to repay the Church's outstanding loan and to repair and upgrade the electrical system. The loan will be down to \$750 mio and we could take the opportunity to pay the balance off to avoid the ongoing expense of servicing it. In addition, the electrical panel at the Church needs to be replaced and brought up to code. Rob emphasized that if we don't decide to replace the panel on our own, then the City may ultimately force us to do it at a less opportune time. The new capital campaign may be launched in the fall and would hope to raise between \$1.5 and \$1.7 million.

Update on Sanctuary Renovation & Audio-Visual Project – Ben Roberts

Ben reported that the system is now fully operating and things are going well. The cost of the project was \$3 – 4k above what was raised and that overage is being taken from the AV fund. He called on folks to let the Church know if they are experiencing any problems. Eileen added that there is money to pay for someone to operate the system. It is currently being operated by dedicated and skilled volunteers. Ben said we have been looking for someone to take weekly responsibility for operating the system during worship and encouraged members to come forward with names. He said that we could also use the assistance of more volunteers for Sundays and for other events. One suggestion from the Congregation was to contact the directors of the AV programs at Foothill and De Anza Colleges and ask for referrals of students.

Closing prayer: Eileen Altman offered a prayer.

The meeting adjourned at 12:25 PM

*Respectfully submitted,
Clare Warner
Church Clerk*

Next scheduled Congregational Meeting: Sunday, June 5, 2022, after worship.