

**First Congregational Church of Palo Alto**  
*United Church of Christ*

**CONGREGATIONAL MEETING MINUTES**  
**March 21, 2021**

**Call to Order: Anne Campbell**

Moderator Anne Campbell called the meeting to order at 11:00 AM via Zoom. A quorum was established.

**Opening prayer: Dave Howell**

Pastor Dave Howell offered the opening prayer.

**Payroll Protection Program Loan – Anne Campbell**

Anne explained that the Church has an opportunity to receive another PPP loan, similar to the one we received last year. Last year at this time, we did not know what the future held financially. In May 2020 the Congregation approved receipt of \$145k to help with payroll and operations. We have managed to keep all staff on board and have avoided program cuts. On January 18, 2021, the 2020 PPP loan was forgiven. Anne said that we are still not out of the woods financially and we are in the process of developing the new budget for FY 2022 with lots of uncertainties. We don't know if, when, or by how much our rental and event incomes will rebound. Nor can we predict with certainty the Stewardship Campaign results. Anne underscored that the Congregation has been incredibly generous over the past year, which had an important impact on the Church, but we don't know what the future holds. Some Church families have left the area, while others have had a change in financial circumstances. There are also uncertainties around the pandemic and the possibility of resurgence.

In February, the government announced Round 2 of PPP loans and prioritized them for organizations with fewer than 20 employees. As with the first round of the program, new loans were intended for coverage of payroll and operations. FCCPA qualifies for the new round of PPP loans and another loan would be very helpful in meeting the needs of our 2022 budget. The Board of Trustees has discussed the loan possibility and are in support. The Council approved applying for the loan at its February meeting. On February 25<sup>th</sup>, the application was submitted and on March 4, 2021, a loan of \$142,000 was granted. Acceptance of the 2<sup>nd</sup> PPP loan requires approval of the Congregation. Anne said the Council recommended that the Congregation approve receipt of the funds.

***Discussion:** In response to various questions from the Congregation, Anne replied that we do expect the new loan to be forgiven and since we have specific uses for the fund, we do not expect the loan itself to produce a surplus. If having the loan means that we do accumulate an excess of income over expenses, then we may be able to build a reserve or meet some of the other financial challenges we have. The pandemic-related impact on revenue over the past fiscal year has been about \$80k, primarily from shortfalls in fundraising, events, and rent.*

***Resolution:** The Congregation approves receipt of a second round of PPP funding to be used for payroll and operations.*

***Action:** A vote of the Congregation was taken on the resolution. A majority of the Congregation voted in favor of the resolution. There were 7 who voted against it. The resolution passed.*

**Sanctuary video capability – David Howell/Ben Roberts**

Dave explained that there was a committee exploring how to enhance and improve the audio/visual capabilities in the sanctuary and turned the discussion over to Ben Roberts.

Ben said he, Jill Bicknell (Chairperson of the Worship Board), and a small committee of members from the Worship Board had been researching the audio/visual possibilities and had met with an architect and an AV expert. If the Congregation responds positively to the idea of enhancing the AV capabilities in the sanctuary, then the committee will proceed with further research. They went on to say that the pandemic has compelled the Church to develop and use technologies that had not been used in the past and now we have an opportunity to continue to benefit from some of the positive outcomes of the year with Zoom services and gatherings. As we move toward more in-person activities and worship, we will want to stay connected with those who cannot physically make it to the Church and meet their needs as well as the needs of those who are gathering in person. To do this, we will need some upgrades and we want to do them in a way that makes it most comfortable for everyone, those in the sanctuary and those who are remote. We also want to make it comfortable for the choir and the ministers. The goal is to do the enhancements in a way that is simple and easy to manage technically.

Ben went on to describe the enhancements that are under consideration, including a large centrally located overhead screen, a smaller LED screen on the front of the altar facing the Congregation, and additional screens for the minister and on either side of the chancel facing the choir. These additional screens would enable the minister and choir to see what the Congregation sees. Ben described the enhancements currently proposed as having a minimal effect on the view of those in the sanctuary. He showed slides depicting how the sanctuary would look with the screen monitors retracted and how it would look when they are in use.

***Discussion:*** *There were lots of questions from members, many focusing on the visibility of the screens and the extent to which the screens and the content would be sources of distraction for worshippers. While some members of the Congregation said they have experienced the positive aspects of screens in other churches, particularly during memorial services they have attended, others, whose experiences have been less positive, expressed concerns about losing the “feeling” of worship at FCCPA, a feeling which they appreciate. Ben and Dave assured members that the goal is to make the screens and the content as undistracting as possible. Dave said that there are many churches in the area using this type of technology to varying degrees and we feel that what we are proposing is very much on the subtle end of the spectrum.*

*Our approach will be unique from other churches. Dave described what we are attempting to achieve as “threading the needle.” He said we are a traditional church with a progressive theology. We don’t want a return to the sanctuary to be a step backwards. The challenge is to keep moving forward, appealing more to younger generations, while staying true to who we are and who we have been. He said that the size of the screen is negotiable as is the breadth of the equipment. He recognized that FCCPA appeals to many precisely because of the nature of our services and the atmosphere we create and we do not want to adversely change that. We want to have the technological enhancements that will improve our ability to reach everyone and will be as flexible as possible. We want to be able to easily bring out the large screen and then, make it nearly disappear when retracted.*

*There was interest from members as to what other enhancements there would be with cameras and microphones. Ben responded that the committee was looking at enhancements to everything audio/visual and to improve to the point where we have good sound for all sources and for in person and remote worshippers alike. An area that drew considerable discussion was whether or not the words for hymns and other textual content would be displayed on the screens. The order of worship will continue to be available online for downloading and to the extent that the bulletin is mobile-friendly, we may be able to print fewer bulletins for worship services. Members expressed the hope that we can continue with the technological enhancements that have been positive and will preserve the connections we have made with the wider community without making our in-person worship seem like a “production.”*

*Questions about capital and ongoing costs (service contracts, staffing, etc.) of such enhancements were also raised. Ben said that the capital cost is expected to be around \$100k, which would be funded outside the budget. The expectation is that we would need to hire an A/V person to handle worship services and sanctuary events and this person would be assisted by volunteers from the Congregation. Ben and Dave both emphasized*

*that the goal is to make what is a very complex set of tasks as simple and easy as possible to perform. Dave added that a generous member had already pledged \$50k and he hoped that would be matched with donations from other members. He also mentioned that we are facing other expenses, including tree trimming and removal, a new electrical panel and loan repayments so we have to prioritize things. His view is that this is the right time to make the technological changes and to make them a priority. In reply to a question about what our plan is if the costs were to exceed the funds raised, Ben said that we will need to raise more than the estimate and Dave reminded all that we still have to come up with a specific and detailed plan. Members expressed the hope that there would be ongoing discussions to clarify certain things before all was decided. Ben assured the Congregation that what was presented to them was informational only and that the committee is interested in dealing with all the concerns. He said they had done extensive review of the screen placement and size and had thought the project possibilities through many ways and many times and are determined to pursue results that would be the least intrusive and most effective.*

*Many members thanked Ben and the committee for their efforts and look forward to the benefits, particularly those related to retaining the broader reach of FCCPA in the wider community.*

Ben concluded the discussion by saying the next steps for the committee will be to develop a semifinal design and produce a solid cost estimate. They will then take the design and estimate to the Council and the Congregation. They will continue the discussions involving words of hymns and other text on the screen.

Anne thanked all who attended the meeting and contributed to the discussion.

**Closing prayer:** Eileen Altman

The meeting adjourned at 12:05 PM

The next Congregational meeting will be April 11, 2021, when the proposed budget for FY 2022 and the revised Bylaws will be presented.

*Respectfully submitted,*

*Clare Warner*

*Church Clerk*

**Slide Presentations:**

Anne Campbell – 2<sup>nd</sup> round PPP loan recommendation and acceptance

Ben Roberts – Sanctuary video and audio upgrades