

DRAFT MINUTES

Old First Reformed United Church of Christ Minutes for the Annual Congregational Meeting January 31, 2021

The meeting was held remotely, online through Zoom, due to the COVID-19 safety procedures adopted by the Old First Elders in March 2020. Information was provided to the congregation online prior to the meeting in the collected reports of leaders and groups and a Action Item Summary. Those documents should be referred to for details related to actions recorded here.

Welcome activity

- Participants used Zoom breakout rooms to share with a small group the surprises they have encountered while we have been worshipping and meeting remotely
- All viewed a video retrospective of Old First in 2020 prepared by Suzanne Cole

Organization of the meeting

- Co-Moderator of the Elders, Julie Steiner, called the meeting to order
- The congregation sang the hymn we traditionally use to open the Annual Meeting, “Once to Every Man and Nation”
- Pastor Michael Caine led the opening prayer, building on the theme of surprises from the welcoming activity
- A quorum was present, with the attendance of 82 members and 5 guests verified with online sign-in and review of screen shots of attendees
- A motion to offer voice to guests was moved by Adam Sherr, seconded by Greta Stewart and passed by a show of hands
- Julie Steiner explained the procedures for a remote congregational meeting
- Approval of the agenda for this meeting was moved by Mark Steiner and seconded by Jonathan Atwood

Approval of Minutes and reports

- Approval of the 2020 Congregational Meeting Minutes was moved by Jonathan Atwood and seconded by Tony Merlo
- After an opportunity for questions—there were none—approval of the collected Annual Reports from church leaders and groups other than the financial reports was moved by Adam Sherr, seconded by Greta Stewart, and approved unanimously by a show of hands

Financial reports

- Financial Secretary Adam Sherr provided an overview of and answered questions about his report available online, highlighting the near-record level of receipts from 2020 pledges, the continuing strong support of the UCC by Old First through Our Church's Wider Mission and special offerings, and a record number of pledges for 2021
- Treasurer Jonathan Vogan provided an overview of and answered questions about his report on 2020 and the proposed 2021 budget, both available online, highlighting the cost-saving efforts, especially in light of the decrease in income from building, that resulted in a balanced budget in 2020 and, we hope, in 2021
- Approval of all financial reports, including the proposed 2021 budget, was moved by Steve Wilhite and seconded by Greta Stewart and approved unanimously by a show of hands

Offertory

Church leadership

- Julie Steiner thanked those finishing terms in leadership positions: Alexa Sherr, Meg Bigelow, and Yiwola Awoyale as Elders; Nancy Donohue as chair of the Administration Standing Leadership Group; Gerry Woodroffe as representative to the Penn Southeast Conference and Philadelphia Association of the UCC, and Barbara Gurley as representative to POWER; the congregation acknowledged their good work with applause.
- Julie explained the nominations for election and appointments for 2021
- Affirmation of nominated and appointed leaders was moved by Jane Acevedo, seconded by Nancy Donohue, and approved unanimously by a show of hands
- With regard to the vacant Christian Education position, Julie reported that Trixie Steiner-Rose, Lorena Haberern, and Tim Robinson will be leading an exploration of possible reorganization and revitalization of Old First's Christian Education program
- Julie informed the congregation that we still need representatives to the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ and would welcome additional representatives to POWER

Sanctuary restoration proposal

- Julie Steiner reminded the congregation that restoring the sanctuary was a goal in the previous capital campaign, that it proved unrealizable at the time, and that at last year's annual meeting the congregation identified restoration in time for the 300th anniversary in 2027 of Old First's founding in 1727 as an ongoing congregational goal
- She explained that the vote today will be on the process for the project, not the design details in it, and invited anyone interested in participating in the specific

planning to attend a meeting of or join the Sanctuary Enhancement and Accessibility Committee

- Janice Smith, chair of that Committee, provided an overview of its report available online, which report identifies the Committee’s goal as “restoring the sanctuary using the vision of the 1837 congregation with the mission of 2027 in mind”
- She showed as slides images of the proposed restorations included in the online Action Item Summary
- Questions were asked and answered about the capacity of seating in the restored sanctuary (two-thirds of the current), the Historical Commission (it has no say on internal changes), the removal of the lectern (a single “desk” on the chancel for all functions is common in UCC churches and reflects the Reformed value of the centrality of the Word and the equality of all expressions of it), and the elevator (it cannot be extended to the balcony because of the structure of the building)
- Janice suggested that it might be appropriate to arrange for congregational discussion of what images, if any, would be the counterpart for our day of the open Bible (“the flying Bible”) currently painted on the reredos behind the chancel
- Pastor Caine reported on the selection of contractors so far, and the Committee’s commitment to using businesses owned by people of color and women
- Janice pointed out that the budget for the project—\$285,000 at present—is just an estimate and will change as more decisions about contractors are made
- Suzanne Cole, Stewardship Director and chair of the committee for raising funds for the project, reported on that fundraising effort, noting that the goal is to raise “300K for the 300th” anniversary of the church, to provide more financial resources than currently identified in the project budget, and that the campaign is “live” as of today, with all pledges to be fulfilled no later than March 31, 2023
- Suzanne explained the proposal to borrow any funds needed in anticipation of as-yet-unfulfilled pledges from the church’s endowment
- Co-Moderator of the Elders Bobbie Benjamin moved, on behalf of the Elders, that

To better pursue our mission as a community of faith and to make the most of this time when the sanctuary is not being used regularly, we:

- 1) Direct the Sanctuary Enhancement and Accessibility Committee to implement the plans approved by the Elders for renovating the Sanctuary and, within the parameters of those plans, to make all necessary decisions related to the renovation;
- 2) Approve the expenditure of funds from the Endowment for this project by authorizing the Treasurer to borrow from the Endowment up to \$250,000, or 95% of the amount pledged, whichever is less, at an interest rate of 1%. The loan will be repaid to the Endowment no later than April 1, 2023.

- Jane Styer Acevedo seconded the motion
- There was no discussion and Adam Sherr called the question
- The motion passed unanimously

Concluding matters

- Julie Steiner reported that the Elders are discussing the request of the Penn Southeast Conference of the UCC that Old First sign an anti-racism statement, and will consider actions item related to it
- Julie also reminded the congregation of upcoming volunteer opportunities including the preparation of Lenten packages for the congregation; work in the sanctuary in preparation for the restoration, to be done in isolation by individuals and families for safety reasons; the need for representatives to the Conference and POWER
- Adjournment was moved by Margaret Rohdy and seconded by Nancy Donohue
- Final Hymn
- Pastor Caine led the closing prayer