

**Pennsylvania Southeast Conference
United Church of Christ
Consistory Meeting Minutes
March 18, 2023 Hybrid Meeting
PSEC Office and via Zoom**

Conference Vision— a unified body of Christ moving in one direction to effect for good and for God the lives of all people living in Southeast Pennsylvania.

Conference Mission— to strengthen local churches and pastors by making the five Associations of the Penn Southeast Conference agencies of connection and accountability.

Conference Goals— 2020 Vision Statement

Who is PSEC ?— PSEC is the link that connects our church's various and diverse ministries both locally and globally. Together, we provide our local churches, pastors and congregations with the training and inspiration they need to carry out our church's wider mission. We are stronger together; therefore, we embrace diversity, and above all, we spread God's love!

The following members were in attendance: Rev. Bill Worley, Rev. Bob Fogal, Rev. Kevin McLemore, Ms. Donna Fried, Ms. Mary Loiselle, Rev. Suzanne Schwarz-Green, Mr. Charles Kuthuru, Rev. Melissa Burkhart, Rev. Cean James, Mr. Tom Wright, Rev. Alan Miles, Rev. Kevin Fruchtl, Rev. Ken McDowell, Ms. Alisa Unell, Beth Walker. The following members were absent: Mrs. Robin Hightower, Rev. Jeff Wargo, and Rev. Fran Merkel

Opening reflection was provided by Rev. Burkhart who read a piece reminding us of the sign of redemptive love found in the spring of each year in the buds of new life.

The meeting was called to order by Moderator Charles Kuthuru at 10:10.

The Agenda for the meeting was approved upon motion by Rev. Suzanne Schwarz-Green which was seconded.

The minutes of the January 21, 2023 meeting were approved upon motion by Mary Loiselle which was seconded.

Reports:

Treasurer Rev. Bob Fogal provided a review of the current financial statements. He noted we are slightly ahead of Budget in OCWM giving which is due to some churches sending their 2022 contributions late and some paying ahead. Pass thru funds will always show more receipts than disbursements due to timing of payments. There is an operating deficit of \$33,000 which is better than projected due to increase, over budget in OCWM contributions. Invoicing has just been sent for the Communities of Practice work. Expenses which are under budget include staffing, which is light use of hourly paid staff, and a savings on benefit expenses due to ACM McLemore's health benefits source. The auditors have requested that some expenses be paid a month in advance, including pension contributions which results in the showing that the expenses are overbudget. There will be a meeting

with the Auditors on April 15, 2023. The Treasurer's report was approved upon Motion for approval by Beth Walker with a second.

Caroline Dunleavy joined the meeting for a discussion about OCWM. Discussion regarding the results of the OCWM calls. There was about a 50% response rate to calls to the congregations in all associations. There is a reluctance to keep calling when there is no response. There was a discussion about how to better equip the Association representatives to engage in these calls and make the connections to the Local Churches. How are we engaging with member churches? Often this depends on the connection by the Pastor to the Conference. Without that connection, it is difficult to get the Local Church engaged in this giving.

Stewardship Taskforce Report: Caroline Dunleavy provided a background of the development of the Generosity Mission Team. Ground work was laid last year through work with Andrew Warner from the National Setting. The engagement is continuing develop. As to OCWM the question is "what can we do right now?" The Generosity team is focusing on Local Churches who have not given to OCWM in the past few years. There is an expectation that every church contributes to OCWM, even those that are small and struggling. There is a plan to follow up with the 14 churches that gave nothing last year. There are also some congregations who have contributed \$100 or under and they will be the next focus area. We do not have development staff, so we have to work together and the Consistory is essential to this work. In addition, the Generosity Team will be presenting at the Lay Leadership Training event on 4/15/23.

Next steps were discussed. Some training of consistory members with scripts was requested. The relationships are to be covenantal and we do not want to view the giving as transactional but rather as a part of the covenant relationship. We are all involved in supporting each other and so the key questions to take to discussions with those congregations who are not giving to OCWM is "how are your covenantal relationships going?" There needs to be a listening session as well as a setting of expectations.

The Stewardship Taskforce Report which accepted upon Motion by Rev. Suzanne Schwarz-Green with a second.

Disaster Ministry Coordinator Report A written report was submitted by Dr. Karl Jones. The report was accepted upon motion by Ms. Donna Fried second by Suzanne Schwarz-Green.

Personnel Committee Report was received from Rev. Burkhardt. The report was accepted upon motion by Rev. Bob Fogal, seconded by Mr. Tom Wright.

Report of Associate Conference Minister for Congregational Development Report. The written report was received and accepted on Motion by Ms. Donna Fried, seconded by Ms. Mary Loiselle.

Report Associate Conference Minister for Search & Call was presented by Rev. McLemore. Churches remain on the list of churches in transition until there is an installation of a settled pastor. There are currently 10 churches engaged in a search for pastoral leadership. There is a slow down in circulated profiles. The report was received and accepted upon Motion by Rev. Kevin Fruchtl, seconded by Rev. Bob Fogal.

Report of the Conference Minister a written report was provided before the meeting and Rev. Worley supplemented that report as follows. Open Table UCC (a new church start in Pottstown) received correspondence from the zoning officer regarding the location at which Open Table is gathering to worship as it is in an area that is not designated for churches. A meeting was held with the Pottstown Zoning officer, Pottstown Manager and Solicitor to exchange information and concerns. There is further discussion on going regarding how church is defined for zoning purposes. On April 5, 2023 a meeting with Pottstown council regarding Beacon of Hope and temporary shelters and warming centers in church properties will be discussed. Prayers for and attendance at that meeting is welcome. Year End Reports were completed and submitted last week. Of our conference congregations, 88% submitted the requested information. Rev. Worley is adding working with a Spiritual mentor and quarterly retreats to his plans for the coming year. The Conference Ministers report was accepted upon Motion by Rev. Bob Fogal, seconded by Donna Fried.

A written Report from the Lay Leadership Education Team was received -there is a training event planned for 4/15/23. Thanks to Trinity UCC in Pottstown for hosting the event. A request was made to address a computer glitch in the Conference website events page. The report was accepted upon Motion of Ms. Donna Fried with a second.

Conversation broadening out the use of church closure funds – This item was tabled till the next meeting.

Keystone Project -Rev. Worley reports that the talks are ongoing. The last scheduled meeting was cancelled due to weather. April 28, 2023 is the next scheduled meeting. The talks are progressing.

Funding for General Synod Delegates-We have \$30K from last year's budget but nothing budgeted for this year for General Synod Delegates cost. There is a proposal to use \$8K from savings to supplement the budget for covering delegate costs. This will result in an anticipated out of pocket expense of \$200 per delegate. The Conference Minister has discretionary funds to help those for whom this will be a hardship. The use of \$8,000 from savings to offset costs for General Synod delegates from PSEC as approved upon Motion by Rev. Kevin Fruchtl, seconded by Rev. Bob Fogal. Rev. Suzanne Schwarz-Green abstained.

Report on Ecumenical Mission Trip to India -The CSI denomination is a merger of both Anglican and Congregationally based denominations. Photos of the trip were provided. There is a movement to creating a Hindu National Faith. This is of concern much like Christian Nationalism movement is on the rise in the U.S. Bishop Rubin provided wonderfully generous hospitality to the group that traveled. Bishop Rubin has been invited to attend General Synod this June.

The meeting was adjourned upon Motion by Rev. Suzanne Schwarz-Green seconded by Ms. Donna Fried.

For May 20th meeting: Devotions: Kevin Fruchtl Hospitality: Rev. Melissa Burkhart