

**Pennsylvania Southeast Conference
United Church of Christ
Consistory Meeting Minutes
January 21, 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!

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The meeting opened with prayer and devotions. Rev. Suzanne Schwarz-Green led the Consistory in devotions, "Does God Have a Big Toe?" She also supplied the hospitality.

1. The following members were in attendance: Mrs. Robin Hightower, Rev. Melissa Burkhart, Rev. Bill Worley, Rev. Kevin McLemore, Rev. Bob Fogal, Rev. Kevin Fruchtl, Rev. Fran Merkel, Rev. Jeff Wargo, Rev. Ken McDowell, Rev. Suzanne Schwarz-Green, Ms. Donna Fried, Ms. Mary Loiselle, Mr. Tom Wright, and Ms. Beth Walker. The following members were absent: Mr. Charles Kuthuru, Rev. Alan Miles, Rev. Cean James, and Miss Alisa Unell.
2. The meeting was brought to order by Rev. Melissa Burkhart, Vice Moderator, in the absence of Mr. Charles Kuthuru, at 10:10 AM.
3. Approval of the Meeting Agenda. Rev. Schwarz-Green moved to approve the agenda. Mr. Wright seconded the motion. There was no discussion. The motion carried.
4. Approval of November 19th minutes. Correction of Rev. Kevin McLemore's Call Agreement. The substance of the correction, PSEC covering the cost of alternative Health insurance for Rev. Kevin McLemore and his spouse, was previously approved by the Consistory. There was some confusion as to the cost of benefits represented in the proposed amended agreement. There was discussion. A friendly amendment was added by Ms. Beth Walker: ", not to exceed the cost of the UCC's Pension Board Plan A Medical, Dental, and Vision Benefits for a family of two." Ms. Mary Loiselle seconded the motion. The motion carried. His call agreement will be changed to include his family. There were no other changes. Rev. Wargo moved to adopt the minutes with the change. Rev. Fruchtl seconded the motion. The minutes were adopted.

5. Correspondence. Mrs. Hightower read a letter of thanks from Rev. Dr. F. Russell Mittman. He expressed his thanks for conferring the title of Conference Minister Emeritus bestowed upon him at the Fall Conference Meeting. Rev. Dr. F. Russell Mittman passed away on January 7, 2023.

6. Reports.

- a. Treasurer: See Attachment #1. Rev. Jeff Wargo and Ms. Mary Loiselle moved that the word, “surplus,” be used in reports versus the word, “profit.” In all Budget & Finance and OCWM reports. There was no discussion. The motion carried.
 1. Budget & Finance Reports. See Attachment #1
 2. OCWM Calls. A spreadsheet of those churches which had not yet reached its OCWM pledge was distributed. Rev. Bill Worley reviewed talking points and offered advice as to how to approach individuals about what we are requesting.
- b. Personnel Committee Report. There was a decision to keep staff evaluations the same, and Rev. Bill Worley approved. Rev. Bob Fogal moved and Ms. Donna Fried seconded the motion. There was no discussion. The motion carried.
- c. Disaster Ministry Coordinator. The events Rev. Karl Jones proposed to attend will be budgeted. Rev. Jones is stepping down from PNEC. Ms. Donna Fried moved to accept the report. Rev. Fran Merkel seconded the motion. The motion carried.
- d. Stewardship Task Force Report. The book, Spirituality of Fund Raising, was recommended by Rev. Bob Fogal. Ms. Beth Walker moved to accept the Stewardship Task Force Report. Rev. Bob Fogal seconded the motion. The motion carried.
- e. Associate Conference Minister for Congregational Development. Rev. Cean James is engaged in a funeral today. Rev. Suzanne Schwarz-Green moved to accept the report. Mr. Tom Wright seconded the motion. The motion carried.
- f. Associate Conference Minister for Search & Call Report. Recently, there has been a two to three week flood of circulating profiles, which is very positive. Rev. McLemore has set up coaching appointments with interim pastors. MESA (Ministerial Excellence Support and Authorization) team supports clergy in search and call. Rev. McLemore is seeking information and feedback from MESA why profiles weren’t circulating. We think differently how individuals discern being called to serve. The future is the laity because

there are not enough ministers. It is important to set up structures focused on training laity. It was asked: When will the very small churches work together? We need to look at congregations which have vitality and reimagine who churches can be. Rev. Kevin Fruchtl moved to approve the report. Rev. Suzanne Schwarz-Green moved to second the motion. The motion carried. This includes the Churches in Transition Report.

- g. Conference Minister Report. Rev. Bill Worley made additions to his written report. The Keystone Study Group met yesterday. Mrs. Robin Hightower, Rev. Bob Fogal, and Rev. Melissa Burkhart are members of this group. The Group has met three times. The Group is drilled down to staff, money, and etc. There is a page on the PSEC website regarding the Keystone Study Group.

We will celebrate closed churches' legacies at the Spring meeting. Ms. Sue Creswell had the shingles and Rev. Cean James has pink eye.

It is expected that 700 people will attend Rev. Dr. F. Russell Mittman's funeral service. There is an online choice as well.

Ms. Beth Walker will send to Rev. Bill Worley and Rev. Suzanne Schwarz-Green what is needed for petitions. There is an online guide describing the closure process.

Rev. Suzanne Schwarz-Green moved to approve the Conference Minister Report. Rev. Fran Merkel seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Old Business

1. Report from the Lay Leadership Education Team. The target audience of the April workshop are individuals in congregations interested in attending. The time of the workshop will be 9 AM to 3 PM. The cost is \$40.00 per person which includes lunch. It will be held at Trinity UCC and Zion UCC.
2. Report from conversation broadening out the use of church closure funds. The group has not met.
3. Update on Open Table UCC. Revs. Zach and Nicole Jackson were in attendance. Nicole opened their discussion with prayer. Open Table has an Open and Affirming covenant. Two preteen girls were baptized in the river. Flexibility is possible when there are no traditions. The freedom and flexibility to fail is there. The Sacrament of Holy Communion is held every Sunday. A seminary intern attends worship. A Wednesday Bible Study is held via Zoom. The podcast has been the best tool of evangelism. Open Table has connected to about 25 people with an average of eighteen people. Giving continues to rise. Open Table is looking to find ways to raise

money. The church wants to pay taxes. It is helpful to have two Pottstown Borough Council people in the church. Connections are being formed. The Steel River Playhouse in Pottstown is allowing Open Table to use their space for free; members volunteer there. The Christmas Eve service was held at ManorCare in Pottstown. Glick's donated about 200 poinsettias.

Connections have been made in the community. Following the explosion in Pottstown, Open Table organized a prayer vigil which was "really beautiful." They are working on the homeless shelter issue. They have a mentoring program at the middle school. They are also working with the Ricketts Center to organize a clothing exchange in the Spring. They are partnering with the high school to organize a silent protest.

There are challenges and joys. Financial independence is a challenge. They are bringing in people who are burned out and disillusioned. The joy is that is really good; doing what "my heart says I should be doing." The livestream is run by a ten-year old. The Consistory asked how they can help Open Table; the response was prayer. The Pottstown churches are alarmingly silent about Open Table. There are 65 churches in Pottstown.

4. The Spring PSEC meeting will be held June 2-3 at West Chester University. The theme will be: May they all be One: Unleashing the Spirit.

New Business

1. PSEC Fall Meeting. Where will the offering go? The Consistory members suggested that a Seminary Fund (for members in discernment), youth, and lay leadership. Scholarships could also be created to support sending people to programs.
2. Adjournment. Ms. Beth Walker moved to adjourn the meeting. Rev. Suzanne Schwarz-Green seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 12:50 PM.

Robin A. Hightower
Conference Secretary