

**PSEC Consistory Meeting
Minutes for January 18, 2025
Hybrid meeting – on zoom or @ PSEC Office**

In attendance: Rev. Bill Worley, Rev. Kevin McLemore, Rev. Cean James, Rev. Melissa Burkhart, Mr. Bob Ames, Rev. Ken McDowell, Rev. Caroline Bashore, Rev. Selina Hamilton, Mr. Rick Deerfield, Rev. Alan Miles, Ms. Caroline Dunleavy, Ms. Mary Loiselle, Ms. Jenny Strauch, Ms. Donna Fried, Rev. Suzanne Schwarz-Green, Mr. Cole Brenner-Smith

Word of Prayer and Devotions offered by Rev. Suzanne Schwarz-Green.

Hospitality offered by Ms. Donna Fried.

Meeting called to order by Moderator Rev. Melissa Burkhart at 9:06 am.

Work of God's People

Rev. Glenn Rarick though unable to attend was welcomed to the PSEC Consistory.

Motion to approve the meeting's agenda with the addition of the proposal of repositioning fund written by Ms. Caroline Dunleavy by Rev. Suzanne Schwarz-Green and seconded by Mr. Rick Deerfield. No discussion, motion carried unanimously.

Motion to approve the November 16, 2024, minutes with the revision of 'protentional' being changed to 'potential' on page 2 under the Conference Minister Report by Ms. Donna Fried and seconded by Ms. Mary Loiselle, motion carried unanimously.

Reports:

1. Treasurer – Rev. Ken McDowell – as of December 31, 2024, total income was \$864,399, expenses were \$969,109, and the net assets decreased by \$132,415. It was emphasized that these numbers do not yet reflect additional church contributions received through mid-January (books remain open until January 18th), which have historically made up a significant portion of year-end giving. OCWM contributions were lower than anticipated for December, coming in at \$51,120 against a budgeted \$157,559. Historical trends suggest that additional funds are likely to close this gap. Savings will be used to cover the shortfalls for the year. On the expense side, Rev. Ken McDowell noted that spending was approximately \$50,000 below the budgeted amount which he attributed to careful financial management by the PSEC staff.
2. Generosity Mission Team Report – Ms. Caroline Dunleavy – she announced her completion of the Executive Certificate in Religious Fundraising through the Lake Institute. Giving Tuesday efforts raised \$1,967. Upcoming initiatives include a presentation for Glenside UCC, participation in the 2025 Lay Leadership Convocation, and preparations for the 2024 annual report.
3. Disaster Ministry Coordinator Report – written report submitted by Rev. Karl Jones – an AmeriCorps team will be in the area from March 6th to April 23rd, splitting their time between

a Baptist church in Berks County for recovery work and Salt and Light Church in Philadelphia for disaster ministry efforts. Appreciation was expressed for Karl's efforts.

4. Personnel Committee Report – Mr. Bob Ames – a final version of the staff evaluation has been completed to reflect the upcoming merger and staff transitions; focusing on feelings and support. The evaluations will begin within the next month, with the committee discussing the reports at their March 19th meeting. A copy of the staff evaluation form will be shared with the PSEC Consistory. Additionally, work has begun on drafting job descriptions for Keystone Conference staff, including a revised Executive Conference Minister job description.
5. Associate Conference Minister for Congregational Development Report – Rev. Cean James – it was highlighted that some churches in the NCD process raised concerns about continued support in the process during the Keystone Conference transition, Rev. Cean James suggested that it should be communicated to these churches that whoever continues this work in the Keystone Conference, there will be a clear handoff for easy transition.
6. Associate Conference Minister for Search and Call Reports – Rev. Kevin McLemore – Rev. Kevin McLemore and Brea Rarick attended the Authorized Ministry 21 Conference, pointing out the limited outreach from conferences to candidates looking to circulate their profiles. The MID retreat across PA was overall successful.
7. Conference Minister Report – Rev. Bill Worley – In addition to the written report, Rev. Bill Worley expressed gratitude to the National Church for financially supporting Rev. Kevin McLemore and Brea Rarick's attendance at the Authorized Ministry 21 Conference. At the recent Keystone meeting, discussions focused on the constitution and bylaws for the Keystone Conference, incorporating lessons learned from the PSEC Consistory. The group also addressed the new conference logo, recommending a participatory process for its final design, which the transition board (set to begin work in July) will oversee. Rev. Ken McDowell has agreed to succeed Bill as process coordinator for the Keystone transition, assisting the four Conference Ministers in managing and organizing the next steps. At some point, the PSE Conference body will need to vote on legally dissolving the corporation, with the timing, either at the May 31st Spring Meeting or the November 9th Fall Meeting, yet to be determined. Additionally, a historic PSE Conference Board will continue through 2026-2027 to handle financial decisions, including fund distribution and asset management. However, the board's authority post-dissolution remains unresolved, and Rev. Worley has consulted Conference Attorney Jim Smith for guidance. With Tammie's transition to a subcontractor role, PSEC Consistory must appoint a new third check signatory. A motion to designate the Conference Moderator as the third check signatory for the remainder of PSEC's existence was made by Rev. Selina Hamilton and seconded by Ms. Donna Fried. No discussion, motion carried unanimously. Finally, 32 PSEC members will serve as delegates at General Synod and will have their first meeting soon.

Motion to approve the above reports (1-7) by Ms. Jenny Strauch and seconded by Rev. Suzanne Schwarz-Green. No discussion, motion carried unanimously.

Old Business

1. Keystone Conference next steps – Keystone Conference updates were provided during the Conference Minister report. There were no further questions.
2. Open Table UCC – The PSEC Consistory acknowledged improvements in Open Table's business plan and documentation compared to the previous year. Open Table requested \$40,000 from the New Church Start fund for 2025, a reduction from the \$48,000 received in 2024. However, future financial support depends on the Keystone Board's decisions regarding endowments. Based on this knowledge there was discussion around potentially providing more than \$40,000 to Open Table; given the New Church Start fund's balance of approximately \$639,000. There were concerns voiced about Open Table's ability to become self-sufficient and a suggestion was offered to compromise on the financial support by providing \$20,000 (half of their current request). Praise was given to the Revs. Jackson for their innovative ministry and online reach, but there was concern about a lack of concrete sustainability plans and financial projections.

As the Revs. Zach and Nichole Jackson and member Luke Johnson joined the meeting, they shared that in Open Table's second year of ministry, they have solidified their mission to remove barriers. A key achievement this last year was forming partnerships with other open and affirming churches in Pottstown, which led to Pottstown's first Pride Fest, drawing 500 attendees to the event. In 2025, Open Table will continue to expand partnerships with other community organizations and UCC churches, as well as make themselves more visible through platforms like gaychurch.org and local newspaper ads. Open Table does not see themselves as a replacement to the traditional church but as an alternative approach to church working alongside traditional churches. Financial sustainability remains a key concern, and they have been working with a coach, Cameron Trimble, to explore realistic revenue streams. Initially considering a coffee shop or game café, they have pivoted due to economic challenges and the saturation of similar businesses in their area. Currently, OpenTable receives about \$2,000 per month in offerings and has secured national church funding that will increase to \$25,000 in the coming years. However, they recognize that full self-sufficiency typically takes 8–9 years. To adjust, one pastor will seek full-time external employment to reduce church salary expenses as the current structure is two part-time pastors splitting a full-time salary. A transition to one pastor working full-time outside of ministry and the other part-time would reduce the strain on Open Table's finances but require a redistribution of weekly responsibilities among the congregants. The intention is by the end of summer or early fall for one pastor to secure full-time employment outside of the church that allows for flexibility for ministry work. Lastly, the financial ask of \$40,000 was determined by reviewing end-of-year financials, projected giving, and rising expenses, ensuring only the necessary amount was requested. Currently, there is a prediction and expectation that giving will increase by 10% yearly while expenses rise by 3-5% yearly.

Following their departure, the Consistory continued discussions. A motion to approve the \$40,000 that Open Table has requested for 2025 was made by Rev. Melissa Burkhart and seconded by Rev. Alan Miles. Discussion included concerns about the sustainability of the ministry, particularly the high personnel expenses in their budget, and whether Open Table functioned as a traditional church start

or a mission-focused ministry of PSEC. Doubts were expressed regarding a lack of clarity on the plan for transitioning to lay-lead ministry. A suggestion to split the funding in half and revisit the progress of Open Table in six months was made. The motion did not pass with 4 votes in favor, 6 opposed, and 3 abstentions. A motion to approve \$20,000 to be reviewed in May, contingent on receiving financial statements and proof of progress toward self-sufficiency was made by Mr. Bob Ames and seconded by Ms. Jenny Strauch. Discussion included whether six months was a realistic timeframe for achieving self-sufficiency and the possibility of requiring bi-monthly financial updates to maintain accountability and transparency. The motion was recalled by Mr. Bob Ames and seconded by Ms. Jenny Strauch. A motion to approve \$50,000 from the New Church Start fund to Open Table as a final contribution from PSEC was made by Ms. Caroline Dunleavy, there was no second. A motion was made to approve \$20,000 to Open Table in 2025 to help with the costs of transitioning to a lay-led focused ministry by Rev. Suzanne Schwarz-Green and seconded by Ms. Caroline Dunleavy. It was clarified that Open Table could in the future ask for additional funding, but the financial support was not guaranteed. The motion passed with 8 voting in favor, 1 opposed, and 4 abstentions. PSEC Moderator, Rev. Melissa Burkhart will notify the Revs. Jackson with the decision via email, with CC members given 48 hours to review and provide input before it is sent.

New Business

1. Proposal of Repositioning Fund – Ms. Caroline Dunleavy – a brief verbal explanation of the repositioning fund was provided; the fund would provide financial incentives for churches considering mergers, acquisitions, and administrative consolidations, aiming to support congregations actively working toward sustainable change and encourage structural changes that align with long-term viability. The proposal was tabled until the next meeting, allowing PSEC Consistory members time to review the proposal before further discussion.
2. \$150K from the former Christ UCC, Temple – Motion to allocate \$30,000 of the funds from Christ UCC, Temple toward startup costs related to the Keystone Conference and to place the remaining funds in the new church start fund made by Rev. Suzanne Schwarz-Green and seconded by Ms. Mary Loiselle, no discussion, motion carried with 1 abstention.
3. Exception of term limits for Consistory/Committees members – motion to accept the exception of term limits for PSEC Consistory and Committee members made by Rev. Selina Hamilton and seconded by Rev. Suzanne Schwarz-Green, no discussion, motion carried unanimously.
4. Agenda for the Spring Meeting – May 31 @ Zwingli – The election of delegates for the transition Keystone Board (4 delegates from each Conference will serve on the transition board) will take place during the Spring meeting; Mr. Rick Deerfield, Mr. Bob Ames, Rev. Suzanne Schwarz-Green, Rev. Ken McDowell, Rev. Melissa Burkhart, and Ms. Jenny Strauch all volunteered to serve on the transition board. Overall, it was confirmed that the agenda structure was appropriate.

Motion to Adjourn at 12:45 pm by Rev. Suzanne Schwarz-Green and seconded by Ms. Donna Fried, motion carried unanimously.

Consistory Meeting dates:

2025: [Mar. 15](#), [May 17](#), [Jul. 19](#), [Sep. 20](#), [Nov. 15](#)