

Church Council

Minutes

1.27.26

Present: Ben Lee, Kim Stevens, Craig Way, Debby Dwyer, Rita Skog, Jacque Paige, Jim Meisner, Wendy Williams-Brown, Vanessa Rose and Michelle Velez.

Wendy Williams-Brown offered the opening prayer.

The minutes from the December 14, 2025 All Church meeting were approved.
The minutes from the January 6, 2026 Church Council meeting were approved.

Pastor Report

From 6-7 p.m. previous to the Church Council Meeting Vanessa led a multi-faith Minneapolis solidarity event at First Church. It was attended by over 200 people from First Church, St. Paul's, St. Anthony's, Trinity Episcopal, B'nai Israel, Westport UU, Greenfield Hill and more. With civil rights music leadership from Frank Martignetti and our choir, speakers from Make the Road, Curtis Farr, David Spollett and Kathy Williamson as well as the reading of 32 deaths from anti-immigration efforts, it was quite moving. The First Selectman of Fairfield was also in attendance.

The Church is quite busy with the funerals for Peter Doyle and Sandy Bromer coming up as well as the start of a new hire reporting to Beth as Beth has taken on the social media duties and is doing a good job. Our business manager, Kate, had surgery today for a broken wrist, but seems to be back at work very quickly. Vanessa is grateful to be our Pastor and feels everything is going well. Kudos to Vanessa for her recent moderating of an event at the Westport Library.

Finance Report

Treasurer, Jim Meisner, sent out a number of reports previous to the meeting: 2025 P&L, 2026 Budget, 2025 Fund Report and the 2025 year-end balance sheet. He reported at the meeting that the Church is in "good financial shape."

The **2025 Year-end actuals** showed a surplus of \$49,300 of which \$39,590 will be used to close out the losses in the Tiffany Window fund and the Rowland Road Asset Improvement Fund. The Store had an amazing year contributing \$187K to Church income.

The **2026 Budget** is showing a surplus of \$2,344 with an excellent pledge campaign response for 2026. The **Fund report** at the end of 2025 shows a balance of \$142,928 in accounts held at Fairfield County Bank and \$2,765,432 of endowment funds. The investment performance was

quite strong this year bringing the balance in the endowment almost back to the balance at the end of 2024 after spending \$439K in mostly maintenance.

The year-end **2025 balance sheet** shows healthy current assets \$2.5M with fixed assets (buildings) of \$10.7M. Our only liability is \$13K for the security deposit on the Sunnieholme Parsonage.

Jim moved that the 2026 budget that he forwarded via email today be approved. Passed unanimously.

Jim discussed the Maintenance three-year plan previously developed between Facilities Manager, Albert Faustini, and the Finance Board. **He moved that \$132K capital improvements be approved for 2026.** These are estimated to be \$75K for HVAC Controls, \$15K for supplemental sanctuary HVAC controls, \$20K to refinish the sanctuary hardwood floors and a \$22K contingency fund. This will be funded with available cash in the money market and \$100K from the Bulkley Maintenance Fund in the Endowment as needed. Approved unanimously.

Outreach

Rita Skog reported plans for a Juneteenth celebration on the Town Green is being led by First Church Racial Justice Team with participation from St. Paul's, St. Anthony's, First Baptist of Stratford and Trinity Episcopal. Jacque Paige is serving as Co-Chair of the Housing Team for CONECT which will be very active with the legislative session starting 2/5. There is a CONECT Assembly on Sunday, 2/1 from 4 to 5:30 p.m. at Spring Glen Church in Hamden. Rita and Jacque are speaking at a roundtable at the Congregational Library on 2/25 about our effort to recognize enslaved people owned by our early Pastors.

With the uncertainty in funding at the Federal level, Rita is holding back on specifying donations from the Kreitler Fund until we see a need. Legal assistance for the Aghan refugee family we have sponsored may be needed. If/when pathways go over budget, they need to come to Church Council for approval on additional spending.

Vanessa moved that \$10K/year for 2026, 2027 and 2028 from the Kreitler Fund be given to Operation Hope's Capital Campaign. Passed unanimously.

There may be a need for a rain date for the Pasta Dinner due to expected snow on Sunday.

Faith Formation

Michelle Velez reported that the Faith Formation group was planning Spring activities including Creation Care at the Y. First Church hosted one of the children's concerts on Sherman Green that got some significant publicity. Lots of baptisms lately!

In-Reach

Debby requested a more formal reporting on new members. We have had 14 new households join in the past year! Reporting the names in the Sunday bulletin is problematic as it often isn't the same as who actually joins that day. Perhaps new members names and pictures on a hall bulletin board, or a new picture directory? If a directory the Deacon's and members of Council should be included, along with an online contact for new members.

Next Meeting

The All-Church Finance Meeting will be held on Wednesday, 2.25.26. The fourth Tuesday February Church Council meeting will not be held. The next Church Council meeting will be 3.24.26. Then 4.27.26 and 5.25.26.

The closing blessing was given by Pastor Vanessa Rose.

Respectfully submitted,
Jacque Paige, Clerk