

INDEPENDENT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
SESSION MINUTES
REGULAR SESSION MEETING

January 26, 2021

The Session convened via Zoom videoconferencing for a regular Session meeting at 5:30 PM. Videoconferencing was utilized due to social distancing restrictions in place during the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak.

Dr. Steve Goyer opened the meeting with a prayer from the *Book of Common Worship*:

O God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Savior, the Prince of Peace:
Give us grace seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions;
take away all pride and prejudice, and whatever else may hinder us from godly union and concord;
that, as there is but one Body and one Spirit, one hope of our calling,
one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all,
so we may be all of one heart and of one soul,
united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and charity,
and may with one mind and one mouth glorify *thee*;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Present: Bruce Alexander, Tommy Bice, John Burton, Jr., Bill Casey, Lydia Cheney, Rev. Susan Clayton, Caroline Darby, Alan Drennen, Susan Dukes, Bryson Edmonds, John Feagin, Jr., Mike Graham, Sr., Terry Hamilton, Beth Hillhouse, Bill Horton, Sissy King, J Long IV, Rowena Macnab, Amy McCain, Richard Monk III, Janet Ort, Martha Reeves, Kara Scholl, Jim Shepherd, Paul Simmons, Marda Sydnor, George Taylor III, Kate Waters, Ellen Williams, Emily Wykle

President of the Congregation: Judy Matthews

Past President of the Congregation: Penney Hartline

Moderator: Dr. Steve Goyer

Clerk: Steve Hunt

Staff: Catherine Goudreau, Lindsay Jones, Kathy Leaver, Bill McKelvey, Jeff McLelland, Denise Moore, Stacy Pulliam, Rev. Jay Wilkins

Absent: Jim Bussian, Alan Deer, John Higgins III, Frank Sutherland

Excused Absences: Scott Adams, Jim Brunstad, Ivy Spencer

The Clerk declared that a quorum was present.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Minutes from the regular Session meeting of December 15, 2020 were approved by the Session without objection.

REPORT OF THE CLERK

The Report of the Clerk was included in the Session packet. Total active church membership is 1792 persons, as of December 31, 2020. There were 12 infant baptisms in 2020.

APPROVAL OF BAPTISMS

Two baptisms were presented for approval and were approved by the Session.

PRESBYTERY REPORT

Project Empathy is a project to raise money to have medical debt forgiven for individuals who live in the Black Belt counties of the Presbytery of Sheppards and Lapsley. Sponsored by the Presbytery in response to a request from two Sunday School members at Southminster Presbyterian Church, Project Empathy set a goal of \$50,000, which would permit the forgiveness of about \$5 million in crushing medical debt. As of yesterday, the project had exceeded its original goal and had raised over \$74,000. Details are available at ripmedicaldebt.org by clicking on the Campaigns button and scrolling down to Black Belt Counties of Alabama.

The Presbytery has also been active in the issue of race relations with the formation of an **anti-racism task force** and production of a number of training materials.

With its current membership, IPC is the largest church in the Presbytery, followed by First Presbyterian of Tuscaloosa (1030 members) and South Highland Presbyterian (630 members). Included in IPC's budget for 2021 is restoration of a \$25,000 discretionary contribution to the Presbytery.

Session members were invited to volunteer to serve as commissioners for the **upcoming Zoom meeting of the Presbytery** on February 18.

The website for the Presbytery of Sheppards and Lapsley is pslpcusa.org.

PASTOR NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Dr. Goyer reported that the Pastor Nominating Committee is currently very active. George Taylor reiterated this point and thanked Session members for their support and engagement. Efforts are being made to have a presentation to the Session of the results from the previously-completed congregational survey once a workable date and time are identified.

MINISTRY TEAM REPORTS

Finance

Alan Drennen reported for the Finance ministry team, focusing on the financial results from 2020 and the proposed 2021 budget. Charts of both of these concepts were distributed to Session members in the e-mail packet and are appended to these minutes.

Fiscal year 2020 final results

Revenue was mainly derived from **pledges**, which came in fine in December, resulting in a 2020 pledge total that was \$176,100 above budget. **Designated gifts** were way up in 2020, ahead of budget by \$439,300, a reflection of the generosity of IPC members in response to the needs of people affected by the pandemic and economic downturn. **Other income** increased to \$156,558, principally due to insurance proceeds for water damage (after a \$50,000 deductible). **Transfers from restricted funds** included the money (\$209,808) for the Highland Park Community Garden, which was not transferred in 2020, but will be transferred in 2021. Application was made for a **Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan** in April and proceeds totaling \$668,200 were received by IPC. The loan enabled IPC to continue

paying the employees of the Day School while the school was closed in the spring. The loan was forgiven in December and therefore does not need to be repaid.

Under **Expenses**, **Community Ministries expenses** rose substantially as more people needed assistance with basic needs and money from designated gifts became available to address those needs. **Giving to the Presbytery** was restored by \$25,000 in fiscal year 2020, after being cut by \$36,000 in the initial budget. **IPC staff costs** were \$148,800 lower than budget.

Fee-based activities showed a \$197,500 loss, related to the Day School closure. This is usually a break-even line item.

At the end of the year, IPC had a **surplus of \$831,000**, which was principally due to the forgiveness of the PPP loan.

Proposed 2021 budget

A comparison of the proposed 2021 budget to the 2020 budget was presented. Of the various **revenue sources** for IPC, the largest by far will be **member pledges**. The church membership includes 1040 “giving units,” with a husband and wife counted as one giving unit. Thus far, 443 pledges have been received, representing 43% of the possible “giving units.” The average pledge is \$5,424, a 15.2% increase from last year. The **total pledged is \$2,402,800**, an increase of \$38,900. Including offerings and the steady contributions from those who do not pledge, revenue from pledges and offerings together is projected to be \$2,740,500. **Designated gifts** are unpredictable, but are budgeted to be \$200,000. **Transfers from restricted funds** include the \$200,000+ for the Highland Park Community Garden and \$80,000 from the surplus from last year.

Under **expenses**, total program costs are budgeted to be 11.9% higher than last year, mostly due to an increase in **spending on social services in Community Ministries**, which is likely to continue while the pandemic lingers and the economic recovery remains uneven. **Staff costs** are projected to be lower, but a 2% increase for the staff has been built into the budget, rather than adding it later in the year (as has been typically done in prior years).

General and operating expenses are projected to be up by \$62,500, including \$35,000 budgeted for additional security.

Contribution to Governing Bodies includes \$25,000 in discretionary giving to the Presbytery which was reinstated in 2020. **Transfers to restricted funds** total \$114,000 and include gifts designated for the Contingency Fund (\$75,000), the Giving Tree, Holiday Houses, and the pipe organ.

Including \$80,000 from the 2020 surplus, the budget for 2021 is a balanced budget.

Questions about the budget

In response to a question, Bill Horton stated that Kirkwood by the River is a separate legal entity from the church. It has received support for the chaplain position from the church and the IPC Foundation over the years, but there is currently not a fiduciary responsibility of IPC with Kirkwood.

Proposed utilization of the 2020 budget surplus

Alan presented a proposal for the \$831,000 surplus from 2020, with the money held in a restricted account outside the 2021 budget until an *ad hoc* committee is set

up to make recommendations for the utilization of the funds. The recommendations of the committee will require approval by the Session. Proposed expenditures include:

Outreach and special programming needs (driven many by the needs of Community Ministries)	\$419,440
Replenishment of the Contingency Fund (to obtain a target balance of \$850,000 in the Fund, which enables “smoothing out” of capital expenses. The Fund aims to maintain a balance which would cover estimated capital and maintenance costs for 4 years. Capital and maintenance spending for 2021 is budgeted to be \$281,310 and estimated to be ~ \$290,000 for 2022.)	\$205,160
Strategic Resource Reserve (to give the new pastor the ability to be creative in implementing new ideas or programs)	\$125,000
General Operating Budget (to produce a balanced budget for 2021)	\$60,000
Pastor Nominating Committee (for travel, moving expenses, etc. in relation to the pastor search process)	\$20,000

Alan presented the following motion from the Finance ministry team:

MOTION:

The Session approves the 2021 budget as outlined in the budget proposal, with the 2020 budget surplus to be allocated as outlined in the proposal for the surplus.

In response to a question, clarification was provided that the surplus amount does not need to be spent in 2021 or in another specific time frame.

The motion was approved by the Session unanimously.

Christian Education

John Burton reported for the Christian Education ministry team. The “**Ask the Pastor**” Sunday School class kicked off last Sunday and will continue on Sundays at 10:00 via Zoom. **Grace Groups** signup will commence on January 28. This spring, Grace Groups will be studying *The Sermon on the Mount*, by Amy-Jill Levine.

A full report from the Christian Education ministry team was distributed to Session members in the e-mail packet prior to the meeting.

Community Ministries

Bryson Edmonds reported for the Community Ministries ministry team.

IPC will be serving **dinners at First Light** women’s shelter the week of January 31-February 6.

IPC has been providing support for **One Roof**, a project which has created a shelter for homeless individuals who have tested positive for the COVID-19 virus.

The IPC food pantry has been named the **Pat and Gayle Pelham Food Pantry** in honor of two long-term supporters of hunger ministries at the church. A donation to the pantry has been made to honor them and to support the food pantry.

An **anonymous donation of \$100,000** from a non-member was made to Community Ministries for support of social outreach programs. This has enabled IPC to ramp back up to providing 75 vouchers each week for families who can redeem the voucher for a week of food from City Meats in Woodlawn. The donation has also enabled IPC to sponsor 30 **meals** per week from both **Bogue's** and **Rojo** for individuals who are food-insecure in the neighborhoods surrounding IPC.

Our **blessing boxes** have been moved slightly and are now on dollies so that they can be moved inside the church at night. They are stocked with nonperishable food which is intended for anyone who is in need.

Families of STAIR and Summer Learning students are being supported with **financial help with utility bills and other obligations** when their need is significant.

IPC is providing **50 lunches** through Highlands United Methodist on Tuesdays to serve hungry people in the 5 Points South area.

Christmas stockings were distributed to 160 children in the STAIR and Summer Learning Programs. **Winter coats** were provided to the STAIR children.

A Centennial Celebration of the **100th anniversary of the Children's Fresh Air Farm** is in the planning stages. It is hoped that the children can go back to an in-person program at the Farm this summer.

A search is underway for the Assistant Director of Community Ministries position.

A full report from the Community Ministries ministry team was distributed to Session members in the e-mail packet prior to the meeting.

Human Resources

Penney Hartline reported for the Human Resources ministry team. She encouraged the submission of suggested candidates for the **open positions** of Youth Director and Assistant Director of Community Ministries. Denise Moore also will be filling Marsha Harbin's position and encouraged Session members to recommend candidates, particularly those who possess strong administrative and bookkeeping skills.

House and Properties

Mike Graham reported for the House and Properties ministry team. He expressed thanks for the allocation of an additional \$35,000 this year for **security**.

Jim Shepherd and his committee are making progress on the **expansion of the columbarium**. Architect Andrew Hicks is working on preliminary drawings.

Mike expressed thanks to Bill McKelvey for his work in converting the blessing boxes into mobile units.

The **Reopening Task Force** has taken note of the recent drop in COVID-19 cases in our area and has recommended that in-person worship resume on Sunday February 14, limited to 60 persons at 11:00 AM and 75 persons at the 5:00 service in Highland Hall. Each service will require sign-up in advance and the wearing of face masks throughout the service.

The **Annual Congregational Meeting** is scheduled for February 14 and will necessitate a hybrid format, including in-person attendees and Zoom teleconferencing to achieve a quorum (100 members). Bill Horton noted that the IPC Bylaws provide for remote participation in the Congregational Meeting if it is authorized by the Session. Bill made the following motion:

MOTION:

Due to the necessity of remote participation in the Congregational Meeting on February 14, 2021, the Session authorizes the IPC staff to make appropriate arrangements to implement remote participation in the meeting.

The motion was seconded and passed by the Session unanimously.

A full report from the House and Properties ministry team was distributed to Session members in the e-mail packet prior to the meeting.

Music and Fine Arts

Kate Waters reported for the Music and Fine Arts ministry team. The 50th annual Religious Arts Festival will take place the week of January 31 - February 7. The theme is Comfort, Connection, and Healing. Events are listed in a brochure, which has been mailed to the congregation. They are also listed on the IPC website. Advance reservations are needed for the "Banquet in a Box," which will take place on Thursday, February 4 (\$15.00 per person). The Friday night duo guitar concert and the Sunday concert on February 7 will allow limited (50 people) in-person attendance. These two events and the other Festival events will be livestreamed on YouTube and Facebook.

Stewardship

Beth Hillhouse and Denise Moore reported for the Stewardship ministry team. A **Pledge Progress Report** was reviewed. Of 432 pledges that were received, 135 were for increased amounts, 189 remained the same, and 85 were for decreased amounts. 14 people declined to pledge and 11 pledges were lost due to death or transfer.

Beth requested that each elder make 10 phone calls to thank members who have made pledges. A list of 10 members should be sent out to each Session member later this week.

Worship

Marda Sydnor reported for the Worship ministry team. She expressed the gratitude of team members for the resumption of in-person worship services beginning on February 14. The Table service at 5:00 PM on Sundays will begin livestreaming this Sunday. She submitted the following motion from the Worship ministry team:

MOTION:

Minutes of Session meetings will be published monthly by the church, so that they can be accessed on the church website or through the weekly e-mail blast. The material published may be subject to redaction at the discretion of the Pastor or the Clerk of Session if the minutes contain information which is sensitive or not yet intended to be made public.

The motion was passed without objection.

The following motion was submitted:

MOTION:

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper may be served:

- once a month in the sanctuary at the 8:45 and 11:00 worship services

- every Sunday at the 5:00 p.m. service in Highland Hall
- every week at the Wednesday chapel service
- on the first Thursday of every month at Kirkwood, by an elder
- on Maundy Thursday
- on Ash Wednesday
- at the homes of individuals and at other times at the discretion of individual clergy

The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

Dr. Goyer expressed his hope that Deacons may eventually be allowed to serve communion. This can be discussed at another Session meeting.

Earth Care Team Report

Janet Ort reported for the Earth Care team. IPC became an Earth Care congregation in 2015. Dr. Goyer has agreed to serve as staff advisor for the Earth Care team. The Earth Care program evolved from the Presbyterian Hunger Program at the Presbytery level.

Four parts of the Earth Care pledge include:

1. Worship
2. Education
3. Facilities
4. Outreach

Current **members of the Earth Care Team** include Jane Cooper, Alice Christenson, Susan Haskell, Anna James, Elise Warren and Janet Ort. Staff members Bill McKelvey and Stacy Pulliam have also been active in the effort.

Recent activities have included:

- Locally-grown flowers placed on the altar
- Eco-palms used for Palm Sunday
- Prayers and hymns celebrating Creation
- Outdoor services
- Educational efforts, including a series on the importance of water and other topics covered in Sunday School classes.
- Projects at Living River
- Native and pollinator plants at the Children's Fresh Air Farm
- Formation of a hiking group
- A water bottle refilling station
- The Highland Park Community Garden

Other outreach efforts include time spent on Habitat for Humanity houses and projects of the Hunger Work Group.

Recertification for the Earth Care designation will be undertaken shortly, beginning at the next team meeting, which will take place next week.

Janet issued a plea for more members to join the team. Folks who are interested should feel free to call or e-mail her for details.

Prayer requests were solicited, after which Rev. Jay Wilkins closed the meeting with prayer.

Dr. Stephen Goyer, Moderator

Steve Hunt, Clerk