

Newton Highlands Congregational Church, UCC
Congregational Meeting
October 20, 2024
Church Parlor

Meeting called to order at 11:15 a.m.

Copies of the treasurer's report were distributed by church email on October 18, 2024.

Report of the Treasurer

Treasurer Jim Harper has made several updates to the budget since the Annual Meeting on June 2, 2024. Thanks to a long effort by Rich Bryden, the lease with DISH has been negotiated and signed. From the parsonage sale in July 2023, \$1.635M was added to the endowment. Two tables for the sanctuary were purchased using funds from the Paula Wong memorial. There was lots of spending to restore the church organ. There was \$62 in profit for the year.

Moderator Sally Brickell requested a round of applause for Jim Harper's diligent effort.

Report of the Auditor

Peter Moore certified that he audited the financial statements of the Treasurer and the Board of Endowment and these accurately reflect the financial position of the church. He asked Jim questions and they worked together to make sure everything was accurate.

Round of applause for Peter Moore's work.

Motion by Carol Jensen to approve the Auditor's report; second by Kitty Rieske.

Meeting attendees voted to approve the Auditor's report.

Report of the Treasurer

Motion by Steve Willner to approve the Treasurer's report; second by Mildred Hutchinson.

Meeting attendees voted to approve the Treasurer's report.

Proposed updates to bylaws

Moderator Sally Brickell reported.

The Bylaws Committee was authorized by the Church Council to begin a review of the church bylaws in October 2023. The hard-working committee members were Senior Pastor Ken Baily, Sally Brickell (moderator), Rich Bryden (assistant moderator and assistant treasurer), Carol Jensen (former Deacon and former moderator), Yumiko Matsuoko (Deacon), Kitty Rieske (Mission Committee chair), and Yvette Ruffin (Christian Education Committee member).

During the year, the full committee met four times. A subgroup consisting of Sally Brickell, Rich Bryden, and Carol Jensen met 14 times, with the Reverend Ken Baily occasionally joining the discussion.

Peter Boberg (Choir), Jim Harper (Treasurer), and Liz Ramos (Pastoral Relations Committee) also provided invaluable assistance. In addition, member Dick Osterberg, an attorney with deep expertise in church organization, reviewed the bylaws and provided thoughtful comments.

The church bylaws were last updated in 2011/12 and prior to that, in 2005.

Committee members and helpers in attendance were each thanked and given a rose.

Motion by Steve Willner to approve the proposed updates to the bylaws; second by Jim Harper.

Sally Brickell explained that there were additional changes proposed to the bylaws after the congregational Q&A on Sunday, October 6, 2024. She reviewed the updated [Notable proposed changes to NHCC bylaws](#).

Tony Rudie left the meeting because he could not hear the discussion.

Discussion

Carol Hausner: Why replace the name Worship & Spiritual Life with Board of Deacons? This name makes it sound like the deacons have a higher ranking than the other committees. Also, through the proposed amendments, Worship & Spiritual Life has gotten more power.

Carol Jensen: Pastoral Relations was always under the Deacons.

Carol Hausner: Fundamental issue is that there's lots of power in committees. Nomination process is not transparent. The congregation votes on a slate, but if a member is kept off of committee, the congregation isn't told. This is not healthy; the church needs diverse opinions.

Misha Hill: A person can nominate him/herself at the church meeting.

Carol Hausner: A Congregational church needs diverse voices; the church will suffer by silencing diverse voices. Wants to add more transparency for the nominating process. At the congregational meeting, wants the names disclosed so people know if someone was not allowed to be on a committee. Has tried to be on Deacons. When she makes her request using email, she always copies others. Is this discrimination? Has not allowed on; has been sidelined.

Anna McMahan: It needs to be easy to join a committee.

Misha Hill: Has worked a lot on nominating and knows it can be hard to find volunteers.

Carol Hausner: Need to allow people to nominate themselves, not add to nominating report. Wants nominating to be more transparent.

Carol Hausner: Why do Deacons control adult education?

Kitty Rieske: Can the Board of Deacons be called the diaconate, which was used in the past?

Given the time that has passed and the various issues raised, attendees agreed to table the vote on adoption of the proposed bylaws.

Carol Hausner: Concern about approval on spending. If a committee is formed to look at a capital issue, the full committee should be allowed to meet with Council. Otherwise, minority views may not be aired. In congregationalism, you can't just outvote someone.

Anna McMahan: Need to be clear about which things should come to a congregational vote.

Jim Harper: Congregationalism supports majority rule.

Carol Hausner: Ken told me that we need to reach consensus. You don't outvote people.

Jim Harper: Council meetings are open. Anyone can come to the discussion.

Sally Brickell: Consensus is a very slow form of decision making for a large membership like the church. It would be very impractical.

Misha Hill: If you want to require that a minority view be presented to Council, you would need something under article 10, section 13; for example, you could say something about the opportunity to share minority opinions. But it's not prohibited.

Agreed that Misha Hill would send proposed wording to Sally Brickell.

Carol Hausner: Has concern about removing members. What is the definition of disruptive? Is voicing an alternate opinion disruptive?

Anna McMahan and Misha Hill: The termination section is referring to "destructive" behavior, not "disruptive."

Kitty Rieske: This would be an extreme case, like a member who was sexually abusing children.

Mildred Hutchinson: Clerk should post notices on a bulletin board for those who don't have email.

Steve Willner: The Board of Endowment can meet once a year, in April or October. The choice of a Stewardship Committee chair should be endorsed by membership by including the name on the nominating slate.

Motion to adjourn approved at 12:00 noon.

Respectfully submitted,
Sally Brickell, Moderator