

Fairmount Presbyterian Church
2757 Fairmount Blvd
Cleveland Heights, Ohio 44118

Special Session Meeting
MINUTES
April 8, 2026 - 6:30 p.m.

The April Special Session Meeting of Fairmount Presbyterian Church was held on Wednesday, April 8, 2026 at 5:30 p.m. at Fairmount Presbyterian Church and was presented by the Moderator, Rev. Ryan Wallace, Senior Pastor.

THE ROLL

Elders: Rev Ryan Wallace, Senior Pastor; Rev Lindsay Harren-Lewis, Carol Adrine, Jesse Bassett, Ian Cameron, Steve Chapman, Tim Cuff, Nancy Gillombardo, Jerry Parker, Ruth Wasem, Katie Wetherbee, Susan Wherley, Peg Zitzner.

Absent: Jim Crosby (resigned)

Moderator: Rev. Ryan Wallace, Senior Pastor

Clerk of Session: Ginger Van Wagenen

Guests: Rev. Andrew Genszler

QUORUM

The Moderator opened the meeting with prayer.

The Moderator determined that a quorum was present.

The Moderator reviewed the docket.

ORDER OF THE DAY: To discuss next steps in Session's governance review process.

Pastor Ryan reported that he met with Ginger Van Wagenen, Clerk, and Tim Cuff and asked Tim to be our thought partner in this effort. Tim brings a newer Fairmount perspective but has lots of Presbyterian governance experience. Pastor Ryan advised that we would begin our conversation with individual reflection, followed by small group discussions, and then a full group discussion.

He reviewed the governance history, noting that our current structure was created in 2014. Since then, there have been some updates but not an overall review. We have had some tension points around decision making recently that brought this governance review to the forefront, and periodic governance is good governance. With our new mission statement, the timing of this review is great.

Fairmount's call is to share the good news of the gospel; our mission is to reclaim our humanity by embodying God's love. Our objective is to create a governance structure that allows us to fulfill both.

After a brief period for individual reflection and 20 minutes for small group discussion, we

regrouped as a whole. Each person was asked to briefly share their thoughts:

Ginger Van Wagenen- relieved by consensus that our governance is good but needs clarity in roles/responsibilities and in decision making.

Katie Wetherby- the love here gives her so much joy; “peace” in Hebrew = nothing missing + nothing broken. She hopes we accomplish peace within Session (resolve tension - eye rolls, harsh words) through clarity in governance. We are called to a strong culture and a strong governance.

Pastor Drew - there is no peace in the world without peace in land without peace in home without peace in heart. He agrees we need a “remodel,” not a “rebuild” of our governance. If others believe we need more, our impetus should be a focus on our community - how can we be used in this community at this time. Our governance should be driven by our mission statement. Question: Are deacons an order of Ministry? What do we do with the Endowment Trustees and other committees?

Carol Adrine - Church Work is the work of Jesus so we need to remember what our mission is. “I would rather see a sermon than hear one, any day” “And they’ll know we are Christians by our love.”

Tim Cuff - also sees a remodel: things are generally working. However, our Deacons aren’t fully empowered. And there is concern around clarity around organizational roles and responsibilities, how to get involved, etc. We’ll need to revise the org chart and clarify roles.

Nancy Gillombardo - she has very little to add. She sees a “remodel,” but really more of an update. Back in the day, the Elders supported staff and ministers in a way we don’t today - we should change that. We should create more for Elders to do (eg, participate in inquirers class) and provide training for newly involved so responsibilities are clear. Every member of the FPC family should be involved.

Ian Cameron- the church is changing and we’re adding new members but they don’t always know what it means to be a Presbyterian. We need to teach them. And do elder training. We are reformed and always reforming (exactly what this review is intended to do). As elders, we need to lead and we need to be empowered with clarity of roles. We also need to be aware of the needs of the congregation and attend to them.

Jerry Parker - the ministers are being asked to do more and perhaps they should push back and tell Councils to take on more.

Peg Zitzner - she thinks we need a remodel, not a rebuild. She sees this largely as a communications problem. Decisions are made and then presented, when more information should be provided in advance.

Ruth Wassem- there is a lack of clarity over roles/responsibilities and thus elders abdicate to the pastors. Training is important. We need this review to assure our governance conforms to polity and to our mission. Our Councils also need clarity. We need to empower each other.

Steve Chapman - we all hold grace and space for each other. We put a lot on our pastors. The governance structure is working well but we do need to clean some things up. We should be honoring FPC through structure, policy and reflection. We also need an avenue for

non-members to serve (e.g., Serve Council's charter prohibits non-members from serving!).

Pastor Lindsay - she acknowledged she is holding a lot of anxiety and is not quite sure how we got here. She urged us to continue to be honest and kind to each other, remaining mindful that harsh language for those who have been doing the work can be hurtful.

Susan Wherley- We need a rebuild! If there is a structure, it's a ghost structure. No one understands it or how to get involved. Is it a communication issue or something bigger? She sees many club-like tendencies at Fairmount - heavy on belonging, light on responsibility. We need to establish an expectation of involvement among our members.

Jesse Bassett - He sees the need for a practical and process-oriented remodel focused on clarifying roles, responsibilities, roles. We are looking for evolution and improvements, not a rebuild. We have a responsibility to hold each other accountable for how we treat/speak to each other. We should also be mindful of our own motivations: what are our reasons for the changes each of us seeks? Trust is essential here.

Pastor Ryan - he is coming to this project with an open mind and open heart. There doesn't seem to be anything we desperately need to fix. There has been a lot of culture building within FPC that has set us up to take the next step. Yes, we need to provide clarity on paper, but that's not enough. We also need a culture of relationship, empowerment, trust.

NEXT STEPS:

Pastor Ryan then asked where we should go from here. Do we want more conversation about roles and responsibilities? Do we need more discussion within Session?

Steve Chapman suggested that it is too early to go to the Councils. Perhaps another Session meeting or joint meeting with Deacons would be helpful. Ruth Wasseem agreed with Steve: it's too early to go to the Councils. She thinks we should consider what's not getting done that then falls on staff? Also, what is Session's relationship with our committees and Endowment Trustees?

Susan Wherley reported that Faith Formation should be working with William Birkett Williams lecture series but it was unaware. Nancy Gillombardo asked about the Memorial Committee?? Pastor Ryan observed that it is one of those committees that doesn't really have an organizational home.

Ian Cameron noted that ushers are supposed to report to Care but they aren't aware. He shared an org chart, noting that some committees don't even know where they report. Pastor Lindsay commented that some committees have refused to report per the org chart.

Katie Wetherby observed that, as we grow, we may have committees that develop organically to a new need. Our structure should include a process for assignment of new committees to Councils. She wondered whether the pastors have an end goal in mind. Pastor Ryan responded no, although he has some specific ideas (eg, we should identify objectives related to our mission and then build the structure around them). Nancy Gillombardo said she really wants to hear what the pastors want. Pastor Ryan agreed that it was a good question and he will think more about that. He acknowledged that FPC allows him to be himself which he really appreciates (noting that it was a major topic with his Pastor Nominating Committee) and he feels empowered. He noted that there has been so much restoring of trust and rebuilding of culture, which sets us up well for this discussion. He's been aware of much of what we've been talking

about but it was not a top priority upon his arrival. Now we have the space and time to discuss how to build a governance structure that fits our culture and mission.

Ruth Wassem observed that many of the elders are relatively new to Fairmount. We don't want to inadvertently step on traditions but some of us don't know what they are. Peg Zitzner cautioned that just because it was done in the past doesn't mean it needs to continue.

Carol Adrine noted that Pastor Lindsay first and then Pastor Ryan brought a breath of fresh air to Fairmount. This comment evolved into a general discussion of the blessings we receive from our three pastors.

Pastor Ryan asked for Session's consensus. Set a meeting date but take some time to decide what to do at that meeting? Get feedback from Councils? Tim Cuff suggested that we ask specific questions of our Councils and then develop next steps based on that input. Ian Cameron suggested these questions for the Councils: what is your job? What's working and what's not? What are the other Councils doing? What's not getting done? Does the congregation know what you do? Are there committees that report to you?

Pastor Lindsay commented that Elders should also answer questions about governance. Jesse Bassett suggested that we first send a survey and then form focus groups. Ian Cameron added that we need to do Councils first so they feel like their opinions matter.

Pastor Lindsay then refined the plan: provide the survey questions to Council and committee members, and give them time to reflect. After that reflection, the committees and Councils should meet to discuss internally. Pastor Ryan concurred, observing that the survey and discussion data will drive Session's next steps.

Ginger Van Wagenen, Tim Cuff and Jesse Bassett will work with Pastor Ryan to prepare the survey.

PegZitzner reported on behalf of the Nominating Committee that Gary Sampson, currently on the Personnel Committee, has agreed to complete Jim Crosby's remaining term and will be proposed for election at the April 26, 2026 Annual Meeting.

We agreed to have our next Special Meeting on this topic on May 20, 2026 at 5:30 p.m.

Pastor Ryan led us in a closing prayer after which Steve Chapman moved to adjourn, Nancy Gillombardo seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.