Fairmount Presbyterian Church
2757 Fairmount Blvd
Cleveland Heights, Ohio 44118
Stated Session Meeting
MINUTES
July 1, 2026 - 6:30 p.m.

The July Stated Session Meeting of Fairmount Presbyterian Church was held on Wednesday, July 1, 2026 at 6:30 p.m. at Fairmount Presbyterian Church and was moderated by the Rev. Ryan Wallace, Senior Pastor.

THE ROLL

Elders: Rev Ryan Wallace, Senior Pastor; Carol Adrine, Ian Cameron, Steve Chapman, Tim Cuff, Nancy Gillombardo, Jerry Parker, Gary Sampson, Ruth Wasem, Katie Wetherbee, Susan Wherley, Peg Zitzner.

Absent: Jesse Bassett, Rev Lindsay Harren-Lewis

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 the presence of a quorum.
The Moderator reviewed the docket.

> **MOTION: to approve the docket was made and seconded (T. Cuff and S. Wherley, respectively) and approved unanimously.**

CLERK'S REPORT

Ginger Van Wagenen presented the June 2026 Clerk's Report (found in the Share Drive) especially noting that year-over-year worship attendance continues to exceed 2025 numbers.

> **MOTION: to approve the July 2026 Clerk's report was made, seconded, and approved unanimously.**

> Due to an injury to the Clerk's wrist, the presentation (and assumed approval) of the June 3 minutes will be delayed. They will be presented at a future Session meeting.

ORDER OF THE DAY:

Governance Task Force Update

Tim Cuff provided an update on the governance review process, noting that Jesse Bassett cleaned and analyzed the survey data using his statistical and analytical skills. (Attached handout includes a summary.)

- Process Review:
    - The survey received 86 total responses, representing 59 unique individuals from the church leadership, which Tim described as an excellent response rate.
    - Focus groups were held with the Deacons, Serve Council, Admin Council, Faith Formation, Finance Committee, and staff to gather qualitative feedback.
    - There were no questions about the process.
- Preliminary findings:
    - Early analysis suggests that the church is seen as a healthy, committed community with cooperative lay/staff leadership. However, two main "buckets" of concern were identified: the role and placement of Deacons, and a need for better communication, leader training, and greater clarity in decision-making responsibility and lay/staff role definition. The task force continues to analyze the data to assess whether responses indicate more concern about organizational structure or poor communication flows.
- Continuing Efforts:
    - Ginger Van Wagenen plans to reach out to the three or four committees that have not yet held a focus group, such as the Endowment Committee, to ensure their voices are included if they so desire.
    - The task force aims to provide a full report to Session members by the last week of August to be discussed at the September 3rd meeting. It is anticipated that the report will include additional description of patterns of response, clarification of perceived issues and concerns, and a proposed series of next steps. There remains a goal of finalizing the definition of structural and communication flow adjustments during the January retreat.
- Questions from Session/Staff
    - Ruth Wasem asked if any additional “original” research was needed? Tim and Ginger indicated that they did not believe so.
    - Ryan Wallace asked if the Task Force could identify the major themes within the responses, present them at the joint council/session meeting on September 3 and begin to consider “now what”? Tim and Ginger indicated that they thought this a reasonable expectation.

COUNCIL REPORTS:

Admin Council: (Finance, Buildings, and Grounds)

- Drew Genszler reported that
    - Pledge contributions are currently about $18,000 ahead of last year's pace, and that giving relative to pledges is at about 50% of the pledged total. This is a proportion consistent with past years’ pattern of giving.

    - The current $118,000 operating deficit is expected to be offset by a planned quarterly endowment draw of approximately $150,000 to $160,000.
    - The church received a $34,677 check from the federal government, a “rebate” for solar panel purchase and installation. Receiving these dollars was anticipated and they had already been accounted for in the budget.
- Ian Cameron reported that
    - the church passed its fire inspection after Rich shaved down a door in the stairway to ensure it closed properly.
    - The church has received a $12,500 quote from Osborne Engineering to conduct a building-wide asbestos evaluation. Ian expressed hesitation about the cost and suggested taking a more targeted approach costing $3,000: an evaluation for specific rooms near the boiler and nursery. Remediation can simply involve encapsulating, not removing, all asbestos.
    - A quote for seal coating and striping the Scarborough parking lot came in at $7,761. Ian and Drew will seek further quotes for crack sealing and striping.

Serve Council:

Bridges to Batey Mission Transition

- Susan Wherley presented a report on the Bridges to Batey committee generated proposal/report, focusing on the transition toward making it an independent entity rather than an FPC led mission.
    - She noted that the committee is requesting a funding increase from $12,000 to $17,000 annually to cover administrative costs previously handled by FPC, along with a one-time grant of $5,000 to $10,000 for legal fees and administrative costs related to 501[c][3] incorporation.
    - Several comments were made noting that this B2B request and elements of the report (specifically those arguing for a pastor-led model) generated by the B2B committee seemed to be at odds with what Session understood to be the direction the B2B committee had agreed to take in a December 2025 special meeting of the Session.
    - Peg Zitzner and Susan Wherley noted confusion regarding a previous report containing comments from Rebecca Rubenstein; it was clarified that Rebecca was acting as an interpreter for residents and the comments were not her own.
- Session decided to "deputize" a small group consisting of Peg Zitsner, Susan Wherley, Nancy Gillombardo, and Steve Chapman to meet with Bridges to Batey representatives to discuss the specific financial requests and the long-term governance of the mission.
- Ryan Wallace noted that youth trips to the Dominican Republic and Batey 105 are unlikely for the summer of 2027 unless details of B2B operations and oversight are finalized within the next six weeks.
- Ruth Wasem reiterated that issues associated with a 25-year commitment by Session to a mission activity without clear plans for financing and governance over the entire period should serve as a lesson for current Session members.

Faith Formation Council:

No report

Care Council:

- The Council hasn't met since the Strawberry Festival in early June but reported that the festival was wonderful and the volunteers helpful. Many neighbors and FPC visitors attended.
- The Council is gearing up for Celebrate Sunday.

MISCELLANEOUS BUSINESS:

2026-27 Worship and Communion Calendar

- Ryan Wallace presented the 2026-27 Worship and Communion Calendar. Notable items included:
  - Reduction of Christmas Eve services from 3 to 2 (Christmas Eve services in December 2026 will take place at 4 pm [family friendly] and 9 pm [traditional])
  - December 27's service will be online only
  - Expansion of the celebration of communion to most, but not all, weeks of the year during the 11 am service
  - Resumption of 8:30 a.m. service on September 20
- Ryan Wallace presented the 2026-27 spiritual focus, "Come to the Table: Living into Communion." This focus has the purpose of:
  - deepening our congregation's understanding of the Sacrament of Communion;
  - expanding our congregation's definition of communion in a way that points us beyond the sacrament itself; and
  - invite Fairmounters to "practice" communion in our everyday lives.
- Ryan Wallace noted that in addition to the approval of the worship/communion schedule several other items would help support the spiritual focus for 2026-27 and likely should be approved by Session:
  - Approving a wider group of people in the congregation to serve communion
  - Temporary movement of the communion table currently in the sanctuary out of the sanctuary and into Anderson Hall so that it might be used as a teaching tool
- Questions/comments were raised/made by several Elders:
  - Steve Chapman voiced concerns about protection of and possible damage to the current communion table. He suggested several possible protective measures.
  - Tim Cuff suggested that during Breaking Bread Sundays that the communion practice used most recently at the 11 o'clock service be retained so that even while new methods of offering communion would be used throughout the year, there would be some sense of stability for persons for whom stability is valuable.
  - Peg Zitzner noted that it would be good for Session members to have talking points to be shared with members of the church who are concerned about or upset about the anticipated variation in the format of the celebration of communion.

- Drew Genszler noted that regardless of format, the celebration of communion is a sacred act, a sacred meal.

· After discussion, it was agreed that the Faith Formation Council would work with the pastors in determining who might be offered the opportunity to participate in the offering of communion to the congregation

MOTION: To approve the proposed worship calendar and communion schedule for September 2026-May 2027. Susan Wherley made the motion, Tim Cuff seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

MOTION: To 1) approve the temporary movement of the current communion table out of the sanctuary and into Anderson Hall and 2) to expand the persons authorized to serve communion during the 2026-27 church year. Steve Chapman made the motion, Susan Wherley seconded it, and the motion passed unanimously**.**

Nominating Committee Update

· It was reported that the Nominating Committee needs a representative from the Endowment Trustees. The plan is for the Nominating Committee to start meeting within several weeks.

· Discussion ensued about whether persons nominated to serve as Elders are specifically nominated to serve on a given Council or Committee. The answer, per the Book of Order, was no. Persons are nominated to serve as Elders, and although such individuals might be perceived to be, or even suggested to be, particularly suited to serve on one Council/Committee or another, that final determination is made after nomination and election to the role of Elder.

2027 Presbytery Commissioners

· Presbytery Commissioners from FPC need to be identified for 2026-27. Ryan Wallace will work with Susan Wherley and Peg Zitzner to determine who might be a commissioner from FPC and for what months. Commissioners must be ordained Elders.

Personnel Committee Update

- Staff Annual Reviews are underway
- At-large nominee for Personnel Committee nomination
  - After consideration, Carol Adrine asked Tom Wetherbee to serve on the Personnel Committee. He agreed to do so.

MOTION - to appoint Tom Wetherbee to Personnel Committee brought by Personnel Committee. Motion passed unanimously with one abstention (Katie Wetherbee)

- Status of two part-time pastoral positions
  - Personnel voted in April to move forward with interviews with candidates for 2 positions (the positions were previously budgeted for)

- Parish Associate for Visitation--Rev. Mark Bassett – was selected to provide pastoral care 10 hours/week
- Immigrant Accompaniment Coordinator
    - The Reverend John Max Legere, the Pastor of Fuente de Salvación, an immigrant congregation on the west side of Cleveland, will NOT be hired directly by FPC to develop and train individuals to accompany immigrants to hearing and medical appointments
        - Rev. Legere is working with We Are Many, We are One (WAMWAO) to build an accompaniment program
    - Visa restrictions prohibit FPC from hiring Rev. Legere directly. If Session approves, $1000/month will be transferred from the Personnel budget to Serve Council's budget and Serve Council will donate $1000/mth to his church to support his work

MOTION– To reallocate $1,000 per month from the personnel budget to the Serve budget with Serve instructed to donate $1000 per month to Fuente de Salvación so that they might support Rev. Legere's accompaniment work. Susan Wherley made the motion, Tim Cuff seconded it and it pass unanimously.

Miscellaneous Business and Community Outreach

· Interdependence Relay - The "Interdependence Relay," a community-building project hosted by the Barn Raiser Project, plans to hold 50 gatherings across the 50 states for the nation's 250th anniversary. Susan Wherley proposed to the Session that FPC apply to be the site of the Ohio Interdependence Relay (Susan envisions a 'big party' held somewhere between October and December of 2026.)

MOTION – To authorize Susan Wherley to complete and submit an application to the Barn Raiser project in order that FPC be considered as the Interdependence Relay site in Ohio. Nancy Gillombardo made the motion, Peg Zitsner seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Pastors' Reports

Ryan Wallace – Deferred his report due to the lateness of the hour.

Drew Genzler – Expressed his appreciation for FPC's latitude in allowing him to take his leave (annual National Guard training time) with the Marines and the Navy. He was away for three weeks, using 2 weeks of FPC study leave and one additional week paid by the Navy.

Closing Prayer

- Ryan Wallace closed the meeting in prayer.

Adjournment

- Upon motion, second and unanimous approval, Session was adjourned shortly after 9 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Ginger Van Wagenen, Clerk

Fairmount Presbyterian Church

Governance Review: Progress Update, July 1, 2026

Presented by the Governance Review Task Force: Jesse Bassett, Tim Cuff, Ginger Van Wagenen

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Where We Are in the Process

Earlier this year, Session authorized the Governance Review Task Force to conduct a structured assessment of how FPC's governance is functioning. The goal of this work is to help Session understand FPC leadership perceptions of what is working well, what is not working well, where there are opportunities for growth, and what organizational changes, if any, might strengthen how we serve and lead this congregation together.

Governance Assessment Progress

The review has been conducted in two main phases:

1. Survey. We designed and distributed a survey to all identified leadership stakeholders across FPC, including Elders, Deacons, staff, and members of all councils and committees. The survey asked about governance knowledge, role clarity, communication, preparation, and overall effectiveness. We received **86 total responses**. After careful review of all submissions:

- 13 incomplete or partial submissions with no corresponding complete response were removed.
- 11 incomplete or partial submissions were removed because those individuals later returned and completed the survey in full. Their complete responses were retained.
- 2 test responses submitted during the survey setup process were removed.
- 1 duplicate submission from the same individual was identified and merged.

This process resulted in a final analytic sample of **59 responses**, which forms the basis of our preliminary assessment. All responses that were eliminated from analysis have been saved and are available for review.

2. Focus group discussions. Six leadership groups scheduled and held conversations about governance which the Task Force helped to facilitate. The groups included: Deacons, Serve Council, Admin Council, Faith Formation Council, Finance Committee, and Staff. Each group worked through a consistent set of questions about their experience of leadership and governance at FPC. Notes from each conversation were compiled and reviewed by the Task Force.

Analysis and Synthesis of Responses

Following the close of the survey and discussions on June 23, we then began the process of organizing and reviewing all the information gathered. This included:

- Reviewing all survey responses to ensure the data was complete, accurate, and ready for analysis.

- Importing survey responses into SPSS, a statistical software that allows in-depth analysis of responses. This analyses will be carried out on the entire set of responses (56) as a whole and by sub-group affiliations (council, by committee, by length of membership and/or service, etc.). We will look to identify and assess patterns that emerge from the data.
- Reviewing and synthesizing the notes from each focus group discussion to develop clear thematic summaries. Incorporating the open-ended questions from the survey into these thematic summaries.
- Identifying, in a preliminary fashion, themes that appear consistently across both the survey responses and the group discussions..

Next Steps

The Task Force is currently in the middle of our analysis. Our intent is to complete a thorough review of all the information gathered and to bring to Session a full written report with findings, observations, and recommendations for next steps at the September meeting. That report will give Session the context and detail needed to have a substantive conversation about governance at FPC and to make informed decisions about moving forward.

We want to be thoughtful and careful in how we present this information. Our goal is not to produce a quick summary but a document that genuinely serves Session and the congregation well. We are committed to doing that work thoroughly before presenting our findings.