

Council Minutes October 8, 2025 Grace United Church

Executive:		Attendance
Chair	Tory Walko	Present
Vice-Chair	Daniella D’Andrea	Present
Past Chair	Marion Staples	Present
Secretary	Cecily Chiles	Present
Treasurer	Paul Cooper	Present
Ministry	Kenji Marui	Present
	Pat Morrison	Present

Committee Representatives:		Attendance
AOTS		
Christian Development	Shirley Willis	Present
Communications	Christopher Cooke	Present
Congregational Care & Growth (CC&G)	Bev Walkling	Present
Finance	Paul Cooper	
Region Rep	Marilyn Barros	Present
Outreach	Paul Cooper	
Ministry & Personnel (M&P)	Laura Black	Present
Planning	Jim Wicks	Present
Property	John Cooke	Present
Proclamation and Special Events	Bev Walkling	
Trustees	Dave Ashdown	
Worship	Bryce McGarvey	Present

The Meeting was held in person and via Zoom with 15 participants and began at 7:00 pm. There was a quorum.

1. **Devotion:** Thoughts on Thanksgiving and gratitude. Bryce McGarvey on behalf of Worship

2. **Reading of Scripture, Summer reflection on the theme *Seeds of Curiosity***
Genesis 28: 16 – *Surely God is in this place, and I did not know it.*
Jeremiah 29:11 – *“For I know the plans I have for you” declares the Lord. “Plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”*
 What are the challenges we are expecting to face in the short term and in the long term as a church?
 What approaches have we considered for these challenges?
 How are they guided by God?
 What tells us that God’s work is at play as we do this reflection process?

3. **Approval of Agenda**
MOTION: to approve the agenda. [Marion Staples / Bryce McGarvey] – Carried

4. **Approval of Minutes**
MOTION: to approve
 - 1 the Council meeting minutes June 4, 2025
 - 2 the Council executive email meeting minutes August 8, 2025
 - 3 the Council executive email meeting minutes August 11, 2025.**[Bev Walkling / Daniella D’Andrea] – Carried.**

Discussion: Suggestion that Council executive schedule at least one in person meeting over the summer. A summer meeting would be planned at the June Council meeting.

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5. Business Arising from the Minutes

None

6. Correspondence

None

7. New Business

None

8. Pastoral Team Reports and Teaching

A. Kenji Marui's report

- General Council 45 meeting occurred over the summer where a new Moderator was elected, an apology given to the 2S-LGBTQ+ community for historic harm perpetrated through past policies, actions, and attitudes, and final endorsement of principles-based approach to justice, as well as the establishment of national youth council. An online recall meeting was held a couple weeks ago to tend to outstanding business that included proposals regarding Palestine and Israel
- Attended a Relevance to Resonance follow-up retreat (along with Pat) and then the annual meeting of The United Church of Christ's Michigan Conference, as study leave
- Along with the standard fall meetings and start-ups of various committees and groups, am assisting with the roll out of a "Coffee and Conversation" group
- Continuing to work with Walpole Island United Church as they prepare to search for a new minister
- Supporting Vanessa Benoit in her training for diaconal ministry as part of her Circle of Accompaniment
- Met with Nominating Committee of Rayjon Sharecare as an external consultant
- Will be meeting with the new executive director of Women's Interval Home; intend on issuing another challenge to churches/faith communities to participate in, and raise funds for, the Walk A Mile event on November 1.

B. Pat Morrison's report

- With Christian Development programming up and running, I am continuing to focus on discernment and revelation, continuing conversations with Grace parishioners on what is being revealed to us, what that might tell us about what God is up to among us, and how that informs the direction we might focus on here at Grace. There is a growing circle of parishioners engaged in this language and practice.
- With the retirement of Kathy Douglas, the Antler River Watershed (ARW) staff person responsible for First-Third Faith Formation, I am working with ARW, Western Ontario Waterways and Horseshoe Falls Regions to update their shared position description for Faith Formation. To date, much of my contribution has been informed by my participation in the Resonance Project, the experimentation we have done here at Grace, and the parishioners here at Grace who have been doing the work of discerning/listening/waiting. This input has been most welcomed by the Regional Representatives.
- Young adult group for 30-40 somethings in process with Kyna
- Anne Eastman has retired as my official weekly salty snack supplier for youth group.

9. Key Ministry Committee Reports

A. Worship

- Grace Website and Tech Booth Updates: The committee discussed some issues encountered with the slideshow automatic slides when committee members are managing the computer for guest ministers. Kenji suggested that when guest ministers are presiding, the slide show will be simplified to assist the person providing computer assistance and that a Word document be prepared with relevant instructions. In a joint activity with Chris Cooke and Pat Morrison, Gord Walkling described the purchase of equipment that will help with connecting instruments to the sound system (funded from a donation to the Memorial Fund). It was also noted that the transition from Zoom to You Tube was taking place on October 5 with the primary objective of improving the audio quality in live meetings. It is expected that post-production of the version for You Tube will be easier. The 2 downsides are that there is no private chat, and there are some ads at the side of the page.

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- Website Update and Video: Gord and Tessa reported that they have a roster of people who have volunteered to participate. They noted that they were going to discuss timing of recording with Brian White.
- Richard Bott Ideas: Bev Walkling sent a list of thoughts from former moderator, Richard Bott, regarding supporting worship services to the committee. Some of the items in the list were specific to the Worship Committee, while other items were more relevant to other committees. Gord Walkling is categorizing and organizing the list for distribution and further discussion.
- October 19 Service: The Rayjon executive director asked whether there could be an opportunity to have Junior Patrick from Dominican Republic participate in the October 19 service while he is visiting Sarnia. Junior has supported recent groups that have travelled to Dominican Republic, and he will be visiting Sarnia in mid-October to meet with upcoming trip attendees. Kenji agreed and suggested an interview style of interaction, and possibly that he could also be part of the Swell with Pat. The committee supported concept.

Bryce McGarvey

B. Christian Development

- Sunday morning programs are running again. Sunday morning leaders are excellent, and the committee is very grateful for them.
- Encouraging intergenerational connection with other small groups within the congregation.
- Women's Price of Admission dinner will be presented to the congregation soon. Second one is planned in January.
- Men's Price of Admission dinner is being planned. These small group events are effective in building connections and showing our young people that they are cared for and prayed for.

Shirley Willis

C. Congregational Care and Growth (CC&G)

- Oct.26 tentative date for volunteer appreciation day.
- Council members and committee chairs are asked to nominate some of our volunteers deserving of community recognition, for Ontario Volunteer Awards. Consider which members of our congregation might have served in a position for an extended time and be worth a nomination. Nominations with paperwork are due by November fifteenth. Send nomination suggestions to Bev Walkling.
- Affirming committee is considering having a Grace table at Sarnia Pridefest 2026.
- Grief support, Senior Singles Group is meeting once a month on Tuesdays at 2:00.
- Seniors' drop in: Euchre game gatherings are running again.
- Committee is looking at the updated Privacy policy prepared by Communications.
- A child was sponsored to attend Lambton Centre at a cost of \$542.40. A motion to cover the cost to attend the camp was carried at the June meeting.

Bev Walkling

D. Proclamation and Special Events

- Fall Fair on Saturday Oct. 18. The current convenors are looking for new volunteers to take over organization of the Fall Fair next year.
- Pampered Chef fundraiser raised \$358 for special projects.
- Prail's is offering poinsettia sales as a fundraiser again this year.
- New members for the committee would be very welcome.
- Received a meat donation from the Cattleman's Association for chilli making.

Bev Walkling

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E. Outreach

- September 28 soup luncheon for the Indwell supportive housing project raised over \$2300. Thanks to Heather Martin and John DeGroot for attending. Thanks to everyone who helped with the setup, serving and clean-up. We appreciate the great support.
- Next soup luncheon is planned for November 2nd. Proposed beneficiary is River City Vineyard and their project for safe accommodations for those who would otherwise feel at risk.
- Support for the Inn of the Good Shepherd continues with donations from Food Bank Sundays (135 pounds) and serving of the monthly meal (129 clients). We have noticed a significant increase in the number of clients served. There is a concern with having enough food to feed the higher numbers.
- Attended the appreciation dinner at Brigden UC to celebrate the wrap-up of the 'Forget-Me-Not' grow project for the Canadian Food Grains Bank. With 4:1 matching by CIDA, \$675K was donated over 14 years. Grace was happy to be a partner with Brigden.
- We are now supporting the Blue Water Grow Project. In addition to the support provided in 2025, we plan a soup luncheon fund raiser in 2026.

Paul Cooper

10. **Governance and Support Committee Reports**

A. Finance

- As of the end of August, we are now in a deficit position. Expenses are higher than revenue by 10.2K.
- We are slightly better than 2024 when the deficit was \$14.1K.
- Givings are equal in both years. Rental income is positive at \$44K.
- All expense categories are in good control.
- The congregation continues to generously support the operating budget – Thank you.
- Communicated the operating budget data (up to the end of August) to the congregation. See summary below.
- Wayne Pease has decided to retire from the finance committee and treasurer role. We appreciate his contributions over the years and thank him for staying in the role longer than anticipated. Obviously, the need to find a replacement is a priority. Please approach anyone you think may be interested or let the finance committee know and we will follow-up.
- Paul will volunteer to take on the role temporarily.
Motion That Paul Cooper be elected as acting Treasurer until such time as a replacement is found [Bev Walking / John Cooke] – Carried
 Discussion: Job description for the treasurer is in one of the appendices of the constitution.
- Scotia Bank Legacy Fund GIC's mature in late November. Scoping next investment options to review with Trustees.

Paul Cooper

Operating Budget Summary

Results are Year-to Date (YTD) to the end of August 2025, and comparison to August 2024, in \$K.

	<u>2025 YTD</u>	<u>2024</u>	<u>Delta</u>
Revenue:	297.2	287.4	+9.8
Givings	233.4	233.2	+0.2
Rentals	44.0	35.9	+8.1
Interest	14.4	16.0	-1.6
Special Events	3.7	0	+3.7
Expenses	307.4	301.5	+2.9
Net Income	-10.2	-14.1	

B. M&P

- No report.

Laura Black

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C. Property

- Thank you to Danny Knight for providing excellent relief coverage while Curtis was off for vacation & surgery.
- A busy summer for the Property Committee with several repairs required.
- The Sanctuary Roof Top HVAC Units both suffered motor failures and were repaired.
- The Chapel furnace/AC unit condensate was found leaking into the Nursery wall. A temporary repair was completed, and a final repair is planned.
- A large section of the Sanctuary soffit was blown off. Repairs were approved by Council Executive, and we are waiting for the contractor to complete the work. The contractor will also re-fasten all the soffit panels as they appear to be loose.
- Small kitchen glasswasher repaired.
- Water heater for the Narthex washrooms was replaced.
- We continue the “critter war” with raccoons getting into the eaves and elsewhere. Dave Veldman is assisting to find and seal the entry points.
- STEM Camp operated successfully, and they plan to return in 2026.
- Snow Removal – I am seeking approval for the seasonal snow removal contract with Bore Fence Solutions. The quoted cost has not changed for 5 years.
- **Moved that: Council approve the seasonal snow removal contract with Bore Fence Solutions at a cost of \$3900 + HST. [John Cooke / Bev Walkling] – Carried**
Discussion: A question was raised about the cost of having snow removal requested on a per-time fee compared to a seasonal contract. Seasonal contract cost is equivalent to 15 visits if billed based on usage.
- Policy – The Rental Policy was updated along with supporting documents, and I am now seeking Council approval for the Policy circulated with the agenda. The significant changes include: 1) clarification of “Church activities” vs “Non-Church activities”; 2) clarification about Insurance for Rental Groups; and 3) clarification of Rental Group Sponsorship. The intent is to present the motion at the meeting tonight and table it to the November meeting to allow Committees to study it thoroughly. John Cooke is available to meet with Committees to discuss the policy and respond to questions.
- **Moved that: Council approve the Rental Policy effective September 1, 2025. [John Cooke / Chris Cooke].**
Discussion: General liability insurance strongly recommended for rental groups. Waiver is necessary if the group is unable to obtain insurance.
- **Motion to table until the November meeting [Marion Staples / Paul Cooper] - Carried**

John Cooke

D. Communications

- New Main Office furniture was purchased, including a new chair and sit/stand desk. The old desk needed to be replaced, and a sit/stand desk is now standard for most offices, as they reduce the risk of repetitive strain injury.
- A new version of the Personal Information Privacy Policy and Guidelines for Handling Personal Information have been drafted (see attachment). The new privacy policy is largely based on a template provided by the Region. Next month, Council will be asked to approve this document, replacing appendix 1.5 of our constitution. The guidelines document will only be approved by Communications Committee but is provided for information and review. It has been updated to include a list of personal information sources held by Grace and a privacy statement to appear on the website.
- A new website has been developed and will be implemented shortly. Not only was it time for a face lift, but the new website includes a software upgrade - moving from the out-of-date Joomla 3 to Joomla 5.

Chris Cooke

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E. Planning

Improved Depth of Grace Faith Community

- Planning to work with other committees to identify and implement ways to better inform the congregation of what is available to them to be a part of the Grace faith community
 - Various demographic groups opportunities to gather
 - More communication of committee roles and activities
 - Better access to know what is happening at Grace

Project Proposal Form

- Planning is responsible to prioritize proposed expenditures to advise Council when projects compete for funding and resources
- Planning is reviewing the process to ensure it is still relevant

Planning Committee “Real Connections with Real People” Event #2

- Proposing that Grace hold another event in October
 - Goal is to provide an opportunity for us to get to know on a deeper level other individuals in our faith community
 - Open up invitation to the broader congregation
 - Hold two sessions – one morning and one evening on two separate days
 - Snacks or pizza to be provided
 - Initially an all-together introduction discussion and potentially some testimonials and introduce some watch words that have been arising
 - Break into discussion groups
 - Each group will have a facilitator/gatekeeper to guide the discussion event (Will be looking for facilitator volunteers)
 - As before, there will be seed questions available for the facilitators
 - The discussion time will be “fixed” to allow the return to the whole group after discussion
- Proposed dates will be in November, one event late morning and a second in the evening.
Planning a meeting Oct 16 to finalize details.

Jim Wicks

F. Trustees

- The Trustees are currently working on exploring possible insurance options for the upcoming year. Applications have been filled out for the UCC Protect Program and with our broker at Brokerlink. These include our general insurance, abuse policies, and coverage for Directors/Officers. When we receive quotes, we will examine each one and make a determination if there is reason to switch from our current policy. If you have any questions, please contact Joanna Catterson.

Joanna Catterson

G. Regional Council

- June 24/25 – Marilyn attended Recognizing Misinformation and Disinformation and What to Do About It – webinar hosted by Therese Samuel, from ARW and Sara Speicher, World Association for Christian Communication, Link: https://youtu.be/AUNoMWuuCL0?si=EIBdPjVrwWOM_B6C
- Link to current e-newsletter: <https://arwrcucc.us20.list-manage.com/track/click?u=ee15470ca4eab124ea964929b&id=2a7f1b1c16&e=8325eff85f>
- Antler River Regional Council Fall Meeting – attended Friday, Oct. 3 and Saturday, Oct. 4 – led by Richard Auckland, President as of Spring 2025. Video clips shared included individual reflections on General Council 45 in August in Calgary. Many shared a recognition of how meaningful the apology offered at this meeting to 2S and LGBTQIA community. Link: <https://united-church.ca/news/apology-offered-today-united-church-2s-and-lgbtqia-communities>
- At this fall meeting, the follow up to the GC meeting regarding this apology is: An Update from Thérèse Samuel, Minister, Right Relations and Social Justice John Egger, Minister, Social Justice

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- As a first step, we encourage individuals and congregations in each of ARW, HF and WOW Regional Councils to be aware of the apology and begin to ask the questions:
 - How does this apology impact me?
 - How does this apology impact others in my congregation and wider community?
 - How does this apology impact the Regional Council?
 - What is God calling us to do, be or change to live into this apology?
- Richard shared there were 71 proposals reviewed prior to General Council (Kenji must have put much energy into this tri-annual meeting. Thank you Kenji)
- Historic apology to 2S LGBTQ at General Council 45 link: https://youtu.be/fGyyOYaAYak?si=U8PMY3nMVde_jjQ2
- Cam Fraser spoke on Toward 2035 A Season of Listening? Attention? Perceiving? – In the years moving forward, Cam spoke about ‘not resigning to decline’ – two things we should not do – 1) long for the good old days and 2) give up. He spoke of ‘A Place at the Table’ Campaign, an effort to reach deeply into our sacred stories in a way that would reach those outside the church; 100 Tables invited to show their version of what being invited to the table means; what are the signs that God is building among us; can we articulate Why the Good News is Good News; can we lean into prayer and listening? Link to the video recording of the Saturday meeting: <https://youtu.be/AREzm8rqWIM?si=00I8oQ0lfaATSN6y>
- Cam begins to speak at the 1hour:51-minute mark and speaks for one hour and 20 minutes.
- Greg Smith Young, Growth Animator – spoke of a Season of renewing – and upcoming resources: Crashing Someone Else’s Party, From Hesitation to Hope, and Pilgrimage in Place
- The new Moderator, Rev. Dr. Kimberly Heath shared a brief video greeting.

Marilyn Barros

H. AOTS

- No report

11. Reflection and Closing Prayer

Reflection on scripture. Council members were invited to share their reflections.

Meeting closed at 9:10 pm.

Kenji led a closing prayer

Next Regular Council Meeting: Wednesday November 5, 2025.

Tory Walko, Council Chair

Cecily Chiles, Council Secretary

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2025-2026 Sunday Lock-up Responsibility		
2025	October	CC&G
	November	M&P
	December	Finance
2026	January	Communications
	February	Outreach
	March	Property
	April	Planning
	May	Trustees
	June	Worship
	July	CD
	August	CC&G
	September	M&P
	October	Finance
	November	Communications
	December	Outreach
2025-2026 Devotional Responsibility		
2025	October	Worship
	November	Proclamation and Special Events
	December	CD
2026	January	Regional Council
	February	Communications
	March	Finance
	April	M&P
	May	Outreach
	June	Trustees
	July	na
	August	na
	September	na
	October	Planning
	November	CC&G
	December	Property