

Approved Minutes: Meeting of Mt. Seymour United Church Council

February 11, 2026 – 7pm; Mount Seymour United Church

1. Opening & Land Acknowledgement

Deb Bowman / Kirsten Harkins opened the meeting at 7:10 with a land acknowledgement, reading and check-in

In attendance: Rev. Deb Bowman, Kirsten Harkins, Steve Wellenbrink, Younes Skhissi, Catherine Branch, Jeffrey Smith, Tierney Ness (virtually)

Regrets: Doug Querns, Rev. Carla Wilks

2. Approve Previous Council Meeting Minutes

- **Motion to approve January 14, 2026 Meeting Minutes, with edits and reports attached.**

Jeff/Catherine PASSED

3. Ministers' Reports

Deb Bowman & Carla Wilks submitted in advance and attached.

Discussion of the impact of the mental health ministry

4. Financial Report

Jeff Smith

- Donation to cover increased maintenance costs for Sacred Garden. Jeff will liaise directly with the donor.
- Update on budget: All good, budget making will get underway in earnest as soon as M&P budget is passed. Expenses so far this calendar year are constrained. No large expenses. Action item to ensure Christmas Eve donation to World Central Kitchen.
- ACTION ITEM: Kirsten will work on a donation policy. Kirsten will request a list of significant donations and special donations from Doug. In addition, a letter will be included with each tax receipt.

5. Property Report

Steve Wellenbrink

- Endowment has been received for ongoing maintenance expense.
- New contract has been signed for the landscaping maintenance.
- New microphones have been identified and will be received at the end of March.

6. M & P Report – in camera

Catherine Branch

- Budget discussed with recommendations

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Motion to approve M&P budget as presented with adjustments

Jeff/Younes PASSED

7. New Business – in camera

Catherine Branch & Steve Wellenbrink

- Presentation of the MPS Committee Report. Council approval on the documents to be presented to Congregation at upcoming AGM.
- Approval of Search Committee members: Jocelyne Cottier, Mary Sparks, Catherine Branch, Dave or Carol Ballard, Susan Chambers, Kim Branch, Judy White, Kelli Johnstone with Shauna Getz, Pastoral Relations & Community of Faith as Pacific Mountain Regional Representative.

Jeff/Tierney PASSED Catherine and Kim abstained

8. Next Council meeting

- Wednesday, March 11, 2026

9. Meeting Adjournment 10:15 pm

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Debra Bowman Minister's Report

Feb. 10, 2026

The most time and thought consuming project over the last month has been assisting the Ministry Profile and Search Committee with their ongoing discernment regarding a staffing model. We have been meeting every two weeks with some meetings being for 4 hours. Every member of the committee is so committed, diligent, sensitive and faithful to the needs of the congregation. Between meetings hours are spent working over multiple drafts and permutations of position descriptions. Shauna Getz, the regional minister for our area attended one of our recent meetings and was helpful and supportive. The recommendations they will bring to the Council meeting have been reached after deep conversation and attentive listening to each other and the Spirit and I believe are a faithful reflection of what the congregation needs and how to value and retain the gifts of Carla.

Carla and I attended a lunch hosted by the Reflector group. It is a group of liberal evangelical Christians who offer programming in the lower Mainland. There is good potential for collaborating with them to host events. It was very interesting for me to learn from the people I was sitting with about how things are going in their churches. They all serve evangelical, independent churches with Asian congregations. They told me there is a high rate of burn out in their clergy with frequent friction and conflicts in the congregations, and much is expected of them. I was grateful for the opportunity to meet them and gain some insights into a clergy group I don't usually spend time with.

There was a good turnout for lunch with Rev. Aaron Miller after he spoke at worship Feb. 25. I am grateful he was able to stay and answer people's questions and engage in conversation. I find his book quite inspiring and I hope those who read it did also. There is rich material in there for considering how we are church and live our faith.

Pilgrims' Path continues to have a strong attendance, there are 20 people who come regularly. Two of newcomers to the church are coming and it is a blessing that there is such a wonderful group to be able to invite people to be part of. I did a reboot at the most recent gathering, as I find my feet and receive feedback some adjustments were needed. I want it to feel familiar, much like it was with Nancy, but at the same time not try to 'be' Nancy.

I will be on vacation from Feb 17-March 19, in church for Lent 5 March 22. I'm looking forward to being away, and very glad that the MPS committee has completed their first phase of work before I leave. Shauna Getz, the Regional Minister for our area will offer support to the group, including training the Search Committee. Shauna will also attend the congregational meeting when the committee presents their recommendations.

When I return, I will do a sermon series on the letters of Paul, including photos and information from my time in Greece. I have invited Susan Chambers to preach one of those Sundays. I have been doing some visits with newcomers and a person from Pilgrims' Path.

When I look back on the month some days don't have much booked, and yet the days are busy with visiting people in the building and attending to the regular business of being a minister. I am still very much enjoying my time serving this extraordinary congregation.

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January/February 2026 Minister's Update to Council – Rev Carla

- I preached and presided one Sunday since our last meeting, this past Sunday on how we at Mt Seymour are salt and light. I got some plans together for the upcoming season of Lent, to accompany worship.
- During the season of Lent the theme we are going to be exploring is around Pilgrimage. During the weeks of Lent I have arranged to have hosted labyrinth walks on Tuesdays and Sundays. We will be advertising the times in the community so that people can come and learn about the labyrinth, or just walk it with others. Michael Hetherington and Jennifer Crawford are going to be the hosts for these sessions.
- I started a craft group last week, which was a lovely gathering of 8 or so people, to share craft time, conversation, share ideas and skills, and connect with others in the congregation that they normally might not connect with. Some stayed for an hour – others stayed for 3 hours! It was awesome.
- A few weeks ago I was invited to have lunch with some women who work with the Reflector Project (a progressive/evangelical group that Tierney is on the Board of and introduced me to). We talked about ways that Mt Seymour can partner with the Reflector Project. The meeting was to discuss possibly being a hosting location for one of their events (which has since been scheduled for November), but I was telling them about our mental health project and they are interested in partnering with us with mental health initiatives. It was a very exciting meeting with lots of possibility.
- I attended a clergy gathering with pastors from around the Lower Mainland – a “no strings attached” appreciation lunch, hosted by the pastor who is the director of the Reflector Project.
- In anticipation of having lay leaders participate in the prayers of the people during Lent, I led a prayer workshop on Saturday morning, where I taught about the elements of the prayers of the people and my process for writing them.
- I led meditation once this month – with a smaller group this month than usual.
- The Thrift Shop leadership team met this month once and we had some great conversation about connection between shop and church, and updated them on the Sacred Garden project and other upcoming activities. I did a lot of prep work with Alexis and with the team and volunteers in general to prepare them for the next phase of sacred garden work. I sent out a similar update to the volunteers as I sent to the congregation in the weekly newsletter, with photos and an explanation of what's going to be happening.
- Spent a little extra time with the volunteers this month pastorally due to the death of Bonnie and a few other pastoral issues. I spend time with them each day at tea time and connect during their shifts.

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- There were a few people interested in participating in the Coldest Night of the Year walk again this year, so I have set up a team and will be asking for participants to join the team and others to donate to our team. This raises money for First United.
- Last week I was invited as a faith leader in the community to be honoured at a blanketing ceremony by the Tsleil-Waututh peoples. You would have heard all about it on Sunday (or can watch the video), but it was a very humbling experience and felt like another step in the right direction of reconciliation. There were representatives from the Sikh community, Muslim, Jewish, Anglican, Unitarian and United, and we all gathered together and were asked to pray for protection of the waters of the Inlet.
- I have been looking at dates to have a games night again – there seems to be some interest.
- The mental health program is going as per usual. I had two new applicants this month, and I had a clinician call me to find out more information. She said that the word is getting out about the project amongst the counselling clinician community – to recommend to their clients.
- Had several pastoral visits in office and made several pastoral phone calls.
- I am participating in our former Moderator's book study on the book *The Leader's Journey* – which nicely follows up on much of my sabbatical reading as well. There are about 20 or so ministry personnel from across the country who are in the group together. We have met for two weeks so far.
- I had two meetings with the Pacific Mountain Region's Lay Leadership Support Team of which I serve as a regional duty. We have a Zoom call planned for the end of the month, where lay leaders from communities of faith can join and make connections with people from other congregations. Our next one is planned for Monday February 23, and it would be great if some of you would attend. I will forward the newsletter to all of you, so that you can register if you would like. It is a great opportunity to chat with folks from other congregations and share struggles and successes.