

Minutes for Sojourn Houston Assembly of Elders

Date: 10/5/2023

Attendees: Reid Squires (*Chairman*), Cole Kirby (*Clerk*), Paul Ramsay (*Treasurer*), Payton Simpson, Nick Lipscomb, Tim Woolsey, Matt Gibert, Adam Seals, Matt Van Zandt, Taylor Ince, Nathanael Ince, Tony Villatoro, Raphael Peters, Demeko Bivens

Non-Voting Attendees: Chase Woodhouse

Absent: Dods Pengra (sabbatical), Britt Martin (illness)

1. Call To Order (Reid Squires) — 7:49 p.m.
 - a. a. Announcement: Matt Gibert is a new voting elder at Sojourn Houston, as he is the new lead pastor at Sojourn Heights. His prior ordination has been recognized by the Sojourn Heights Elders.
2. Homily and Prayer (Tony Villatoro)
 - a. Topic: “Setting the Tone”
 - b. Content: Pastors are called to set the tone for their congregation as it relates to gospel ministry and proclamation. We must stay the course in our “unique, simple, and biblical” vision for ministry in our neighborhood.
3. Adoption of the Agenda
 - a. Paul Ramsay: moved to add a time for reflecting upon the All-Sojourn Sunday Gathering
 - i. Payton Simpson: 2nd
 - ii. **APPROVED**
 - b. Demeko Bivens: request to discuss a potential partnership with Church in Hard Places and their cohorts.
 - i. Chairman suggested adding to February 2024 agenda.
 - c. Paul Ramsay: stated desire to revisit Sojourn Houston Vision Frame language per the Financial Stewardship Team’s request, with a motion to ask a single question re: vision frame and Sojourn Houston budget.
 - i. Payton Simpson: 2nd.
 - ii. **APPROVED**
 - d. Tim Woolsey: What do we do about geography gaps between neighborhoods with Sojourn Churches (ex: Washington Heights b/w SM and SH or Upper Kirby b/w SM and SG)? Request to discuss a strategy to reach those neighborhoods.
 - i. Cole Kirby: Request to give this topic to CRC as a first step.
 - ii. Reid Squires: CRC will add this to their agenda.
 - e. Demeko Bivens: Moves to amend the agenda with approved additions (above).
 - i. Paul Ramsay: 2nd.
 - ii. **APPROVED: unanimous, by voice vote**
 - f. Tim Woolsey: Calls the question
 - i. Paul Ramsay: 2nd

- ii. ***APPROVED: unanimous, by voice vote***
- 4. Approval of Previous Minutes - June 2023
 - a. ***APPROVED: unanimous, by voice vote***
- 5. Reports of Congregations
 - a. Sojourn Montrose (SM)
 - i. 10th Birthday on 10/20 (Party at SH on 10/21)
 - ii. Congregation experiencing unity and faithfulness from members.
 - iii. Parish Leader retreat was last weekend of September, and that was a positive time.
 - iv. Most recent membership class was well-attended and a lot of new people joining.
 - v. Cole Kirby is discerning a call to plant a church, and exploring the possibility of planting in San Antonio.
 - vi. Continuing to look for space and pray to the end of a more permanent and hospitable space in the neighborhood.
 - b. Sojourn Heights (SH)
 - i. Matt Gibert started as new Lead Pastor on 8/23.
 - ii. Dods Pengra on Sabbatical until 10/16
 - iii. DD Towler's time on staff is ending on 10/31 due to financial limitations following the hiring of Matt Gibert. DD knew that SH would have budget issues, and offered to find other employment. The heights elders honored his sacrificial and Christ-centered attitude. Prayers for DD to find gainful employment.
 - iv. Pre-School is renting 608 Aurora building.
 - v. SH is working on building out more classes for Sunday mornings.
 - vi. Elders establishing practice of home visitation for members.
 - vii. Probable deficit in the budget for the end of fiscal year.
 - viii. Elders are thinking through elder/deacon tracks for development, equipping, etc.
 - c. Sojourn Galleria (SG)
 - i. After over a year of worshiping with Sojourn Spring Branch in Spring Branch, SG will begin gathering in their neighborhood once again on 10/8. They have space at Fuller Theological Seminary.
 - ii. Re-implementing focus on discipleship and evangelism as they re-plant.
 - iii. Chase and Rachel Woodhouse are going to be multiplying a parish.
 - iv. Trying to build in-roads for ministry in immigrant communities south of Westheimer.
 - v. Chase Woodhouse coming on staff and off of full-time fundraising in January to eventually be ordained as a staff pastor.
 - d. Sojourn Southside (SS)
 - i. Bivens and Peters were in Cancun for Acts 29 Pastors retreat, which they found helpful and rejuvenating. This is why they were absent for All-Sojourn Sunday.
 - ii. 1 year since soft launch. God has been faithful.

- iii. Had four baptisms on 9/10.
 - iv. Elders have invited four men into a cohort to discern more formal leadership in the church, including the possibility of pursuing eldership.
 - v. Space situation at YMCA is less sure for 2024, as there is a new director at the YMCA.
 - vi. Demeko's salary is being funded through the Crete Collective for at least 2 years.
- e. Sojourn Spring Branch (SSB)
- i. SG will no longer be joining on Sundays.
 - ii. Members of the church have been working to make significant improvements to the space.
 - iii. Leadership Trainings are on the horizon.
 - iv. Tony has five men entering into a cohort to study eldership and discern a potential desire to pursue the office.
 - v. Developing a partnership with Mission of Yahweh (non-profit).
 - vi. Villatoros are trying to handoff parish leadership temporarily in order to prepare for a multiplication.
6. Reflection Conversation Re: All-Sojourn Sunday Gathering
- a. 396 total attendance
 - b. Overwhelmingly positive feedback from both elders and members. Some concerns about the length of the gathering and the noise in the gathering due to not having childcare for infants or older children.
 - c. Logistics, volunteers, Sojourn Kids, etc. all went very well.
 - d. Agreement that this should be a regular part of our Sojourn Houston fellowship.
7. Reid Squires: Motion for 10-minute recess.
- a. Cole Kirby: 2nd.
 - b. ***APPROVED: unanimous, by voice vote***
8. **RECESS** (9:17 p.m. - 9:22 p.m.)
9. Unfinished Business
- a. Motion 2023.J1, Pt. 13 (Reid Squires): On the Requirement of Sojourn Houston Churches to belong to Acts 29 as per *The Sojourn Houston Family of Churches Church Covenant*.
 - i. Reid Squires: I'm not suggesting anyone leave Acts 29. I'm only suggesting that we don't mandate membership. (See Attached "Pros and Cons" document)
 - ii. *Summary of Assembly Deliberation:*
 - 1. Discussed Acts 29's lack of financial transparency as a concern.
 - 2. Clarification that the SH Confession of Faith includes the Acts 29 Theological Distinctives, so in the event that we no longer required affiliation with A29, the distinctives would remain authoritative.

3. Sojourn Houston could explore alternative partnerships/networks if so desired. But, we don't need alternatives to vote on this motion today.
- iii. Paul Ramsay: I plan to vote against this motion. Acts 29 is our connection to other churches outside of Houston, our system for assessing church planters, and it is useful as it currently stands. Acts 29 has not given us significant enough reason for us to demand freedom to disassociate.
- iv. *Summary of Deliberation:*
 1. Elders asked if there was a SH Church that really desires the freedom to leave Acts 29, to which the answer was "no."
 2. Further clarification was sought regarding the Sojourn Houston Confession of Faith in relationship to the A29 Theological Distinctives. Leaving A29 would not change that part of our Statement of Faith. Elders discussed the pros and cons to belonging (see attachment).
 3. Different staff elders gave their report as to their happiness or perceived value of belonging, which was particularly high for our newest church plant, SS. They have felt connected, supported, and well-resourced by Acts 29.
- v. Paul Ramsay: I don't think any Sojourn Houston churches should leave A29 at this point, and I suggest we vote "no" to the proposal.
- vi. Payton Simpson: Motion to call the Question
 1. Paul Ramsay: 2nd
 2. ***DENIED***
- vii. Reid Squires: I would ask for "no" votes against this motion. We need to solve our Confession of Faith issue before freeing churches to leave Acts 29. I will **call the question** again, with a proposal that we discuss the Statement of Faith after the vote.
 1. Paul Ramsay: 2nd
 2. **MOTION FAILS, by Majority Vote.**
- b. Confession of Faith Discussion Summary
 - i. The Assembly sought clarification as to whether or not our Confession of Faith just states that Sojourn Houston receives the Acts 29 Theological Distinctives or if they have the distinctives written into the document. The concern was that if Acts 29 changed their Theological Distinctives, which no Sojourn Houston churches have real agency in, that the Sojourn Houston Confession of Faith would be changed under our own noses. The Assembly agreed that we can clarify our document to make sure the theological distinctives as they currently exist are put in writing in our Confession of Faith so that we don't have a situation in which our commitment to those distinctives is ever in question. The conversation was tabled.

10. New Business

- a. Elections for the Pastoral Assessment Committee (PAC)

- i. Reid Squires: The PAC needs at least 2 staff pastors to serve as chair and clerk.
 - ii. Nominees for the PAC
 1. Taylor Ince, Sojourn Galleria
 2. Tim Woolsey, Sojourn Montrose
 3. Demeko Bivens, Sojourn Southside
 4. Cole Kirby, Sojourn Montrose
 - iii. Voting for Nominees:
 1. Taylor Ince, Sojourn Galleria (**PASSED**)
 2. Tim Woolsey, Sojourn Montrose (**PASSED**)
 3. Demeko Bivens, Sojourn Southside (**PASSED**)
 4. Cole Kirby, Sojourn Montrose (**PASSED**)
- b. Financial Stewardship Team Question (Paul Ramsay)
- i. Paul Ramsay yields floor to Nathanael Ince.
 - ii. Nathanael Ince: It is difficult to make a budget because the FST lacks specific and current vision for Sojourn Houston. We want to build a budget that aligns with our vision and direction, but we haven't been given the clarity we need.
 - iii. Reid Squires asks the FST to synthesize their concerns and deliver them to the CRC.

11. Adjournment

- a. Reid Squires: **Calls to Adjourn.**
 - i. Paul Ramsay: **2nd**
 - ii. **APPROVED.**
- b. **Doxology and Close (11:03 p.m.)**