

First Unitarian Society of Milwaukee
Minutes of the Board of Trustees Meeting (Final)
September 28, 2021

Present: Jane Cliff (President); Benedict LeFort (Vice President); Tony Panciera (Secretary); George Bledsoe, Patricia Geenen, Mike Hogan, Mark Miller, and Rollie Hanson. **Also present:** Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom, Senior Minister

The meeting was conducted via videoconferencing (Zoom) due to Covid-19 concerns, and was called to order by Board Vice President, Ben LeFort at 6:05 pm.

Review Consent Agenda (Ben LeFort)

Amended minutes to note that the meeting was adjourned. Rollie Hanson moved to approve amended minutes. Pat Geenen seconded/approved unanimously.

Ends Review (Jane Cliff)

Board review is required annually to ensure that FUSM Ends are still pertinent and relevant. BOT agreed the current ends are serving our congregation well. Rollie moves to affirm the Ends as stated. Jane Cliff seconds/approved unanimously.

Monitoring Ends 4, 6 and 7 (Jennifer Nordstrom)

Good news: our last congregational survey indicates we have made progress in every one of the Ends. However, in the smaller picture, some areas have improved, while others have not—for example, this year things look better financially (financial engagement), but we have had lower attendance (service engagement).

People have shared very positive experiences from adult spiritual development and youth engagement: specifically, experiencing wonder through engagement such as theme circles, geography of grace, etc. This is a success story of the pandemic. Event attendance numbers were down, given the pandemic.

Discussion: Feels like we're doing really well, all things considered. Congrats to Lynne Jacoby on successful outreach efforts to households who stopped pledging, but now have reengaged financially. Pastoral care associates (PCAs) were commended for their work.

There was also discussion about our PCA volunteer numbers and it was noted that we have had the same number of PCAs we've always had, but former PCAs were invited back for wellness checks to members of the congregation, since the PCAs were making 100s of them.

Other discussion items included: 1) any suspected correlation between drop in engagement in programming going into the fall and engagement on the pledge side? It was noted that there is

consideration for people re-acclimating to their fall schedules and time will tell; 2) questions regarding how we are reporting broadcasted service engagement (unique view vs. all views = limits capturing of info on households watching on multiple devices, live feed vs. concurrent view – the most people watching it at the same time (even if in the middle of the live stream); 3) churches all over are struggling for a variety of reasons, including paying the mortgage. Nationally, UU congregations are seeing attendance rates cut in half. In contrast, we are doing exceptionally well. We are also finding ways to connect with new people who resonate with UU values and find hope and comfort from being part of the congregation. Jennifer sees our core membership as highly engaged and anticipates we will not only survive, but thrive through this. She also noted that we should be prepared for some decrease in membership numbers.

It is a great testament that surveying for all three of these Ends improved (as indicated via measurement) through a pandemic. The fact that congregants are experiencing interconnectedness with a fairly strong increase (End 6) is a great testament. Pledge increases also show how the church is resonating with the congregation.

Mike Hogan moved that the board sees sufficient evidence in making progress on Ends 4, 6, and 7. Mark Miller seconded/approved unanimously.

2021 UUA General Assembly (GA) (Ben LeFort)

Bruce Wiggins and Elizabeth Lentini shared written reports on their experience at GA. There were four initial items from their reports to address:

1. Recommending support for youth participation in GA
2. Reimbursing delegates for their fees
3. Flagging the UUA's Article 2 Commission (group studying draft changes to the UUA by-laws and one or more of the principles)
4. Continuing attention to dismantling white supremacy and systemic racism

Regarding the third item, the UUA is requesting congregations provide internal education on these items and at a future GA the UUA will be asking for input and possible changes. Jennifer noted the board can play a role through the selection of our delegates to the GA or guidance on how to vote on behalf of the congregation, if desired. Jennifer is working with Bruce on developing a plan and team for more education of the congregation on the Article 2 Commission.

Discussion included noting how important our by-laws are at the congregational level. The UUA is considering changing their principles, so big questions are on the table, including the possibility of adding an eighth principle on anti-racism. It was also noted that the UUA principles have not been revised in 30 years, so there is a lot to be considered on what revisions could look like. This action does take a vote at GA two years in a row in order for it to pass. Board vote on slate of GA delegates is fairly symbolic. In previous years, we have not filled all of our delegate slots.

The board is supportive of staff playing their role in continuing budget allocations to cover fees for participation in GA, as well as fostering and supporting youth engagement.

Additional regarding anti-racism action, pertains to the next agenda item.

Joint Training of BOT with Nominating Committee and Strategic Planning Team (Ben LeFort/Jane Cliff)

The board is looking for ways to build linkages between itself and the committees of the board in order to get to know each other better and support each other's work. We could center this around a topic that will make us all better at what we are here to do.

Bruce's aforementioned report speaks to white supremacy and a culture of racism, which are broader structural societal issues; this training would specifically look at the board and committee's role in our own structure and operations. What does the board think we need to focus on?

There was agreement that anti-racism training and content could be a good starting place. Board members referenced previous positive experiences in this sort of learning (e.g., Beloved Conversations). It was noted that we would likely need external guidance to lead us through something along these lines. Jennifer offered to help explore some options of trainers who work with intersection between leadership and anti-racism (ex., How do we make decisions?).

We believe this will be within the current board budget allocation for this year. It would be a standalone session outside of a board meeting, aiming for this winter.

There was vocal support for pursuing this training.

Next steps: Ben and Jennifer have leads on trainers. Jane will inform Nominating Committee and the Strategic Planning Team about the plan for this.

Board of Trustees Self-Assessment (Mark Miller and Rollie Hanson)

Mark and Rollie completed a review of our self-assessment process pertaining to BOT responsibilities (Policy #2). They recommend a couple changes to our monthly survey. Specifically:

- a. Remove: Collective decision making versus individual decision making question. Reasoning: this is defined through our rules of engagement as Board members.
- b. Add: Question to section on governance values and style. Reasoning: monthly reminder to be connecting with our sources of authority and taking a pulse on if this is happening.

Other considerations: How can we make Policy #2 more of an ongoing discussion? Perhaps cover more policy-related items at BOT annual retreat. Might there be some other things we want to rate ourselves on with an end-of-year BOT survey?

Mark and Rollie were asked if they would be willing to make the changes that they recommended and work on a year-end survey for the board.

Next Steps: Ben will update #3 and Rollie and Mark will update #4.

Sr. Minister's Report (Jennifer Nordstrom)

There were three main items from Reverend Jennifer's report.

Sabbatical: Jennifer is due for her sabbatical and is aiming to start in winter 2023, though timing may be determined by the upcoming capital campaign. However, there is a need to start planning now.

Strategic Planning Team: The SPT made progress sorting out their budget. They have engaged a special fundraising team that will report to the SPT, which then rolls up to the BOT. The SPT is asking for confirmation of this direction from the board. They are nominating Holly Patzer and Alexis Fielik as co-chairs of the fundraising committee with Dale Skaggs as Spiritual Director. They hope to get approval of this slate and delegated authority to identify and select further members.

Rollie Hanson moved that we approve the proposed SPT communications plan and the slate of proposed fundraising committee members, and also delegate authority to add additional members to the committee. Mark Miller seconded/passed unanimously.

Partner Survey: Lastly, the Social Justice Council has concerns about using the partner survey to report on progress towards the Ends. The board affirms the Social Justice Council's concerns and welcomes their suggestions on how to move forward.

Ben LeFort moved that the Social Justice Council stop doing the current form of measurement and consider quantitative or qualitative forms of measurement that work for them and propose that back to us. Tony seconded/passed unanimously.

Update Corporate Resolution (Jane Cliff)

We need to renew a corporate resolution to allow Treasurer Tom Briscoe to receive financial bequest funds on behalf of FUSM. Jane will update the date (through August 2022) and change the signatory from the previous board President to herself.

Mike moved to update the date on the corporate resolution and update the signatory to Jane Cliff. Ben seconded/approved unanimously.

Next Steps: Jane will inform and supply Jean Johnson with the needed paperwork.

Other Business (Jane Cliff)

There is a requirement that the board have a liaison to Nom Com. We were not in compliance with this last year and need to address.

Policy states that Board members need to sign a conflict of interest form. Tony may have an example he can provide, if Jean does not have a standard one.

Regarding youth members on the board, Jane talked with Deb Solis about when might it be a good time to address and Deb said she'd have a better gauge of youth interest in October.

A question was asked in terms of what we should be doing to support Jennifer's sabbatical in this current moment. The short answer was support the planning process.

Adjournment: Rollie Hanson moved to adjourn at 8:13pm. Jane seconded/7 approved, 1 objection. Motion carries.