

First Unitarian Society of Milwaukee
Minutes of the Board of Trustees Meeting
March 22, 2022

Present: Jane Cliff (President), Ben LeFort (Vice President), Tony Panciera (Secretary & Recording Secretary) Rev. Jennifer Nordstrom (Senior Minister), George Bledsoe, Dianna Dentino, Rollie Hanson, Mike Hogan, Mark Miller

The meeting was conducted via videoconferencing (Zoom) due to COVID-19 concerns and was called to order at 6:03 PM by Jane Cliff.

Minutes Approval Feb 2022 mtg: Reviewed, minor changes.

Ben moves to approve the minutes with the minor adjustments. Rollie 2nd. Passes unanimously.

Staff Changes Report

Board has been informed.

Monitoring Limitations on Policy 4.3 (Compensation & Benefits) (Rev. Jennifer)

Several limitations on the Policy are conflicting. Specifically, how do we pay people fair compensation, while also dealing with a budget deficit? Our plan was to use the predictive model to increase pledges twice as much annually, as FUSM expenses increase. However, we haven't been successful at keeping up with inflation or with the pledge increase to staff ratio.

Our financial plan is to ensure a safety net of financial reserves and a strong bottom line. Big chunks of income (PPP and bequests) are unpredictable.

Last year we came into compliance with our value of paying a living wage. Executed a multi-year plan and finally got it into compliance.

A question was asked about staff work hour increases and benefit eligibility.

Is this compliance? If not, is the plan satisfactory to get us in compliance?

A board member stated: If we can't come up with a good plan, the alternatives are undesirable. We haven't kept up with fair compensation.

Motion: We are not in full compliance with policy 4.3. However, we have made progress and the outlined plan is satisfactory, in particular: the endowment campaign, which is in motion. Tony moved; Mike seconded. Passes unanimously.

2022 –2023 Compensation & Benefits (Rev. Jennifer)

Discussing options: None of these are great options. This is in some ways a stop gap until we get through the endowment campaign. This plan is the last year of this pattern and a hold over.

Jennifer would entertain a COLA (Cost of Living Adjustment) as well as fair compensation improvements if we are able to pull pledges in higher (5% or more). The FUSM pledge team is giving Jennifer feedback now. Next month we'll vote. Option 1 sounds good and the hope is it will be better. Wouldn't hurt to have a more positive option.

Jennifer will prepare a 5% range estimate for our April's board meeting.

Also, perhaps we revisit having Board education sessions on budget and fair compensation in the coming church year.

Predictive model isn't serving our purposes. Next year's budget is going to have a big deficit. We'll have to present the budget to congregation in May at our Annual Meeting and will have to justify it. Lay groundwork for budget.

The comment was made that this type of work is relational and about relationships. Also, that it would be valuable to present this sort of information during our annual pledge drive. Rev. Jennifer noted that every year when we get actual FUSM budget expenditure, we always close out better than we expect. Another question was raised: are there self-sustaining models out there for NGOs? Answer is yes, many churches are self-sustaining, but they have endowments or other sources of income (such as parking lots spaces for rent).

Linkage was made to anti-racism work and white supremacy culture.

Policy 4.9 Policy (Communication & Support of the Board) Interpretation Update (Rev. Jennifer)

Rollie moved that this is a reasonable interpretation, and we are in compliance with policy 4.9. Seconded by Mark. Passes unanimously.

Annual Congregational Survey Results (Ben, George)

Jane: Thank you to Ben, George, and Pat for their work on the survey.

Ben: 159 respondents. We'll be looking back at this data into the next year. Made progress between 2018 and the 2020 surveys, but did some backsliding between 2020 and –2022 surveys. Another insight: in terms of those who responded, we have more families with kids 19+ living at home this year than in the past.

Building community, connecting, etc. seemed to be the things that the congregation responded to in regard to the pandemic, so somewhat unsurprising.

There's so much data there it takes a while to sort it all out. There was a question about engagement of 26-45 year olds.

Jennifer commented that RE participation has decreased, and we haven't seen folks revoking their membership, but a lot of younger families and parents aren't as active as in the past: kids and parents are less engaged due to Zoom school and burnout.

Jane encouraged us to think about the implications of the data and much seems to be related to pandemic weariness.

Ben noted that communication of the survey results will be coming to the congregation and will include links to survey highlights.

Monitoring End 3 (Rev. Jennifer)

This topic was deferred this from last month to await results of congregational survey.

Jennifer: Almost every area of the ends decreased. End 3 also decreased in congregation's assessment of its importance. This is a social justice end, following up with partners. Congregants don't always have insight into social justice team's relationships. There is an intuitive system reaction when a system is under stress. Jennifer's assessment is that this is a normal emotional reaction. Of course, we lost progress in every area. We had a pandemic and pivoted and held a lot of grief and trauma and figured out virtual church.

Motion: While the circumstances of the pandemic have challenged progress on End #3, we have seen sufficient evidence that our performance is encouraging. Ben moved; Jane seconded. Passed unanimously.

2022 – 2023 Board & Nominating Committee Nominees (Mark)

- Sarah Richards
- Joe Riepenhoff
- Amy Wilbourne

Some well-rounded expertise for BOT nominees, above. Nom Com used the skills matrix that the BOT approved.

We did not receive an update regarding new Nominating Committee nominations.

Board and Nominating Committee nominations need to get into the May Chanticleer, so the congregation can be prepared to vote at the Annual Meeting.

Rollie moved to approve the nominations for the board. Mike seconded. Unanimously approved.

Mark will follow up in regard to Nominating Committee and we will vote by email on that slate.

Sr. Minister's Report (Rev. Jennifer)

- We hired Cecelia Groshek as nursery coordinator.
- Nationally, UU congregational trends are concerning, and we're not exempt, but we're doing well relatively. Credit where it's due for membership stability, financial stability, etc at FUSM. A lot of congregations saw 5% or more decreases last year. Haven't seen that yet and doubt we will be moving forward.
- About 1/3 of pledges are in; comparable to where we are usually at this point in the pledge drive.
- FUSM average attendance is to date is about 72% of pre-pandemic in-person numbers (online and in-person for all three services combined, including those who watch services later online). Live in-person and streaming average attendance (for all 9 a.m., 10 a.m., and 11 a.m.) is about 50% of pre-pandemic numbers.
 - 9am, 10am, 11am all have about the same number of people watching.
- The question was asked if there is any BOT role at the engagement fair on May 1st.; the answer is no, other than encouraging people to attend. The event will include various FUSM lay- and staff-led groups staffing tables, providing materials, and engaging membership.
- First Church is still streaming a prerecorded service, working to move that to livestream, when the music team can catch up with hybrid church (September).

Other Business

BOT is meeting in person April 26, with a zoom option.

Jane: reminder about post meeting self-assessment.

Adjournment

Hearing no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:05pm, with the next meeting scheduled for April 26, 2022, at 6:00 pm CT.