

First Unitarian Society of Ithaca

Board of Trustees Meeting

November 3, 2021 Minutes

President Don Barber called the special meeting of the Board of Trustees (BoT) to order at 6:37pm on Wednesday, November 3, 2021.

Trustees Present: Don Barber (President), Therese O'Connor (Vice President), Diana Nier (Clerk), Valerie Graves, Simon Catterall, Nancy Miller, Margaret Nichols, John Gaines, Elton Hall, Walt Peck (Treasurer, ex officio). Rev. Tony Johnson (Minister, ex officio) was present at the start of the meeting but excused himself after the opening agenda items.

Trustees Absent: none

FUSIT Members & Guests: Emily Richardson (DRE), Sue Roenke, Elizabeth Einstein, Harry D, Fred Balfour, Stephanie Ortolano (Music Director), Michelle Waffner (Administrator), Marie McRae, Fred Conner, Amber Harris, Angela Zhang, Pam Tolbert, Jackie Jablonski, Cathy King

Handouts:

- none

Agenda Item # 1: Opening Reading

Walt Peck lit the chalice and Margaret Nichols read a selection.

Agenda Item # 2: Congregational Communication Period

- None of the members and staff present requested to speak.

Agenda Item # 3: Changes to Agenda

- No changes to the agenda

Agenda Item # 4: Board Role for Immediate Priorities

- This discussion is based on items from Saturday's leadership meeting
- **Worship Team**
 - Emily Richardson spoke about Celebrations pivoting into a Worship Team
 - Speakers have been lined up through the end of December
 - How will we handle the Christmas service?
 - Emily and Stephanie (and then Worship Team) have prioritized this, including location, whether there's a pageant, etc.
 - Renee Ruchotzke and Keith Kron have both offered to give a sermon.
 - These would be in January or later
- **Pastoral Care**

First Unitarian Society of Ithaca

Board of Trustees Meeting

November 3, 2021 Minutes

- Intent to hire or find a volunteer for someone to provide pastoral care
- Care Team has been tasked to find someone to provide pastoral care and will discuss this in their next meeting
- Healthy Congregation Team intends to organize online Listening Circle meetings. Are Board members willing to attend in an official capacity?
 - Yes. We will work out a volunteer list once meetings are scheduled
- How to handle funerals, weddings, etcetera?
 - Janet Shortall is not available until February at the earliest
 - What about Rev. Darcy Lane, who provided pastoral care this summer?
 - Rebecca Schillenbeck might be available
 - This will require a contract. We can use the one Rev. Margaret wrote for Rev. Darcy Lane this past summer
- **Sexton**
 - Do Walt and Michelle need any support from the Board with regard to hiring a sexton?
 - Michelle has done a bunch of Zoom interviews and an in-person interview with one candidate on Monday, November 1. Now working on background check and references.
 - Personnel Committee and Finance Committee will each discuss this at their next meeting
 - We may not be able to hire at \$21,000 or even \$26,000
 - Will the Board give permission to extend the job description to 30 hours minimum and add in benefits such as health insurance, if that becomes necessary?
 - This would add ~\$7,000 to our budget, but may be necessary
 - What if, instead, we split up some of the tasks (such as snow removal) and either hire those out piecemeal or get two or three part-time workers at an increased hourly wage?
 - Availability may be an issue -- would have to plan further ahead with contract work
 - Flexibility is important to us. How much are we willing to pay for that? Most people are not willing to be constantly available
 - Minimum of \$684/week in order to be an exempt employee
 - How important is it to have a sexton be an exempt employee?
- **Communication with Leadership**
 - Minister generally oversees all three areas of communication. Without a minister, there is no default point of coordination
 - Team Leader Council met on Tuesday, 11/2/21
 - TLC wants to rotate leadership each month. Angela Zhang (Engagement & Outreach) will lead in November.

First Unitarian Society of Ithaca

Board of Trustees Meeting

November 3, 2021 Minutes

- Responsibilities: Create agenda, create and send out Zoom link, run the meeting
 - If anyone is unclear about their Team's charge, they should bring their concerns to the next TLC meeting
 - Request for each team leader to send a short monthly report to the Board to keep the Board updated on Team activities
 - These can be emailed to board@uithaca.org or added to the Consent Agenda folder in the Board Google Drive
 - Can TLC meeting minutes/summary be substituted for the Minister's Report in Board meetings?
 - Nancy Miller will liaise with TLC on an ongoing basis
 - Staff concur that this is a good plan at least for the moment
- What about the Small Group Ministry Leader meeting?
 - Marsha Kardon has volunteered to lead this meeting in the absence of a minister
 - She will also be responsible for finding new facilitators when needed
 - Very important to connect SG leaders to congregation as a whole, since SGs are the main avenue of participation for many members
 - John Gaines will liaise with Marcia since he leads a Small Group
- Use Soul Matters themes to coordinate services, RE, and Small Groups
 - Be open to new themes suggested by the congregation
- **Communication with Congregation**
 - John Gaines has been working on the Open Question project
 - Healthy Congregations Team will work on Listening Circles
 - Margaret Nichols has been supporting the new Communications Committee
 - First meeting was Tuesday, 11/2/21
 - Committee is considering where to focus their efforts, and would welcome suggestions
 - Therese has organized a schedule for Board members to write a piece for the monthly newsletter
 - Videos released in the midweek announce email or as separate message are often very powerful
 - Should we create a schedule for this? Is this a task for the Communications Committee?
 - Need a clear way to communicate what each Team and Committee does, and who is on them
 - What if each Team/Committee submits a video for the midweek announce on a rotating basis?

First Unitarian Society of Ithaca

Board of Trustees Meeting

November 3, 2021 Minutes

- Give each Team/Committee a 3-minute segment in a Sunday service, again on a rotating basis?
- Some way to replace the Team Fair we used to hold in person during coffee hours
- If we go with the videos/Sunday segments, NomCom may be a good choice to go first
 - Suggestion to have Engagement & Outreach partner with NomCom for a video or Sunday segment
 - E&O is working on a project to get videos and text submissions (stories about who we are and what we're doing) shared with the congregation
 - Video can be on YouTube
 - Text can be on our website
 - This could also be a great way to highlight and appreciate volunteers
- Matters of Our Lives segment should return during the services!
- Many people enjoy the immediate feedback portion of summer services. Is it possible to incorporate that into regular year services in the sanctuary?
 - "Improving the Sermon"? (Congregational Response)
- Push Breeze as a method for both communication and coordination
- **Communication Beyond Our Walls**
 - Leadership Training sessions should be publicized to other congregations and the community at large when and if possible
 - OWL program: can we run sessions this year, now that kids are getting vaccinated?
 - Offer Living the Pledge workshops to other congregations in the Ithaca area
 - We are close to being able to do that
 - Can we send a representative to a gathering of Ithaca ministers, etc? We are sure such a group exists
 - Useful for discussing Covid 19 responses
 - Ask people if they would be interested in giving a guest sermon
 - Area Congregations Together (ACT): we need to find a new person to be our representative to this group
 - Thank you to Michelle Waffner for her hard work on cleaning up, organizing, and regularly updating the website!
 - Radio ads?
 - Regional UU congregational network!
 - Emily has a monthly LAREDA meeting with regional DREs
 - How else can we hook in?
 - Ask Renee Ruchotzke for advice

First Unitarian Society of Ithaca

Board of Trustees Meeting

November 3, 2021 Minutes

- Hire Keith Kron to hold some kind of seminar or training session before or after coming to give a sermon
- Mutual Aid Tompkins: issue relating to the Sunday 10/31 service
 - The Board wants to gather more information and discuss before framing a response. We do not currently have enough details.
 - Amy Hamlin and Jackie Jablonski initially contacted Mutual Aid Tompkins. Phoebe Brown was the main contact at MAT
 - Potential confusion over instructions when the MAT representative coming to FUSIT was changed at the last minute
 - What is the role of the Board in reacting to this incident?
 - Normally this would be a ministerial responsibility. It is not a staff responsibility. Therefore it seems to default to the Board, at least as a one-off incident.
 - Staff discussed the incident at their most recent meeting
 - We must make a public response soon, without making excuses, and asking how we can help going forward
 - Who should be the face of the response? Suggestion for Don to issue the response, or another officer of the Board.
 - What are our policies for situations of this nature?
 - These policies must be clearly communicated to FUSIT members, especially members of Hospitality Teams, so members know what we can and cannot offer
 - What happened to the Safety Team? If that team still exists, they should be consulted on the implications of visitors to FUSIT.
 - Mutual Aid Tompkins is currently resettling a number of people on Cherry Street. Another donation could be a good opening gesture.
 - On the other hand, we need to be conscious of the difference between justice/equity and charity
 - We should begin with a phone call, potentially followed up by an email. The call should be made in a spirit of curiosity and empathy.
 - Since Amy Hamlin and Jackie Jablonski made the initial contact with MAT, it might make sense for them to continue being our points of contact
 - Juliana Garcia, a FUSIT member, is heavily involved in MAT. Unfortunately Amy had trouble getting in touch with Juliana to organize a shared plate and a speaker.
 - Amy and Jackie were not at the 10/31 service and are concerned that this lack of information might be a problem
 - Actually, a clean slate might be a better starting point
 - Emily Richardson will coordinate with Jackie and Amy to contact MAT and open a discussion about the incident

First Unitarian Society of Ithaca

Board of Trustees Meeting

November 3, 2021 Minutes

- **Supporting Staff**

- Who currently has access to the minister@uuithaca.org email address?
 - Currently emails are still being forwarded to Rev. Tony
 - Michelle has access, and can either forward email to herself or set up an automated out-of-office response
 - Out-of-office response is best
 - Continue forwarding to Rev. Tony through November 8th

Agenda Item # 7: Meeting/Action Summary for Communication

- Diana will send out a summary by noon on Friday, 11/5/21.

Agenda Item # 8: Closing Words

Walt Peck extinguished the chalice and Margaret Nichols read a selection.

Meeting adjourned at 8:07pm.

Minutes taken by Diana Nier, 11/3/21.