

First Unitarian Society of Ithaca

Board of Trustees Meeting

January 19, 2022 Minutes

President Don Barber called the regular monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees (BoT) to order at 6:31pm on Wednesday, January 19, 2022.

Trustees Present: Don Barber (President), Therese O'Connor (Vice President), Diana Nier (Clerk), Simon Catterall, Nancy Miller, Margaret Nichols, John Gaines, Valerie Graves, Elton Hall, and Walt Peck (Treasurer, ex officio)

Trustees Absent: none

FUSIT Members & Guests: Emily Richards (DRE), Michelle Waffner (Administrator), Stephanie Otolano (Music Director), Nathan Fawcett, Fred Balfour, Matt Hare, Jens Wennberg

Handouts:

- [Minutes of the 12-15-2021 Board Meeting](#)
- ***Board Committee Reports:*** [Communications Policy](#), [Finance](#), [Nominating](#), [Stewardship](#)
- ***Ministry Team Reports:*** [Buildings & Grounds](#), [B&G Capital Project Ideas](#), [Congregational Administration](#), [Care Team](#), [Engagement & Outreach](#), [Hospitality Teams](#), [Celebrations Team](#), [Healthy Congregation Team](#), [Religious Education](#), [Small Group Ministry](#), [Social Justice Council](#)
- [Treasurer's Report](#)
- [2022-23 Financial Information Overview](#)
- [Resolution to Authorize Engagement of Legal Counsel](#)
- [Procedures for Responding to Controversial Communications and Related Issues](#)
- [Resolution on Winter Open Question](#)
- [Fall Open Question Response Analysis](#)
- [Board Winter Goals](#)

Agenda Item # 1: Welcome and Chalice Lighting

Walt Peck lit the chalice and Valerie Graves read a selection.

Agenda Item # 2: Congregational Communication Period

- None of the members present requested to speak.

Agenda Item # 3: Changes to Agenda

- No agenda changes were proposed at this time.

Agenda Item # 4: Consent Agenda

First Unitarian Society of Ithaca

Board of Trustees Meeting

January 19, 2022 Minutes

CONSENT AGENDA ITEMS:

- Approve the minutes of the December 15, 2021 Board of Trustees meeting, shown in Google Docs folder as of the date and time of this meeting
- Accept the Treasurer's Report
- Approve the Resolution to Authorize Engagement of Legal Counsel. (Full text appended at the end of minutes.)

MOTION: Approve the Consent Agenda Items. Moved by John Gaines, seconded by Margaret Nichols. **PASSED.**

Agenda Item # 5: Team and Committee Reports

- Therese reported on negotiations with Dan Hotchkiss, author of Partnership Governance, to come present a training session in March
- Don Barber asked for volunteers to contact Whitney Kummerow, a local lawyer, to work on setting up legal training and advice.
 - Walt Peck volunteered
- Don and Michelle have been working to gather information on our current insurance policies to look for any gaps or issues, after which they will contact some local insurers to discuss options.
 - Simon Catterall volunteered to help with that project
 - Walt Peck reported that the Personnel Committee is looking over staff benefits, which is related; they will share information after their next meeting
- Current master key unlocks the administrator's office. This is a potential issue, since confidential documents and money are often stored there
 - Therese and Elton volunteered to work with Michelle to review the policy on keys
 - Suggestion to just change Michelle's office lock
- The Board would like to meet with the Stewardship Committee sometime soon to coordinate messages and goals
 - Stewardship will have their first meeting soon. No pledge goal yet, but they will discuss themes and out-of-the-box ideas
 - Margaret Nichols will liaise with Stewardship
 - Payment rate on pledges was good through November, but dropped as of the most recent report (January 15)
 - Stewardship will discuss options for asking people to fulfill their 2021-22 pledges in addition to designing the drive for 2022-23
 - Do we see any increase in payments after the quarterly pledge progress reports are sent out to members?
 - The Pledge Campaign traditionally starts on the first Sunday in March

First Unitarian Society of Ithaca

Board of Trustees Meeting

January 19, 2022 Minutes

- Does the Way Forward Team have a plan for switching from pre-registration for services to come-at-will? The need for advance registration may be depressing attendance
 - UUA currently wants us to be entirely virtual, given local transmission rates; this conflicts with local health agency advice
 - Current plan for February is to continue with the current plan and encourage people to wear high-quality masks
 - The rate of people who register and don't show up has been low; our low attendance may be simply a natural seasonal lull
- Leadership training options
 - Therese is working with ministry team leaders to gather a group of at least 3 members to participate in an upcoming Right Relations training program. The program will start in early February. It is 4 months long, with 2-4 hours of homework and 1 90 minute live session each month. The cost is \$75 per congregation.
 - Fred is looking into some local nonprofit training options for April and beyond

Agenda Item # 6: Communication Committee Recommendations

- Margaret Nichols presented the revised policy. Full text of policy is appended to the end of minutes.

MOTION: The Board hereby adopts the Procedures for Responding to Controversial Communications and Related Issues, as recommended by the Ad Hoc Communications Policy Committee. Moved by Margaret Nichols, seconded by Simon Catterall.

The floor was opened to discussion.

- Would these procedures work better as a policy or a set of policies? If not, how will they be made public?
 - Can Governance Committee advise on that issue? Yes
- Discussion on how to make these policies known to the congregation at large

Discussion was closed and the vote was called. **MOTION PASSED.**

Agenda Item # 7: Winter Open Question Topic & Process; Fall Open Question Results

- John Gaines presented the current wording of the Open Question. (Full text of the resolution appended to the end of minutes.)

First Unitarian Society of Ithaca

Board of Trustees Meeting

January 19, 2022 Minutes

MOTION: The Board approves *"Given our history (as described by Carol Kammen) and our hopes for the future, for what purpose does our congregation exist as an organization in 2022 and beyond? In other words, what is and should be our true Mission?"* as the text of the Winter Open Question. Moved by John Gaines, seconded by Margaret Nichols.

The floor was opened to discussion.

- Can we include language about spiritual goals and spiritual organization?
 - This can put some people off or narrow their responses
- The inclusion of Carol Kammen may put off people who haven't read her book and feel they would need to read before responding to the question
- Friendly amendment to change "congregation" to "religious community"
- Friendly amendment to delete "(as described by Carol Kammen)"
 - Carol Kammen's book is very valuable and we should work to get more of the congregation to read it
 - Walt Peck volunteered to put together and present a brief summary of FUSIT's history from 1945 to 2017
 - This would be shared first with the Board and then with the congregation at large
 - The Board is interested in this and requests Walt to do so
- Friendly amendment to delete "as an organization"

Discussion was closed and the vote was called. The Board approves *"Given our history and our hopes for the future, for what purpose does our religious community exist in 2022 and beyond? In other words, what is and should be our true Mission?"* as the text of the Winter Open Question.

MOTION PASSED.

- Therese reported on categories of responses to the Fall Open Question
 - The four categories with the most responses are:
 - Care: one-on-one connections and individual connections
 - Ministerial/Spiritual concerns
 - Suggestions for Sunday services and requests for in-person services
 - Meeting in small groups / Listening circles / Expand small ministry groups and make them easier to join
- Thank you to Therese and Valerie for pulling all this data together!

Agenda Item # 8: 22-23 Minister Decision Process Planning

First Unitarian Society of Ithaca

Board of Trustees Meeting

January 19, 2022 Minutes

- Don presented two questions: 1) What are our options, and 2) How can we best bring the congregation at large into the discussion?
- Don presented the draft pathway flowchart
 - **Path 1:**
 - A) Develop a Ministerless organization and governmental model -- partnership or some other model?
 - B) Three overlapping steps:
 - Increase Team Role
 - Optimize Staff Role
 - Adjust Board Role
 - **Path 2:**
 - A) Develop Mission and 3-4 Ministerial role priorities/expectations
 - B) Develop organizational and governmental model
 - C) Evaluate full, part-time, split duties, and collaborative options
 - D) Seek a minister (interim, developmental, or contractual) that meets our needs
- Be aware that it's hard to hire a part-time UU minister, particularly not if the minister is not already local
- Contract ministers are not required to take interim minister training, but many have since the pools heavily overlap
 - Additionally, not all ministers who serve as interims have completed interim training. For example, Rev. Jane Thickstun had not finished her interim training when we hired her
- Partnership governance relies heavily on an active minister, which is obviously not always an option. What other methods of church governance may be more flexible?
- Any contract minister is likely to be local
- Important to get opinions from FUSIT members ASAP, even if the Board has not yet come to a consensus
 - Buy-in is vital for Stewardship, and a great way to get buy-in is to invite people to participate
 - Knowing what the congregation wants may clarify our thoughts
- Can we join questions about ministerial options with the Winter Open Question about our mission? Otherwise the discussion risks getting lost in nuts and bolts and losing sight of why this is important
- How best to communicate with the congregation?
 - Send out the full text of the balcony meeting minutes and recording of the Board's meeting with Keith Kron?
 - Therese will check with Keith to see if he's willing to have the Zoom recording made public
 - Make another video? Send out a letter?

First Unitarian Society of Ithaca

Board of Trustees Meeting

January 19, 2022 Minutes

- Organize some type of congregational conversation?
- We need to publicize the results of the Fall Open Question! This shows that the Board is listening and people's responses shape FUSIT.
- What are we asking and what are we telling?
 - Telling: results of the Fall Open Question
 - Asking: Winter Open Question, 3-4 characteristics most wanted in a minister
- Are we asking the congregation what personality traits we most want in a minister, or asking them to help decide what kind of minister we want on a structural level?
 - Informing the congregation of the options and the small ministerial pool, as well as the financial consequences of various choices
 - In that case, the question of mission is going to be most effective at igniting interest and participation

MOTION: The Board will work in the following order: **1)** Therese O'Connor and Valerie Graves will make public the results of the Fall Open Question in the newsletter and at a Sunday service. **2)** John Gaines will introduce the Winter Open Question and Walt Peck will provide a summary of FUSIT history. **3)** Diana Nier, Simon Catterall, and Walt Peck will introduce the various ministerial options and explain financial considerations. **4)** The Communications Committee will organize congregational conversations on ministry, with the first one on February 20, 2022. Moved by Margaret Nichols, seconded by Don Barber. **MOTION PASSED.**

Agenda Item # 9: Process for Developing Ideas for Fostering a Culture of Appreciation

- This agenda item was postponed to the February 16 meeting.

Agenda Item # 10: Board Winter Goals

- We accomplished our Fall Board Goals; now we need to set some Winter Goals
- Potential goals:
 - Develop Ministerless Organization and Governance Structure
 - Develop FUSIT's Mission Statement- What is the Board Accountable For?
 - Our question on mission may not end up changing our mission statement
 - Additionally, we won't finish gathering information until March and won't have the analysis until April; this should therefore be a Spring Goal
 - This must be finished by the Annual Meeting!
 - Develop Top Priorities for Minister Job Description
 - What is the schedule for entering the interim minister hiring process?
 - Deadline for submitting our packet is April 21; should have
 - Suggestion to add "Develop Ideas for Fostering a Culture of Appreciation"
 - This will be workshopped for the February 16 meeting

First Unitarian Society of Ithaca

Board of Trustees Meeting

January 19, 2022 Minutes

MOTION: The Board sets "Develop Ministerless Organization and Governance Structure" and "Develop Top Priorities for Minister Job Description" as our Winter Goals. Moved by Don Barber, seconded by Simon Catterall. **MOTION PASSED.**

Agenda Item # 11: February Agenda Items

- Process for Developing Ideas for Fostering a Culture of Appreciation
- Approve contract with Whitney Kummerow
- Planning for the Congregational Conversations

Agenda Item # 12: Meeting/Action Summary for Communication

- Diana will create a summary and send it to Michelle and Loretta for the midweek announce email and the newsletter

Agenda Item # 13: Closing Words

Valerie Graves read a selection and Walt Peck extinguished the chalice.

Meeting adjourned at 8:16pm.

Minutes taken by Diana Nier, 1/19/22.

Procedures for Responding to Controversial Communications and Related Issues

Responding to accusatory or controversial media or conversations

Accusatory or controversial remarks between congregants can be referred to the Healthy Congregations Team, in consultation with the minister. In the event of a conflict which involves multiple people (such as factions) and deep division, the Board, in consultation with the Healthy Congregations Team and the minister, may decide to ask a local conflict resolution organization such as the Community Dispute Resolution Center for assistance.

Accusatory or controversial remarks made by someone outside of the First Unitarian Society can be referred to the Board and the minister, who will determine how to respond.

First Unitarian Society of Ithaca

Board of Trustees Meeting

January 19, 2022 Minutes

In general, the initial response should be one of curiosity and concern rather than defensiveness. We should strive to fulfill the Second Principle by promoting justice, equity, and compassion in human relations, recognizing that compassion is especially called for in the current environment of pervasive pandemic stress. The person (or people) responding to the situation can begin by setting aside their own emotional reaction to what has been said and seeking to understand the feelings and point of view that prompted the remarks. Drawing out the person who made the remarks can help defuse the situation somewhat, help the person feel they are being heard, and also reveal their underlying assumptions, which can help the responder determine how to help them come back into covenant. Make sure that both parties are clear about what the other is saying. Paraphrasing the other person's statements and confirming that the summary is accurate is essential.

Who speaks for the Board of Trustees

The Board's designated corresponding member may speak for the Board in answering questions or responding to messages from congregants, using judgment to determine when an issue needs to be referred to the Board as a whole. Similarly, Board members designated to be liaisons with the staff may speak for the Board in answering staff members' questions and responding to their messages, using judgment as to when an issue needs to come before the Board as a whole. The Board should inform the congregation as to who these designated Board members are.

In other situations, where a Board decision is required, the Board will decide the issue by majority vote. However, in a situation that calls for a quick decision, the Executive Committee (ExCo) may decide and then report its actions subject to reconsideration and amendment by the full Board (Bylaws, Article IV, section 4). If an immediate decision is required and there is no time to consult ExCo beforehand, the Board President, or the Vice President in the President's absence, may decide the issue and then report their actions subject to reconsideration and amendment by the full Board.

Response to visitors on Sunday morning

If a visitor asks for immediate assistance just before or during the service or coffee hour on Sunday morning, they can be courteously directed to the Hospitality Team member staffing the newcomers' table in the parlor. The Hospitality Team member will have on hand a list of resources that the visitor can be referred to. Other Hospitality Team members should be aware of the situation and know to direct the visitor to the newcomers' table.*

First Unitarian Society of Ithaca

Board of Trustees Meeting

January 19, 2022 Minutes

Education process

We should seek to educate our congregation, and to remind them on an ongoing basis, as to what our covenant says, what it means to be in covenant, and how we can all communicate respectfully and with an open mind and heart. The minister, the DRE, and the Healthy Congregations Team can all contribute to this ongoing education process in various ways, such as periodically giving a sermon on the topic, conducting or sponsoring an annual workshop on the topic, etc. In the absence of a minister, the Board, the Team Leaders Council, and the Healthy Congregations Team may coordinate the proposed educational actions for each church year.

Resolution on Winter 2022 Open Question

Whereas, the Board on October 20, 2021 created and charged an ad hoc Committee Open Questions to be comprised of the elected Trustees, the Treasurer, and the Minister, and

Whereas the ad hoc Committee has recommended that the Winter 2022 Open Question be on the topic of Mission,

Now, therefore, be it resolved that the Board hereby approves the following language for the Winter 2022 Open Question: ***Given our history (as described by Carol Kammen) and our hopes for the future, for what purpose does our congregation exist as an organization in 2022 and beyond? In other words, what is and should be our true Mission?***, and

Be it further resolved that the Board directs the Committee to solicit responses to the Winter Open Question through solicitations in the Weekly Announce; requests though all Committees, Ministry Teams, and other formal and informal groups within the Society; and also collect responses through a minimum of three in-person and/or Zoom meetings with the congregation, with all responses to be received by March 16, 2022.