

First Unitarian Society of Ithaca

Board of Trustees Meeting

February 21, 2022 Minutes

President Don Barber called the special meeting of the Board of Trustees (BoT) to order at 6:37pm on Monday, February 21, 2022.

Trustees Present: Don Barber (President), Diana Nier (Clerk), Elton Hall, John Gaines, Nancy Miller, Margaret Nichols, Simon Catterall, Walt Peck (Treasurer).

Trustees Absent: Therese O'Connor, Valerie Graves.

FUSIT Members & Guests: Nathan Fawcett (Finance Chair), Jens Wennberg, Matt Hare (Stewardship Chair)

Handouts:

- [W Proposal Statement for Moving Forward.docx](#)

Agenda Item # 1: Welcome and Chalice Lighting

John Gaines lit the chalice and read a selection.

Agenda Item # 2: Changes to Agenda

- The Board will publish a summary of our thoughts for the congregation at large
- Discussion of Open Questions

Agenda Item # 3: State of FUSIT Finances

- Walt presented a summary of FUSIT finances and proposal for how to move forward
 - 1) Limit budgetary expense ministry to \$80,000. This would 'save' us about \$55,000 vs. projected cost of a regular, full-time UUA minister. Exact number subject to review and consideration by the Finance Committee.
 - 2) Board creates a small Special Search Committee to explore and pursue ways to fulfill our ministerial needs within that budgetary framework, focusing on looking 'outside the box'. This Committee would include at least one or two Board members.
 - 3) Budget must be increased by a significant amount to pay for staff increases. This would be in recognition of the added responsibilities incurred by our current staff if we don't have a traditional minister (however briefly), to finance possible benefit enhancements, and to increase staff retention. Finance, Government, and Personnel Committees have already begun to explore these ideas.
 - 4) Stewardship Committee target = \$330,000. If reached, this would reduce our projected deficit by \$30,000.

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- 5) Aim to have ministerial decisions ready to share with the congregation by late March/early April. May not include particulars (e.g., names(s) for 'ministers'), but would at least include a framework for what the future will look like.
- 6) The Board, especially the Search Committee, must include the congregation in the process to the greatest extent possible, recognizing the need for confidentiality. How and when this is done will need to be one of the first tasks undertaken by the Special Search Committee.
- 7) If needed, **limited** deficit spending will be included in the budget, which we should be able to afford from the operating account balance. However, imperative that we not dive into the principal of the Endowment.

Agenda Item # 4: Stewardship Message to Board

- Stewardship had requested a budget number from the Board. Current target is \$330,000
- Stewardship would like to encourage Board members, team leaders, etc. to pledge early
 - Stewardship will create a bulletin board display of households that have pledged, and it would be helpful to start off with that somewhat populated
- Stewardship sends mail to all registered members, and needs some additional hands to help fold, stamp, and seal cards. Once they have a date, they will let the Board know.

Agenda Item # 5: Board Discussion of Requests from Finance and Stewardship

- Does this lower ministry amount seem reasonable?
 - Reasonable or not, it looks like this is what we can afford right now
 - However, what we lose in lowering that amount is a placeholder value for what a full-time settled minister would cost, which would require a LOT of work to make up if/when we are once again in a position to hire such a minister
 - This could limit our future options
 - This would rule out hiring a normal UUA interim minister for next year. Are we okay with that?
 - The timing is not great for hiring a UUA interim at this time
- What do staff think about this?
 - Haven't asked them yet, but will soon.
 - Staff have previously stated that support is important, but so is cohesion of the community and the sense of working together toward a spiritually inspiring goal
- Thoughts on the idea of a Special Search Committee?
 - Seems reasonable, though is 'Search Committee' the right name when we don't yet know what we're searching for?
 - Any charge must be carefully set forth and areas of responsibility delineated
 - Board must present a resolution to the congregation to charge any such committee. We will try to have something ready for the March meeting

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- Discussion of whether it's appropriate to have Board members on this committee
 - If we hired a non-UUA minister, how would that work logistically?
- A point to remember: once we increase staff salaries, we can't back off from that later on if/when we hire a settled minister
- Board must be clear with our needs so GovCo can work around them
- We need to schedule another congregational conversation
 - Should that wait until after we make some decisions so we have new information to share?
 - Schedule meeting after we have guidelines but before we've started work on the process? Good way to solicit congregational participation
- How will this process fit around the Stewardship timeline?
- Money is a sensitive topic, which UU congregations dislike talking about. However, we need to be honest about the situation. If you want something, you have to pay for it -- no free lunch! We don't have anything we can cut.
 - Frame that as, we need funds to get a minister. What we get in pledges will determine what we can pursue
 - Need to make clear that we are not desperate; we are trying to find a path that works well for our congregation and situation
- Discussion of how various financial choices will affect our options for future years
 - Current hope is that we will be able to be back in person by next year, which should be very helpful
 - Further discussion moved to Executive Session
- Discussion of Stewardship campaign and how to build interest
- How do we get more people to attend the congregational conversations? We have the attention of a group of core members, but we need to communicate without people outside that circle
- We need a record/summary of points made in the Sunday 2/20/22 congregational conversation to share with the congregation
 - Michelle Waffner has a Zoom recording of the meeting. Can this be shared? Advertise it in the weekly announcement email
 - Laura Free and Nancy Miller both took some notes
 - Margaret Nichols volunteered to help summarize the Sunday 2/20 meeting
- John Gaines and Don Barber will work on a resolution to define the Special Search Committee's responsibilities and boundaries, to have ready for the Board to vote on at the March meeting
- Next congregational conversation is scheduled for 12:30pm on Sunday, March 13
- Special Board meeting on Wednesday, March 2, at 6:30pm.

Agenda Item # 6: Open Question

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- We are collecting Open Question responses until March 15
- Don't have a process yet for organizing those responses. Perhaps Therese and Valerie can help again
- We should have the responses organized by the April Board meeting

Agenda Item # 7: Vote on GovCo Resolution

- Don Barber shared the text of the resolution

MOTION: Resolved: GovCo is hereby assigned the task of aligning the needs of the church's operations with today's needs and anticipated future needs of the congregation and staff. GovCo is tasked with presenting either a single option or a series of options to the Board for its consideration. The proposal(s) will be submitted before April 20, 2022.

Further Resolved, the Board will agree to:

- 1) Provide guidance on the top 3-4 priorities for work products desired of a professional minister by March 18, 2022,
- 2) Give thoughtful consideration of any suggestions presented,
- 3) Share any decisions it has made relevant to the question with GovCo, and
- 4) Will not independently be working on the same issue.

Moved by Don Barber, seconded by John Gaines.

The floor was opened to discussion.

- John Gaines explained the background of the resolution. GovCo was created with a very limited brief, and therefore needs Board authorization to extend their activities to examine new areas of FUSIT governance
- Walt Peck noted that the 'top 3-4 priorities for work products desired of a professional minister' item is what we need for the next congregational conversation. How best to time that in relation to giving information to GovCo?
 - It could be very helpful for the Board to get input from the congregation prior to the March meeting, at which time the priorities can be finalized and given to GovCo
- An April 20 date is very late in terms of ministerial search and hiring. Can this be moved earlier, perhaps to April 1?
 - That would be a very tight turnaround for GovCo, especially since the process involves a lot of research and at least one committee retreat.
 - Friendly amendment to change April 20 to April 1

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MOTION PASSED.

Meeting adjourned at 8:02pm.

Minutes taken by Diana Nier, 2/21/22.

Executive Session: The Board went into Executive Session at 8:03pm. Topics discussed included providing additional compensation to staff for their service above and beyond during the pandemic and our time without a minister.

MOTION: Resolved: That Stephanie Ortolano's base pay be raised by \$5,000 annually, pro-rated to the end of the 2021-2022 FUSIT fiscal year, and permanent thereafter. Moved by Elton Hall, seconded by Walt Peck. **MOTION PASSED.**

Agenda Item # 8: Closing Words

John Gaines extinguished the chalice and read a selection.

Executive Session Adjourned at 8:42pm.