

Fred Balfour (President) called the regular monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees (BoT) to order at 6:32 PM on Tuesday, November 21, 2023.

Trustees Present: Fred Balfour (President), Don Barber, Tom Coakley, Valerie Graves (Clerk), Megan McCormick, Rene Rogers

Ex- Officio Members of the Board: Walt Peck (Treasurer)*, Emily Richards*

Trustees Absent: Margaret Nichols (Vice President)

FUSIT Members & Guests: Matt Hare*, Michelle Waffner*

* - indicates that the individual joined by zoom.

Handouts:

- Agenda Item # 4: [W 20231115_Open Questions_Summary_Board.docx](#)
- Agenda Item # 6: Consent Agenda:
 - [2023 Childcare Coordinator Job Description 090123.docx \(2\).pdf](#)
 - [2023 Religious Exploration Assistant Job Description 090123.docx \(2\).pdf](#)
- Agenda Item # 8:
 - [E 20231120_Report_Income Projects for FUSIT Planning_FinanceCommittee](#)
- Agenda Item # 9: [P Stewardship Presentation to Board Nov 2023.pptx](#)
- Agenda Item #10: [W Fund Raising and Donation Policy.Rev](#)
- Agenda Item # 11: [W Treasurer's Report, November 2023.docx](#)
- Agenda Item # 12: [E DRAFT Adapted Partnership Governance 10/30/23](#)
- Agenda Item # 14: [E 20231102_Considerations_Documentation_Board](#)

Agenda Item # 1: Welcome and Chalice Lighting

Don Barber lit the chalice and read a selection. Fred Balfour congratulated the staff on a successful Chili lunch on Sunday. He expressed gratitude to all the volunteers who helped cook or clean.

Agenda Item # 2: Congregational Communication Period

No one from the congregation brought up any discussion items.

Agenda Item # 3: Changes to Agenda

An agenda item will be added - the overview of the Open Question responses will be placed before the visioning question.

Agenda Item # 4: Open Question Response Summary - Valerie Graves

The majority of responses were related to connection within the community and opportunities for service. The most common barrier was time. A summary will also be included in the December newsletter. The next open question will be posed to the congregation in January.

Discussion:

- For fundraising we often raise money from ourselves.

The topics for the past powerful questions were reviewed. They have been mostly internal in focus. The Aug, Sept & Oct Powerful Question balance was 85% internal, 15% external.

- The Open Question responses included a few quotes from people who would give more time and energy if partnered with others outside of FUSIT.
- The focus of Visioning Questions and Open Questions responses is consistent between the congregation and Board.
- Early this fiscal year, after Open Questions and based on the congregational input, Does the Board share some of the related changes that have happened or will happen? Does the information get reported back in a sermon?
- In the past, the Board used the synopsis of what we learned in the first open question to help create the second Open Question and then the feedback informs the VoM.
- Some organizations use daily emails to engage people, such as the Atlantic. It states "If you do not read anything else today, read this!"
- As far as fundraisers, service and connection were large themes in the open question response. The responses might help us frame fundraising opportunities.

Action Item:

Valerie Graves will share the detailed spreadsheet with MVT.

Agenda Item # 5: Visioning Question

How should our UU Society balance between internal and external focus?

Discussion:




- Sometimes an external focus can make us more connected internally. One example in the past was the postcards at coffee hour. Service for others can be an opportunity for connection and can draw people together.
- For people to feel connected, they first need to feel held or cared for by the community. If they feel connected, they are more likely to get involved, but involvement can lead to connection. It is hard to know what comes first. For a culture of involvement, we need to exercise those muscles of engagement. Small opportunities can offer connection. Having small steps available to get people building habits of service inside or outside the community. But people need to come in and get something for themselves first. In order to then feel the meaning and purpose, and a drive to contribute in a larger way.
- This is a place to help people connect to others, or an action, or a passion. But it can be hard to get people to give of themselves.
- At the team and committee fair, there could have been more offers of involvement. We need to be able to hook people into activity.
- At the local temple, a friend who belonged to the temple had similar questions. The temple ended up starting a mentorship program so that people who were interested could be connected with someone who would build a relationship with them and guide them to ways to be engaged.
- Since the pandemic - the church has been focused on internal activities. But we know being engaged with the broader community is missing and people are looking for that. MVT is working with social justice to help develop more external connections.
- Maybe the pandemic disrupted the small group service activities?
- After attending a church a while, I am only just learning about all the things that congregants are doing in the community.
- The Social Justice council was always doing something in the early 2000s. Did we outsource external activities to the social justice council? Counting on others to do the work?
- The issues around the world are currently complicated and huge - people need to know how to get involved in small meaningful ways. Current world issues are very complicated, religiously and politically.
- Or we could take on issues that are easier to tackle - and more central to the heart of FUSIT, such as poverty and homelessness.
- We can open up our door and welcome people into our congregation, but how are we creating a space where people belong? How many people come a few times and do not

come back? How many people in our congregations are lifelong UUs? This is an issue - how are we fostering a UU identity in our children and young people? We should focus on external projects, but also the external view of bringing in new members and creating a place to belong.

- I met a person who was a big sister through Big Brothers, Big Sisters. The annex may be a great place for activities for that program.

Agenda Item # 6: Consent Agenda

Consent agenda items:

-  2023 Childcare Coordinator Job Description 090123.docx (2).pdf
-  2023 Religious Exploration Assistant Job Description 090123.docx (2).pdf
-  20231017_ Minutes_ Meeting Minutes_ Board

Motion: A motion was made by Megan McCormick and seconded by Don Barber to approve the consent agenda.

Discussion:

- The hours per week listed for the RE assistant in the job description is 10-15 hours - is that what Emily Richards agrees to?
- Emily Richards is authorized to deal with the issue on her own - MVT has approved her to do so.
- Should the job description say 10-15 hours or something different?
- The current job description says 20 hours. This version is not up to date.

An amendment was made by Don Barber and seconded by Megan McCormick to remove the RE Assistant Job Description from the consent agenda.

The amendment passed.

The motion passed.

Agenda Item # 7: Monitoring Function: Team and Committee Reports

Discussion:

- The hospitality team report was missing - Fred Balfour is the lead and apologized.
- The Board could use more team and committee reports so it can perform its monitoring functions. Michelle was asked to let all team and committee leaders know, but they may need a reminder. The Board needs to think about how to make sure those reports come in before the meeting.
- A Board member could set up a monthly email reminder.

- Board liaisons can contact committee chairs.

From OAT:

- OAT sought out legal assistance to develop an alcohol policy. The report came back and OAT is working on the policy. The proposed limits do not give free reign - they limit the number of drinks people can consume. The Board should consider whether this is an OAT policy or a Board policy. The policy applies to all functions within the church and may need to be adopted at a Board level.

Action Item:

Don Barber will bring the alcohol policy to the Board for consideration at the next meeting.

- Rod Howe will only be staying on OAT until the end of the calendar year. His spot will need to be filled. NomComm should be aware of the open position.
- Is the position a paid position?
- All of OAT is unpaid, except Michelle Waffner, church administrator..
- What is the time commitment?

Response: OAT meets once a month and the agenda is set ahead of time. Individual and group projects are brought to the meeting. The philosophy in OAT is to provide Michelle information she needs to work autonomously. For example, people are coming in to rent the space more than once. OAT is working on rental rates for multiple rentals so she has guidelines to work from.

Action item:

Don Barber will let NomComm know that a spot will be opening on OAT.

About Board Transparency:

- There was a discussion about how much information about the Board meetings should be available to the congregation - Transparency is recommended. Slack can be used for private conversations. Only factual information should be in the Board folders for meetings.
- Should the files be viewed by the congregation?
- There was some trouble in the past - the folders included financial reports and salaries. Now the folders only contain a condensed profit and loss vs budget that is fine for the public to view.
- The new report is one page - it has good readability.
- The full reports will be in Slack.
- The Board is comfortable with transparency as long as all members are aware that the folder is available to the congregation.
- Seeing the proposed resolutions before the meeting is helpful for members.

- The Board meeting folders should be “read only” with no downloading allowed.
- The pdfs of resolutions will be downloadable once they are decided by board.

Motion: A motion was made by Don Barber and seconded by Fred Balfour to direct the church administrator to share, in the weekly announcement the week before the meeting, the links to the consent and discussion folders for the upcoming board meeting with read only access and no ability to download.

The motion passed.

Agenda Item # 8: Finance Committee Report on the 3-year Fiscal Plan Project

The finance committee will stay focused on the 3-year plan. Nathan ran a recent meeting, but was not able to participate tonight and may not be able to lead the committee because of health issues. The Finance committee came up with a list of income ideas:

- A sexton apartment or the apartment could be used for Ithaca Welcomes Refugees
- Lease rooms in the parsonage to one person businesses.
- Install a commercial kitchen in the youth room.
- Improve sanctuary acoustics for groups that might want to use room for a talking environment.
- Increase rental rates.
- Increase grant eligible status.
- Work toward historical district classification.
- Increase accessibility.
- Create an office of planned giving
- Work with the auction team to explore fundraising.
- Have online auctions - but we need new people to work on it.
- Reinstitute a live auction with dinner.
- Have a fundraising dinner.
- Bring back the recycle sale.

Discussion:

- I have a concern about the use of the youth room for a commercial kitchen - It will limit the use of the space. If we want children to grow up in the church, we need a space for them.
Response: There are always impacts and compromises - they will be explored.
- Resolution work happens in Finance, and then OAT and MVT can use the numbers to plan staffing and programs.
- Maybe add fundraisers that bring in money from outside the FUSIT community - such as a sponsored drive/run/swim etc...

- The proposal includes a congregational conversation to present the current financial need and get ideas from the congregation about more diverse income sources. There can be messages in Slack about what information goes to the congregation - who will finish the statement and send it out?
- Who can lead the congregational conversation, and when will it take place?
- December may be hard - people are busy.
- Early December might be fine - could there be one at night, and one after church?
- There can be an announcement in the pulpit a week ahead then again on the Sunday when the meeting will happen.
- The conversation could be casual - a social meeting during coffee hour.
- There is a suggestion of a congregational conversation in the parlor after church, and a zoom meeting in the evening. We want to help people feel ownership. We are opening the situation up for their ideas. We do not need to share the current idea list for approval.
- FUSIT cannot live off pledges.

Action Items:

Don Barber can work on a statement to the congregation and send it to Michelle Waffner. Fred Balfour, Margaret Nichols, and Rene Rogers will come up with a plan for the congregational conversations and announcements. Megan McCormick will make a Sunday announcement or help run one/both of the meetings.

Agenda Item # 9: Stewardship Committee Report on Pledging Campaign - Matt Hare

Stewardship is a small team of six people. The pledge totals were shown in graph form for 2019-2024. Michelle Waffner helped gather the needed information. The yield from pledges is around 90% with the exception of 2020, which was likely related to pandemic. There was a gap this year - of about six households and some members that passed away - which translated to around \$12,000. Projected out to 2025, if everything's the same, with the loss of large donors it will lead to further decrease. However, new households are starting to pledge. And there are about 15 households that are pledging again after a gap. There are some recently untried stewardship strategies, such as phone calls, house parties, and house calls. Those strategies did contribute to more and better pledges in the past. Also the idea of planned giving or legacy giving - it is an important way to build relationships. The stewardship team needs more help for those strategies. There is a proposal for a January dinner at church for those pledging \$1000 or more (around 73 households). Also to reach out by phone or in person with a script for each type of pledger.

Discussion:

- What would be a good number of team members to have the described strategies come to fruition?

Response: We have had little luck getting people to join the committee. We could start asking people if they are available to do a specific task related to stewardship. An example could be thank you notes. People may be more amiable to things like that. Or they could help with a dinner. Helping with a project is easier than joining a committee.

- It would be helpful to have small ways for people to be involved. Thank you notes are a good example and bring visibility to pledgers.
- Postcards that are coloring sheets that could be sent to congregants would be an easy way to make it feel personalized and to get kids involved.
- It is important to make the congregation more aware of what the organization needs to run. And those tasks could bring moments of belonging and connection.
- Does the report include a pledge count per year? Or the median pledge?

Response: We usually have between 287-268 households. Medians are not really useful because the distribution is so wacky.

- If we host an event that involves part of the congregation based on their pledge amounts - is everyone comfortable with that?

Response: It has a proven track record in other churches.

Response: There is some concern about honoring those with money as it might make people feel they do not belong if they cannot donate a certain amount. But if we honor those giving time and energy as well it would provide a good balance.

Response: building relationships is the key to fundraising - we are grateful for everyone's attention and commitment to the church. People are invited to events in order to thank them for their commitment to the organization - whether pledging hours or money.

- Should stewardship come back to the Board meeting next month?

Response: That would be good! The next campaign is launched at the end of January.

- In the chart in the report it lists a goal of \$275 in pledges for the coming year - The committee should think about what would be possible if there were changes to the fundraising strategy and steward could have the personnel to make it happen.

Response: Steward will think about it!

- MVT is talking about a newcomers brunch at the beginning of the year, for individuals that have moved to the area and were very involved in other congregations. It might be great for Stewardship to reach out to them as well.
- Stewardship could consider asking people to pledge time or skill to church, or additional help with fundraising, not just pledges of money.

Agenda Item # 10: Evaluate Fundraising and Financial Donation Policy - Don Barber

Some historical information was shared over Slack. There used to be separate RE fundraisers. Once all fundraising was merged it was easier to have everything under one umbrella. The fundraising policy has been on books for a long time and hasn't been followed recently - because people were unaware, or other things were coming forward. Often it was based on a Minister's decision. Beacon on Aurora asked for interpretation of policy and their fundraiser was not allowed under the current policy. Other congregants would like to see the fundraising policy rescinded. The Board could rescind the policy as it exists right now. A group will need to look at implications of having no fundraising policy. When the budget is set, there is parity and a general plan - if we allow other fundraising, there is less control, but is control important? If there is other income other than pledges, maybe it is not as important.

Discussion:

- The policy should be rescinded. We haven't thought deeply about the implications, but there are no immediate concerns.
- The policy feels problematic - but rescinding has the possibility for unintended consequences. For example, if someone gave all their money to the library fundraiser they may not pledge as much. If the money is coming from individuals, it is the same source of money whether it goes to the general fund or a fundraiser for a part of the church.
- People might be willing to give to what they are most interested in and may give more.
- But we do not want to sway people away from general pledging for things like general operations.
- No one wants to pay the electric bill. They do not want to give money for salaries. But we need to keep the community operational. Getting rid of the policy sets a bad precedent.
- We could allow programs to fundraise for a certain amount per year. Exceptions for things like the youth trip to Boston would be an example.
- If someone were to donate to the library and the fundraiser raised beyond the fundraising cap, where does that surplus money go?
Response: It would go to the community at large.
- The current policy stands in the way - the Board could have a small group bring forward a replacement policy.
- To be included in the budget, the committee, team or group has the responsibility to ask for a line in the budget.
- Some churches have exceptions.
- This could change in the context of revenue shifts.
- Flashy activities and programs might take fundraising money away from salaries.

- Maybe we should leave the policy in place and then define a policy for exceptions.
- Someone is needed to advise the board on this policy. It could be the finance committee after the first of the year. We could bring other people into the mix such as MVT and OAT.

Action Item:

Board members should reflect on this policy and discuss again at the January meeting.

Agenda Item # 11: Review of Treasurer's Report and Budget vs. Actual - Walt Peck

There are no big budget concerns at present. The budget is looking good in comparison to prior years in pledges fulfilled, and our expenses are in line. There are no big areas of extra funds not yet spent.

Discussion:

- How many pledges are in the grant income line of the budget?
Response: There are very few.
- There is a way that people 70 and over can get tax breaks by donating - that should be shared with congregants.
- We have a budget item of \$14,000 for auctions - but we need an auction team. Marie is willing to coach, but not lead, a team.
- We need other people on the auction team, by the end of the calendar year, and we need to get ideas on the table.
- That total number (\$14,000) has been reliable the last several years.
- So the auctions are not staffed?
Response - yes, they are not staffed.
- We can talk at the congregation conversation. There were some open question responses asking to bring back the live auction.
- Getting auction items takes legwork.
- Maybe people will donate service items. Maybe untapped donations.
- So we hope to have a live auction, a service auction, and an online auction?
Response - We need to do whatever it takes!
- The intent is to have at least two auctions.

Action Items:

Fred Balfour will talk to Marie Benedetti about auction options and staffing needs.

The Board member who leads the congregational conversations will gather info and look for volunteers.

- There is also a line in the budget for a new fundraiser for \$5000 - a dinner, swim, run, etc... and we need a team to manage that event. The good news is that some options could engage people outside the community.
- We are also hoping to find additional renters for our space for \$8000 more than last year. We need a marketing plan to market our space.

Action Item:

Megan McCormick will talk to Calvary Baptist, a church that did a walk last year. She will talk to them about how they did it.

- What can be done that hasn't been done - maybe some funky things like roller skating? Paddling a certain distance on the lake?
Response: It is good to think outside the box - but events at the lake and liability.
- We could also do something, such as sponsorship for how long can people keep a beach ball up in the air?

Action Item:

Rene Rogers will communicate with the Board and brainstorm ideas.

All Board members should send Rene ideas. We are looking for ideas with a structure that allows everyone to reach out to others to support them doing something.

Agenda Item # 12: Review of Draft Adapted Partnership Governance

Everyone has had time to respond - if Board members haven't, they have another week. GovCo is working on December 2nd to respond to all the comments and bring forward a proposal for the Board to adopt.

Discussion:

- Some topics were aspirational - need to be more realistic.
Response: GovCo will work on all the comments.

Agenda Item # 13: Active Liaison Issues

There were no liaison issues brought up.

Agenda Item #14: Proposed Naming Standards for Board Documents - Valerie Graves

Discussion:

- Start using now?
response : can start using, but agree by first of year?
- Consistent heading on each page is helpful in larger documents.

Action item: Board members look over and try it out.

Agenda Item #15: Other Topics

Fiscal sponsor for group that need 503C:

The grant didn't go through, but they have another funding source. Is the Board comfortable with that? OAT will work on it.

There was a note last night from MVT:

The concerns included the budgeting process and church staff morale, and gratitude and appreciation from the Board. Someone will need to take the lead to make sure this happens. At the end of the MVT minutes, the question was raised about what goes to MVT, OAT, or the Board. That question should be on the agenda for the joint meeting in January. Has that meeting been scheduled?

- OAT and MVT made a loose agreement to meet twice a year at the beginning of the calendar year and the end of church year.
- Recommend that the Board be part of that conversation and not wait past January, given the confusion over where things should go.
- The Board would like to know the issues causing staff morale concerns.
- If there are issues of staff morale coming to the Board, the Board should know what is happening. If MVT cannot handle the issues, that is concerning.
- Related to staff morale, they are all overworked. Emily Richards did not have a day off in October. There is a lot of work to be done and the staff is not getting help from volunteers. Another thing is the lack of clarity about ministry and what it will be going forward, as well as plans for all areas of programming.

Response: The Board is also anxious about what is happening next year - the church is not in a good position. There have been earlier conversations about recognizing volunteers. We have to find ways to keep the church operating. The Board hopes the

staff would engage in the revenue discussion and ideas about revenue sources - the church will need to bring in revenue to keep salary where it is.

- The staff is aware of the current financial situation. And the staff is always willing to help. Many staff members have thoughts and ideas for fundraisers. We need to expand financial reach beyond the walls of the congregation.
- Asking people who are burnt out to have ideas to save their own jobs is putting them in a difficult position. Ideas are welcome - but we also need to leverage people who have more mental space to think creatively. It is hard to be creative under pressure. And it has to be a group effort.
- It is difficult for many working people and FUSIT volunteers to get days off!
- I have worked on retention and can revisit strategies that would help improve staff morale in general.

Action Items:

Megan McCormick will bring forward a list of things that the Board can do to honor staff.

Fred Balfour will poll members to set a joint OAT, MVT, and Board meeting date.

Agenda Item # 15: Closing Words

The closing words were read by Don Barber.

Meeting adjourned at 9:14pm.

Minutes taken by Valerie Graves, 11/21/2023.
