

**First Unitarian Society of Ithaca**  
**Board of Trustees Meeting - Minutes**  
November 12, 2019

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President Andy Turner called the regular monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees (BoT) to order at 6:01 pm on Tuesday, November 12, 2019.

**Trustees Present:**

Angela Zhang, Matt Hare (Clerk & Scribe), Andy Turner (President), Elton Hall, Diana Nier, Lyn Staack, Wendy Salomon, Jennifer Streid-Mullen (ex-officio; Treasurer), Rev. Margaret Weis (ex-officio)

**Trustees Absent:** Kim Wilkinson

A quorum was present being a majority of the full Board (currently eight members).

**FUSIT Members & Guests (arrived 6:30):**

Don Barber (Strategic Planning co-chair), Rich Dolge (Endowment chair, member of finance committee), Nathan Fawcett (Endowment and finance committees), Sharon Costianes (Stewardship co-chair), Dick Kurtz (Building & Grounds), Marie Benedetti (Recycle Sale), Sue Roenke (Recycle Sale co-chair)

Via Zoom: Jens Wennberg (Stewardship team and finance team), Nancy Miller (Recycle Sale co-chair)

**Handouts:**

Graphic of FUSIT Strategy for financial management & coordination (2 parts)

**Agenda Item # 1:** Opening Reading and Minutes Approval

Matt Hare lit the chalice as Rev. Margaret said a few opening words.

**MOTION:** Approve the BoT October 15, 2019 meeting minutes shown in Google Docs folder as of the date and time of this meeting. **PASSED. Archived as "2019-10-15 - BoT\_Minutes"**

**Agenda Item # 2:** Upcoming FUSIT activities and dates

Date	Event	Comments
11/10, 17, 24	NICE classes	Cohort 2
November 15-17	UU Partner Church Council Weekend at FUSIT	

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<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Nov. 20	Pub Theology	6:30 pm at Liquid State Brewery
Dec. 1	New member welcome and drop-in Circle	
Dec. 11	Rev. Weis speaking at Kiwanis Club	
Dec. 15	Child Dedication during Sunday service	
Dec. 15	Quiet Christmas Service	

**Agenda Item # 3: Unsung Heroes for October 2018**

Jessica English, Aurelia Faraday, Emily Hopkins	Auction organizing, auctioneering
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**Agenda Item # 4: Summit of committees and teams focused on FUSIT finances**

**Invitation to committee and team leaders, requesting their presence or a representative:**

One of our main goals for this conversation is to simply convene the various finance related teams to learn about each other's piece of the FUSIT Financial pie and to provide an educational opportunity for members of the Board and the just launching strategic planning team. We are going to ask each of you to take five minutes (and only five minutes!) to share a bit about your committees work and focus. We are asking you to share your perspective on the following three questions:

- What is the core purpose of your committee and role in FUSIT's overall fiscal health?
- What does success look like for your team?
- What are the key challenges to achieving success for your team/committee's work?

Rev. Margaret began the discussion with a brief thought question: Did you grow up in a home that talked about finances, and was there an orientation toward giving, or service? (pairwise discussion)

Andy Turner set the stage for discussion by noting that under Partnership Governance, oversight by the Board of Trustees requires intimate knowledge of all the parts of our financial

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workings and how the parts integrate to keep us strong and responsive to our mission. This summit is a learning opportunity for the BoT, for the Strategic Planning Committee (Dreamcatchers, represented at this meeting by Don Barber), and perhaps for some of you representing different parts of the finance puzzle.

Paper elephants were displayed to recognize several 'elephants' in the room, i.e., current and near-future challenges. First, we rely on two big donors who will not be with us forever. Second, Jennifer Streid-Mullen is moving on Dec. 2020, requiring a new treasurer. Third, there is concern about the sustainability of Recycle Sale efforts, or at what cost. These were acknowledged as important items, but they were not the focus of this meeting.

Introductions were made to self-identify what FUSIT body each person was representing, and what each was hoping to get out of this meeting.

#### **Team Summaries**

**Rev. Margaret - staff** organizes ministry teams to live out mission. Staff salaries are the largest part of our budget, and they are crucial for translating ministry team efforts and ambitions into budgetary needs. Desire to maintain living wages. Staff are at the front lines of developing the budget and using the budget to realize our ambitions.

**Budget team** - co-led by minister and treasurer. Work with key staff & team leaders & stewardship. Jennifer Streid-Mullen summarized the "FUSIT Strategy" figure. There is a lot of back and forth within the budget team and between them and staff. An important annual goal is to bring key issues to April BoT meeting for preliminary discussion. As stewardship evaluates what they are going to be able to do in terms of pledges, budget becomes finalized to generate realistic and balanced budget for annual meeting. Important to not surprise the congregation, so preliminary discussion opportunities are important. Late adjustments can be stressful. Plan for capital campaigns when needed.

**Finance Committee** - Nathan Fawcett described good collaboration with endowment (regularly meeting together) and with stewardship (including chair or a member in Finance Comm. meetings). Committee functions include:

Support treasurer & budget team in budget balancing effort

Support treasurer in understanding current budget status

Develop plans for longer term financial health

Address issues like big donor vulnerability - how to be prepared for transition?

General mission is to support best and wisest uses of finances to realize mission and vision of ministry (support role). Responsible for review of specific transactions (gifts), and to recommend strategies and policies (e.g. new gift policy).

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Examples of longer term planning by finance committee - minister sabbatical and capital campaign.

**Stewardship** - Sharon Costianes: Main job is the annual pledge campaign. We raise the money to do all our FUSIT things and to keep FUSIT financially sound. The committee evaluates past efforts in terms of success and messaging. How do we “sell” the mission of the church? We put a lot of thought into shaping perceptions about finances and what we do. How do we get people to buy in? If successful then we are increasing # of pledge units as well as total dollars pledged. We are recently meeting or exceeding goals. However, sometimes it feels like we are operating in a bubble, with time spent trying to work out how things work at FUSIT. We are finding it challenging to increase pledge units (205 most recently). It has been helpful to have clear history of FUSIT financial performance. There are high hopes for the data gathering capabilities of the new BREEZE electronic system. The annual budget process is challenging - we have to start with target numbers before we know what is needed next year. It would be good to have a rough basis for goal setting at the start. One challenge is the culture of scarcity, and trying to direct attention to all the wonderful things happening at FUSIT to alleviate fear that the (financial) sky is falling. To reach more people we need them to perceive that there is no ‘us’ and ‘them’, or an inner circle, but everybody is working toward a common goal. The committee has expanded outreach efforts so that Stewardship has a presence beyond when we are asking for money.

**Endowment** - Rich Dolge: Endowment Committee manages and strives to enhance our current funds (~\$700,000). When expenses outstrip income for operating budget then it typically is expected that endowment will make up the gap, but if that happens too often and is more than our earnings it eats up our principle and is not sustainable. Long term giving is an important part of our strategy for enhancing the endowment. Growing the endowment is what success would look like for us. We try to protect the funds and conservatively manage them, mostly through the UU endowment fund out of Boston. Our Endowment treasurer (serving for 25 years) is growing weary so we need to find and plan for transition to a new treasurer. Can one treasurer work the budget and also work with Endowment?

**Fundraising Teams -**

Sue Roenke voiced a concern that many volunteers, let alone FUSIT members in general, don’t recognize the big picture in terms of how important the Recycle Sale is financially (~\$20,000+). Big proceeds scare us because the sale becomes irreplaceable, yet seems unsustainable without new leaders and more volunteers. Even a single 3 hour shift is so helpful, but it is hard to get commitments.

Marie Benedetti - Many Recycle Sale tasks begin in January, so we need to identify leaders early. Can we get younger folks involved as a team? Current leaders have generated and vetted

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a formalized manual, making training much easier and repeatable than it used to be, but we have not been successful drawing in more helpers.

Index cards were distributed for attendees to write

1 or 2 things that make FUSIT vulnerable

1 or 2 opportunities or untapped potential

(all cards were read aloud; they are summarized here by lumping similar items)

**Challenges and Vulnerabilities (most articulated multiple times):**

- Lack of long-term financial plans

- Infrastructure needs - need better planning ahead for predictable depreciation
- Lack of succession strategies
  - for key committee positions, for team leaders

- Poor communication among financial committees, teams and operations teams

- Generational shifts:

- Growing younger membership, but they are not as financially capable as elders
- Aging 1-2 major donors - need transition strategy

- Insider-outsider perceptions among members; culture of scarcity

**Opportunities, Possibilities**

Growing membership - unlock its potential;

-We can push a bit harder for pledges than we have

-Engage younger members with electronic and social media, technology (text pledge)

-Capitalize on attendance

-Grow culture of generosity, both financial and time/effort, and showcase it

Grow better leadership in both board and ministry

Do good in visible ways and the money will follow

Need overview examination of fundraising efforts to make sure the portfolio makes sense

Legacy giving as congregation ages

Project-based giving - where does it fit in?

Build synergy between mission and our giving/stewardship/legacy - relevance of UUism

Streaming Sunday services

Congregant "sermons"

Educational materials explaining connection between FUSIT finances and living our mission

Increased community engagement, richer program offerings, expanded facilities

**Process, Alignment with Mission, and Communication - Discussion points**

- Sounds like there is a lot of pressure on treasurer. How can we distribute that work and responsibility load?

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- Budget team working together with finance, endowment and Stewardship means that people can learn other parts of process (reduce vulnerability by not having solitary players with roles that never get shared).
- How to convey what ministry staff do to make it real to congregants. Not just staff “overhead”.
- Stewardship deserves credit for their marketing efforts - how can BoT help?
- Many members don’t know all that is happening - get it out there with social networking as well as traditional means.
- Talk about money not just when asking for it.
- Rev. Margaret project proposal - how do we communicate our culture of generosity?
- Too few people are asking for pledges. Can we make asking for money for FUSIT a more generalized thing?
- In other churches there is more personal engagement to ask for money. It has been done some here, but not often.
- Connection between ministry, mission and finances. What is it that people DO want to talk about if not money - start there. Create comfortable spaces.
- How do we increase the number of people giving a small amount?
- When people are not informed they create their own narrative. Better communication.
- Folks become more engaged when leadership invites them in. Create opportunities for them to feel like part of the team.
- Giving is a very personal decision and subjective. It is the personal connection to FUSIT that will drive giving. Finding diverse ways to build that personal connection is key.
- An advantage of inviting and generating more small pledges is that it builds a culture of giving, with increases annually.
- We currently have logistical complications with giving - BREEZE will help, but we should consider all the ways we can make it easier.
- Donate to general fund. Generational shifts. 42% of people are impulsive givers, and 60% of people are not budgeting their spending.
- Fundraising as a 3-legged stool, with project-based giving as a 4th leg (for those who don’t want their donation going to endowment).
- How does pledging and volunteering get approached in NICE?
- Some highly committed congregants do a lot - they pledge time instead of money and should be appreciated as much as money givers. Make donation of time explicitly recognized and thanked.
- In bulletin, have a text number where \$\$ can be pledged
- Stewardship trying to have a presence year-round to build relationships, not just during pledge season.
- Community engagement impact of fundraisers like Recycle Sale is important

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**Capitalize on this discussion - Discussion points:**

Board will continue to think about culture change mechanisms and communication

Finance team reports to BoT. This process of reflection and inquiry is helpful to keep going, and lets keep finance teams interacting with other fundraising/fund management components. Finance team is looking for more direction from the board, not less.

Developmental planning is the goal of Dreamcatchers whereas BoT is problem solving and managing. Good to avoid parallel processes. Looking for coordination, but from tonight's discussion it doesn't look like we are at risk of parallel processes.

Rev. Margaret - thanks to all of you for all you do.

**Meeting adjourned at 8:05 p.m.**

Minutes taken by Matt Hare and compiled with notes from Elton Hall  
Nov. 12, 2019