

First Unitarian Church of St. Louis Policy Board Meeting
Monday, July 14, 2025, 6:30–8:00 p.m. via Zoom
Minutes

President Kathy Wilke called the meeting to order at 6:31 p.m.

Others in attendance: Chris Kocher, Vice President; Margaret Weck, Treasurer; Carl Bassi, Mike Bray, Deborah Cavanaugh Grant, Betty Neill, Chris Peterson, Trustees

Absent: Lisa Ross, Trustee, Sidney Watson, Secretary (who recorded these minutes from the Zoom recording)

Church Council: Cathy Rauch

Staff: Rev. Kim Mason, Lynn Hunt

Opening words and Chalice Lighting by Betty Neill

Board Covenant read by Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant,
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1cBWTB1BODfNv4Xks6vuDCH0RmnF5brnV/edit?usp=drive_link&ouid=105183447557092303738&rtpof=true&sd=true

The Process Observer is Chris.

During our check-in, President Kathy Wilke invited board members to share their favorite kind of pie.

Consent Agenda

- Minutes from June 9, 2025 Board meeting (requires a vote to approve) -Kathy Wilke
- Report of the Minister - Rev Kim Mason
- Report of the Administration - Lynn Hunt
- Report from the President - Kathy Wilke
- Church Council Notes - Cathy Rauch
- Religious Education Report - Michele Grove
- Statement of Financial Position, July 1, 2025 - Margaret Weck, Treasurer
- 2024-2025 Budget, not final - Margaret Weck, Treasurer

Motion to approve the June 9 Board minutes. Betty moved. Chris seconded. Motion passed.

Lynn clarified that we currently have 196 members. She inadvertently omitted the number from her written report.

Treasurer Margaret noted that the 2024-2025 Budget she provided this month is incomplete. The end-of-year financial books are still being updated as income and expenses come in. She should have the final numbers for the next board meeting.

Updates:

Rev. Kim explained that we have received the tornado recovery money from the UUA. Lynn provided an update on the tornado repair work.

We will have a Policy Board and Council Social on Friday, August 15, at Kathy Wilke's home. The event begins around 5:00 p.m. Please bring an appetizer, and Kathy will provide beverages. Plus-ones are invited.

Saturday, August 16, is an all-day Board and Council Retreat at the church. The agenda includes team-building exercises and a review of church governance, including the roles of the Board and Council.

Kathy will provide more details about both events via email.

New Business

- Request for endorsement for Rev. Kim's application to a DM program**

Rev. Kim is applying to a non-resident Doctor of Ministry program offered by Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, which emphasizes creative writing and public theology. She plans to start the 3-year program in June 2026. The program aims for graduates to complete a project that serves as a book proposal. As part of her application, Rev. Kim needs an endorsement from the Policy Board confirming we support this use of her time.

The time commitment involves one week of onsite classes in January and June, with the rest being remote. The program requires three hours per week of class and a daily writing practice. Rev. Kim notes that the daily writing practice has helped others become more efficient sermon writers. Rev. Kim expects that this degree program will make her a better sermonizer.

Motion to give Rev. Kim a Board endorsement for her application to Pittsburgh Theological Seminary for a non-resident Doctor of Ministry program. Betty moved. Motion passes.

- Request for endorsement of Johari Hunt's**

Johari Hunt has been a member of the First U congregation for about two years and is actively involved with the Social Justice Committee. We don't see him regularly on Sundays anymore because he has taken a position as DRE at First Congregationalist UCC in Webster Groves.

Johari has been accepted into Starr King School for the Ministry at Berkeley. Rev. Kim has mentored Johari for a year, meeting with him once a month as he explored the possibility of entering the ministry. Johari's goal is to become a chaplain rather than a parish minister.

Johari is applying to the UU Ministers Association (UUMA) and the UUA as an aspirant seeking to become a UU minister, and he needs a UU congregation to sponsor him. Sponsorship is not a financial commitment, but an endorsement that the congregation knows Johari and supports his efforts to become a UU minister. Board members and Rev. Kim shared their experiences being in

community with Johari and their support for his decision to pursue becoming a UU minister.

Motion to sponsor Johari Hunt as an aspirant seeking to become a UU minister. Moved by Margaret. Seconded by Betty. Motion passes.

- **Recent IRS rulings on not-for-profit status for houses of worship – Rev. Kim**

In a July court filing, the IRS broke from decades of tradition by stating that it will allow religious congregations to endorse candidates for political office without losing their tax-exempt status. The statement was made in a court document aimed at resolving a lawsuit that challenged the IRS's long-standing rule. However, the prohibition on political endorsements remains part of the federal tax code and its implementing regulations.

The Church's current policy is that we may endorse initiatives, petitions, and positions, but we do not formally endorse individual candidates for office. It is likely that, with this change in the IRS policy, we will be approached during the next round of political campaigns with requests to endorse specific candidates.

We discussed that the separation of church and state is a foundational value of UUism. Members expressed discomfort with the idea of the Church telling members whom they should vote for. We can continue to endorse positions and initiatives. We can also continue voter registration, although some details about how and where voter registration can be done have changed. But it is the sense of the Board that we do not want the congregation to endorse individual candidates.

President Kathy will ask the Council to review the existing policy and update, if needed. Chris volunteered to serve on the committee.

- **Short-term goals**

Short-term goals are objectives we can accomplish within 1-3 years. During the Board and Council Retreat, we will identify 1-3 short-term goals for the Board to focus on over the next year. Establishing these goals helps the Board stay focused throughout the year. Rev. Kim asked board members to consider their priorities for short-term goals and to bring their ideas to the retreat.

Rev. Kim also noted that strategic plans are goals that can be achieved in 3-5 years. The last time First U conducted strategic planning was in 2016, and we are overdue for an update. Rev. Kim suggested that one short-term goal for the Board is to do strategic planning this year. The Board creates the strategic plan, with involvement and input from the congregation. The Council and committees decide how to implement the strategic plan.

Kim will send the board and council homework about strategic planning to read before the board retreat.

Old business

- Don't forget to sign up to be a Sunday morning greeter.

- We still need to fill two Board committee liaison positions for Ministry and Nominations. Please contact President Kathy if you're interested in either role.

Wrap up

Here's what we need to do before the next meeting.

- Make and bring an appetizer to the Board and Council Social on Friday, August 15.
- Treasurer Margaret will provide a summary description of each endowment account before the retreat.
- We need volunteers to serve as Board liaisons for the committees on Ministry and Nominations.
- We need a volunteer to join the committee for reviewing and potentially revising the policy on political endorsements. Chris volunteered.

Observations from Process Observer

Chris said, "We are ahead of schedule. We had a good conversation. Everyone respected each other. We had great comments, and people shared their opinions."

In closing, Chris asked whether we had an update from the Facilities Committee regarding the process of obtaining a quote for anticipated building repairs and upkeep. Facilities have been too busy with tornado recovery to do much else, so there is no update.

Kim read us closing words about how to set healthy goals.

The meeting adjourned at 7:38 p.m.

The next Board meeting is September 8, 2025, from 6:30 to 8:00 p.m. on Zoom.