

First Unitarian Church of St. Louis
Policy Board Meeting Minutes
10 January 2022 via Zoom

Meeting was called to order by President Gene Rubin at 6:35 pm.

Others in attendance: Steve Wilke, Vice President; Alison Lamothe, Secretary; Kathy Wilke, Treasurer; Sarah Francois, Trustee; Susan Lammert, Trustee; Joel Hickman, Trustee; Mitch Herzog, Trustee; Jason McClure, Trustee

Staff: Rev. Kim Mason

Church Council: Cathy Rauch

Chalice Lighting: Gene Rubin

Opening Words: Jason McClure, “January” by John Updike

Reading of Board Covenant: Susan Lammert

Process Observer: Steve Wilke

Consent Agenda. Documents submitted to Board to review prior to meeting.

- a. Minutes of Previous Meeting: 12-13-2021
- b. Report of the Minister – Rev. Kim Mason
- c. Report of the Administrator – Lynn Hunt
- d. Report of the Board President – Gene Rubin
- e. Report of the Council Chair – Cathy Rauch
- f. Report of the Acting Religious Education Coordinator – Andrea Berin
- g. Report of board email votes (*the Secretary submitted a report of Tuesday 01/04/2022 prior to the meeting*)

Committee Reports.

Steve Wilke could not attend the Committee on Ministry’s meeting because he is participating in the Rev. Kim’s annual evaluation.

Sarah Francois reported that Danielle Kozemczak has been hired as our Director of Religious Education and Church Communications.

Kathy Wilke reported on the Nominations and Leadership Development Committee’s plans for our **Midwinter Meeting**, which will be held on **Sunday, January 30 at 11:30 am via Zoom**. Some of the Committee’s goals are 1) to help church members identify who to contact when they have a problem or concern; 2) identify different people who have skills that could serve the church and encourage them to apply them; and 3) developing fun activities to keep the tone of the meeting upbeat. The Committee remains particularly concerned with filling positions in the Stewardship Cluster, wants to clearly define the responsibilities involved and to convince church members that they CAN fulfill these important roles.

Midwinter Meeting.

As noted above, the NLDC has primary responsibility for the content of the Meeting. The Rev. Kim will open the meeting and then Gene will speak briefly about relevant topics such as the ongoing pandemic. He asked that Board members promote the meeting, particularly with new and/or younger members. He emphasized the importance of reaching out to families enrolled in Religious Education.

Covid Update.

Gene reviewed our process for taking votes between meetings regarding Covid and its impact on church services. On two occasions since the previous Board meeting, the Covid Task Force made recommendations to the Board, Gene forwarded these recommendations to the Board via email, and Board members voted to implement their recommendations with some modifications. Board members agreed that the process was working satisfactorily.

On a hopeful note, Gene noted that the rate of increasing infections is starting to decrease and may peak soon.

Update on Rev Kim's Evaluation

Steve reported that the Board subcommittee will be meeting on Monday, January 17 2022, and that its members should have their written reports completed by then. The other members of this committee are Sarah, Alison Lamothe and Jason McClure.

Financial Update

Kathy reported that in spite of the pandemic, the church's financial situation is okay. People have been honoring their pledge commitments. Of greater concern is the need to develop a capital improvement fund to maintain and repair our aging church. Currently, an ongoing plumbing issue has resulted in water being cut off from the RE wing of the building and will likely cost a great deal of money to resolve. The Board reviewed previous campaigns to build the Hope Chapel and replace our stained glass window and wonders if we need to try something like this again.

Board's Decision of Who Speaks for the Church

To lead into the following topic of discussion, Gene reviewed the following approved motion from our November 2021 meeting:

“issues that may be viewed as representative of the church should be: 1) screened by our minister, who will then decide whether to (a) subject it to a vote by the congregation; or (b) to pass it on the Executive Committee, who will then advise where it goes from there.”

Discussion on Role of Social Activism in the Church

In one of his “Rubin's Ramblings” Gene asked, “Should we move more deliberately towards demonstrating our values? Should we be more advocacy-oriented?” He asked Board members to reflect on whether we should become a more activist-oriented church and to review the survey results from a few years ago regarding the congregation's priorities. He included the following definition of *activist* from the Merriam-Webster dictionary: “using or supporting strong actions in support of or opposition to one side of a controversial issue”.

Susan Lammert stated that if we believe in our Seven Principles, we should live up to them. The Unitarian church on a national level is way ahead of us regarding activism. She believes we do need to more actively demonstrate our beliefs.

Kathy sees the role of our church as helping individual members identify their priorities and figure out how they can best make a direct impact. Members may very well have shared goals but disagree with how to achieve these goals.

Gene asked if we should live out our principles as a church, or as individuals? Should we choose as a group to focus on some priorities, or focus on empowering individuals to live up to our principles?

Cathy Rauch said she has been thinking about this topic since she joined the Church in 1982. She thinks our Church speaks loudly through its silence and that this silence perpetuates injustice. She has

admired the public role of the Rabbi Susan Talve of the Central Reform Congregation as a voice for progressive values and a person of faith.

Joel Hickman cited an article from *UUWorld's* Fall 2021 issue, "Making a New Home" (pp. 36-37) that was part of a cluster of articles grouped under the heading "In the Public Square." It describes how the Countryside Church Unitarian Universalist in Palatine, Illinois decided as a community to turn a rental property into a safe haven for asylum seekers. He suggested we determine our priorities via a congregational survey.

He referred to the nearby example of Ferguson and the social unrest unleashed in 2014 after Michael Brown was shot and killed. Eventually this resulted in some important structural changes regarding the impossible financial burdens faced by poor defendants for whom incarceration was like a debtor's prison, and municipalities whose police targeted poor people like a collection agency to pad their coffers.

The Rev. Kim said that she prefers to put her faith into action, but as a part of a larger whole: "when you work together you have shared power." It is a stronger message to say that WE as a church or as Unitarian Universalists support a cause. However, she is aware that historically our church has taken a different approach and wants to respect that history.

Steve recalled how, in the wake of the 2017 protests after the Jason Stockley verdict, our minister opened our church to protesters fleeing tear gas and refused to let the police enter our building. In his view, this was a proud moment for our church. Overall, though, Steve prefers actions that help people directly and wonders if public demonstrations serve more to help participants feel better about themselves than to address their underlying causes. As a church, we may share priorities but individually choose different ways of supporting those causes.

Jason stressed that public demonstrations and direct actions do not need to be mutually exclusive; we can do both. However, in the former instance, if we do so as a church we should perhaps have a broader consensus among our members.

Sarah wondered if we might be overly concerned with establishing a broad consensus. We may be missing opportunities to increase our membership through advertising our values more publicly, although she prefers direct action over public demonstrations.

Alison was in general agreement with Cathy. She believes that public demonstrations can send an important message and can and do lead to lasting changes. She, too, has been impressed by the Rabbi Talve's willingness to be a public progressive voice. She would like to see our church be a visible proponent of structural change.

Mitch Herzog believes that the Rev. Kim should not be restrained from assuming a more public role. We hired her to represent the church and should support her when she does so. He doesn't think we will achieve, nor should we have to seek, consensus when Rev. Kim wants to address social justice. He supports public action even if he cannot always participate in it.

Lynn Hunt also proposes a both/and approach to collective and individual action. She agrees that the Rev. Kim should exercise freedom of the pulpit both within and outside of our church building. She reminded us that Rabbi Talve and ministers like Traci Blackmon surely get some pushback within their places of worship for their public statements but choose to speak freely nevertheless. She ended with a quote from Frederick Douglass: "Power concedes nothing without demand. It never did and it never will."

Gene was generally in agreement with Joel and wondered how we can go about deciding upon which action(s) to take. He also asked how we might go about rallying behind Rev. Kim when she takes the lead on an issue.

After all members present weighed in on the issue of the role of activism in our church, we had an open discussion. In a past Midwinter Meeting, Charlie Kindleberger set up a process whereby members identified homelessness and racial justice as congregational priorities. Kathy highlighted our association with the Trinity Food Pantry and reminded us that we are a small congregation and can join with other congregations to help realize our social justice goals. Susan noted that we can work with Metropolitan Congregations United on any number of issues; some of our members are already involved with them. She also stressed that if we really want to help people we have to listen to them and let them guide us regarding what we can do for them. Alison noted the challenges of our geographical dispersion and the reality that we live in a variety of communities with different needs. Rev. Kim reminded us that addressing social justice has different layers, and includes education as exemplified by our ARREST programs. Gene concluded our discussion with a reminder that in the end it is important to establish a sense of direction so that we can move beyond words and put our principles into real action. Some of us agreed that prior to the next meeting we would read the article to which Joel referred: "Making a New Home" from *UUWorld's* Fall 2021 issue (pp. 36-37).

Checking in with process observer: Steve enthusiastically commended our behavior towards one another.

Meeting adjourned at 8:07 pm.

The next Policy Board meeting will be held Monday, February 14, 2022, at 6:30 pm via Zoom.

Respectfully submitted,

Alison Lamothe