

First Unitarian Church of St. Louis
Policy Board Meeting Minutes
14 March 2022 via Zoom

Meeting was called to order by President Gene Rubin at 6:34 pm.

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

Absent: Mitch Herzog, Trustee

Staff: Rev. Kim Mason, Lynn Hunt

Church Council: Cathy Rauch

Guests: Margaret Weck, Marguerite Bogle

Chalice Lighting: Gene Rubin

Opening Words: Gene Rubin, "A Minute," poem by Patricia A. Gordon

Reading of Board Covenant: Alison Lamothe

Process Observer: Jason McClure

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

- a. Minutes of Previous Meeting: 2-14-2022
- 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 Religious Education Coordinator – Danielle Kozemczak
- g. Report of board email votes

Committee Reports

Personnel Committee: Lynn has returned from medical leave and is now working part time.

Nominations and Leadership Development Committee: The Committee is getting closer to completing the slate of candidates for the next fiscal year.

Committee on Ministry: Susan Lammert is now serving as Board liaison.

Updates:

1) Canvass. The canvass kicked off on 03/07/2022 and one week later, we are more than halfway toward our goal. According to Kathy Wilke, the average and median donations are up over last year. Rev. Kim would like to encourage those who have made no commitments to make a commitment. The Committee will be meeting to strategize later this week. Board members were encouraged to pledge prior to the kickoff to help the campaign start on a positive note and were reminded to make a commitment if they hadn't already.

2) Treasurer's update. Kathy reported on the status of our live-streaming project and the arrival of new furniture for Fellowship Hall.

3) Annual meeting. The Annual Meeting will take place 05/15/2022. Lynn has sent a notice of the deadline for reports to those responsible for submitting one prior to the meeting. We anticipate using a hybrid format. At a minimum, we will be voting on the slate of candidates proposed by the Nominations and Leadership Development Committee and will need a quorum present. We will have to figure out how people who attend virtually can vote along with those who attend in person.

Awards Committee. Sarah Francois and Mitch Herzog have agreed to serve on a committee to select recipients for the William Ross and Fathman Awards from among our church members.

Covid Policy and Task Force recommendations. On March 01, 2022, the Board held a special vote and approved the Task Force recommendation that we maintain the vaccination requirement and masking in the sanctuary, but remove the numerical limit (i.e. the social distancing requirement) in the sanctuary. In the course of that vote, Board members made a number of suggestions that were considered by the Task Force in its meeting on 03/11/2022. The Task Force made the following recommendations:

- 1) That we maintain a vaccination requirement for all those eligible for vaccination, but accept people's word regarding being vaccinated. If covid data continues to improve, it is hoped that, in the near future, all will be welcomed independent of vaccination status.
- 2) That we maintain a mask requirement, but allow SINGING by masked congregants.
- 3) That we approve Joel's request to allow up to 8 choir members to sing unmasked from the chancel provided they are 3 feet apart from each other.
- 4) That we welcome children less than 5 years old into the sanctuary and classes with appropriate adult supervision.

Recommendation starting April 1st, the day of the unfish fry:

- 5) Assuming improvement continues, that we allow eating in church as of April 1st.

In addition to these recommendations, Susan Lammert suggested we add a 6th: that we resume passing the collection baskets during the offertory, since we have known for some time that Covid is not transmitted by touching surfaces.

Gene motioned that we approve these six recommendations; Steve Wilke seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.



Church project and social justice; Guest: Margaret Weck

We resumed a conversation about whether and how to move forward as a church in becoming more active regarding social justice issues. Although members are free to support causes individually, it speaks louder if we do so collectively. In a previous meeting, we had discussed the possibility of the Outreach and Social Action Cluster generating a survey to determine causes or projects members would like to support. Since then, Cathy Rauch and Lisa Ross, among others in the cluster, think that further education and discussion prior to such a survey might be in order. Gene appointed Joel Hickman to work with Lisa Ross on congregational social action.

Towards Justice asked Margaret Weck to address the Board regarding our by-laws and if they might limit our actions, specifically Article I section 6 and Article XII section 2, which are as follows (highlights are Margaret's):

“ARTICLE I NAME, MISSION, PURPOSE, AND AFFILIATION SECTION 6: Affiliation. The Church is in general sympathy with the purposes and principles of the Unitarian Universalist Association (“UUA”). The Church may be a member of UUA, its subsidiary bodies, or any other association or affiliation by action of the Congregation.”

“Article XII Miscellaneous Provision SECTION 2: Restrictions on Lobbying and Campaign Activities. No substantial part of the activities of the Church shall be the carrying on of propaganda, or otherwise attempting to influence legislation, and the Church shall not participate in or intervene in (including the publishing or distribution of statements), any political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for public office, in accordance with applicable provisions of the Code.”

A robust discussion ensued regarding our status as a 501(c)(3) organization and whether clarifying or leaving the current by-law language as it would best protect our tax-exempt status. We also discussed our affiliation with Metropolitan Congregations United, an organization that actively seeks to influence legislation to enhance social justice; we are listed as a donor but have not paid membership.

Rev. Kim provided a link to a UUA resource that addresses the issue of advocacy and tax-exempt status entitled “The Real Rules: Congregations and the IRS Guidelines On Advocacy, Lobbying, and Elections “ (https://www.uua.org/files/pdf/t/the_real_rules_2016.pdf). The article states in the introduction that “too many people are under the false impression that religious organizations cannot have a voice in the public policy arena as a result of the Constitutional separation of church and state or Internal Revenue Service (IRS) regulations. In reality, there are many activities that any religious group can do without jeopardizing its nonprofit tax-exempt status. There are restrictions on certain kinds of political actions, but the range of what is acceptable is wide enough to exhaust the time and resources of any congregation without crossing any regulatory lines.”¹

Sarah Francois noted that it is important to determine first what is the will of our congregation and what are we really interested in doing. From there, we can address what we can and cannot do from a legal perspective.

At 8:05 pm, our guests left so that the Board could enter an executive session to discuss a personnel matter.

Checking in with process observer: Jason said our conduct was excellent.

Meeting adjourned at 8:20 pm.

The next Policy Board meeting will be held Monday, April 11, 2022, at 6:30 pm via Zoom.

Respectfully submitted,

Alison Lamothe

¹ The lawyers on the Board also noted this document includes the following disclaimer: “This resource is not intended to be formal legal advice; nor should it be used in place of legal counsel. It is intended to clarify Internal Revenue Service guidelines as they relate to religious organizations in the hope that more congregations will (1) choose to become involved in working for justice; and (2) know when it is important to seek legal advice.”