

First Unitarian Church of St. Louis
Policy Board Meeting Minutes
8 May 2023 Virtual

Meeting was called to order by President Steve Wilke at 6:33 pm.

Others in attendance: Erin Milligan, Vice President; Alison Lamothe, Secretary; Jeremy Colton, Treasurer; Joel Hickman, Trustee; Susan Lammert, Trustee

Absent: Rebecca (Becca) McBride, Trustee Trustee; Norma Vogelweid, Trustee

Staff: Rev. Kim Mason, Lynn Hunt

Church Council: Cathy Rauch

Guest Speakers: Lisa Ross, Kathy Wire

Chalice Lighting: Rev. Kim Mason

Opening Words: Alison Lamothe

Reading of Board Covenant: Steve Wilke

Process Observer: Joel Hickman

Active Hope Project Update- Lisa Ross

Lisa submitted this written report prior to our meeting and went over it with us:

Charge from the Board: To take the pulse of the congregation re the “advancing social justice” part of our mission, including thoughts and feelings about congregational (vs. individual) social action, and which areas of interest are most compelling.

Task Force participants: Lisa Ross, Cathy Rauch, Susan Lammert, Sherry Bassi, Dean Burns, Joel Hickman, Margaret Weck, Norma Vogelweid, Erin Milligan, (Kathy Wire, Jeremy Colton)

Opportunities for input:

- 3 in-person listening circles in December and January, attended by ~ 20 people.
- A Zoom listening circle on 2/9/23, with 7 attendees.
- Email and/or phone invitations to have a conversation with one of us were extended to everyone in the 2022 directory, as well as RE families and a meeting with the Young Adult group.
- After training from an MCU organizer, we completed at least 38 one-to-one conversations, and have a handful more scheduled. I will also reach out to all the new members, since they were not in the directory.
- A survey was emailed to everyone in late February; we have received 5 responses.

What we have learned

Caveats - This was not a scientific survey!

- It is unlikely we reached a representative sample of the congregation, since I suspect those more in favor of social justice action were most likely to respond.
- There was variability in how the interviewers conducted their conversations, and how the information was recorded. For example, not everyone I spoke to specifically stated or ranked their areas and/or level of interest; some of it was inferred from what they said. In addition, some people reported the #1 area of interest, others recorded all areas of interest. Also, the questions for the listening circles were different from the more open-ended structure and reporting of the one-on-one conversations.
- There were some congregants who utilized more than one type of input, for example attending a listening circle *and* having a one-on-one conversation, so their input is duplicated (it was not possible to sort them out).

- Strong support for congregational social action does not necessarily translate into participation. In other words, some people feel that congregational social action is very important but are not necessarily as interested in actively participating.

“Data” (combining one on one reports, listening circles, and survey):

- **Importance of congregational social action** (this question was not part of one-on-one reporting, so only reflects the listening circles and survey; 22 participants)
 - 73% extremely important, 18% very important, 4.5 % somewhat important, 4.5% not very important
- **Interest in congregational social action** (52 participants; one of the listening circles did not get to this question)
 - 52% extremely interested, 13% very interested, 29% somewhat interested, 6% not very interested.
- **Topics of interest:** Racism 42.4%, Housing 36.4%, Economic Justice 36.4% (data from one-one ones only; was not covered in listening circles, only few responses in survey/Zoom circle). Several people felt strongly that racism is at the center of everything, but most felt that all areas are intersectional and the particular topic was less important than the process and projects.

Take-aways:

- **A large majority of respondents believe that advancing social justice is an important role of the church, based on our mission statement and our UU principles.**
 - There is a role for both individual and congregational action in responding to injustice.
 - Many expressed a desire for action, rather than just talk.
 - There are also some who feel the primary role of the church should be to raise awareness and act as a clearing house for opportunities.
 - There is a role for both working toward systemic change *and* addressing more immediate/concrete needs. Some people are drawn more to one than the other.
 - Many expressed a desire for developing relationships with those we might serve.
 - We should focus on issues of importance to people in our neighborhood; we made a commitment to the city of St. Louis when we decided to stay here.
 - We need to find opportunities for youth and families to participate; social justice action should be part of RE as well.
 - There should be options for individual as well as group activities, and one-time as well as ongoing commitments. We may get more participation if there is a social aspect.
 - There were a few who were afraid that social action could turn more political and divide the congregation.
 - We should be intentional about interweaving all 3 elements of our mission: nurturing spirituality, building community, and advancing justice.
- **First U can contribute in many ways:**
 - Raising awareness
 - Education on injustices and ways we can work to combat them.
 - Awareness of what members are doing and which organizations they are working with (e.g. webpage, newsletter or postings in Fellowship Hall).
 - Opportunities for involvement, both congregational and community.
 - Providing resources (meeting space, communications, financial, etc).
 - Partnering with other religious institutions and/or community organizations.
 - Developing activities of our own.
 - Advocating on an institutional level.
- **We will need leadership from the top to create a cohesive and effective program.**

Suggested next steps:

- Social Justice strategic planning summit in the early Fall; could be organized by Outreach and Social Action cluster but should be seen as a *church* activity and be open to all.
- Clarify roles of Minister, Policy Board and Program Council in moving forward.
- Share some version of this report with the congregation with an opportunity for them to respond.

The Board thanked Lisa and task force participants for their efforts. Cathy Rauch noted the lack of vocal opposition throughout this process.

Announcement:

There will be a brief board meeting Sunday May 21, 2023 immediately after annual meeting to say good-bye to outgoing Board members and welcome new ones.

Consent Agenda – documents submitted and read in advance of meeting

- a. Minutes of Previous Meeting: 4-10-23
- b. Minutes of Special Congregational Meeting: 4-23-2023
- c. Report of the Minister – Rev. Kim Mason
- d. Report of the Administrator – Lynn Hunt
- e. Report of the Board President – Steve Wilke
- f. Report of the Council Chair – Cathy Rauch
- g. Draft budget worksheet – Kathy Wire

Alison motioned that these documents be approved as submitted, Erin seconded. MOTION PASSED.

Discussion- Church Budget- Kathy Wire

Kathy shared a draft budget worksheet with us prior to our meeting. She reported that there are \$500-\$1,000 worth of details that need to be worked out. The budget is basically the same as last year. It includes a 2% raise for staff. Kathy thinks it would be a good idea to schedule an informational session prior to the Annual Meeting.

Discussion- Intern

Now that Rev. Kim Mason has successfully passed her probationary period as a new minister and has achieved full fellowship, we can call an intern!

We have enough money in the Lewis Intern Fund to fund a 2-year, part-time internship. We will need to form an intern search committee; Cathy has served on one before and characterized it as a good experience. Ideally, this committee would include up to seven men and women, a few long-term members, a few newer members, and a few young people. The Board can announce that we are accepting nominations for this committee.

Regarding the search for interns, we might be a bit late beginning this process, but there are probably still candidates looking for placement.

Susan Lammert motioned that we invite an intern from Meadville Lombard Theological School, Erin seconded. The vote was as follows: AYES: Steve Wilke, Erin Milligan, Alison Lamothe, Jeremy Colton, Joel Hickman, Susan Lammert. NAYS: None. **MOTION CARRIED.**

Discussion- Moe and Tick tock?

Our AV technician, Michael "Moe" Hurst, has submitted a proposal to increase his hours in order to create a Tik Tok channel and a podcast for our church to help with congregational outreach and increase our appeal to younger members. Although the amount he has requested is not included in our current budget, Rev. Kim thinks she can find congregational members who will be willing to support this. Jeremy thinks our church could make better use of social media; Moe's proposal would be a step in this direction.

Discussion- Fellowship Dinner- Our Boardly duties

Steve reminded those Board members who are attending Fellowship Dinner on Saturday May 13 to bring an alcoholic beverage or soft drink to share.

Vote- Awards

Steve motioned that we accept Erin's nominees for the Fathman and Ross Awards and that their identities remain confidential until she bestows these awards at the Annual Meeting. Susan seconded. AYES: Steve Wilke, Erin

Milligan, Alison Lamothe, Jeremy Colton, Joel Hickman, Susan Lammert. NAYS: None. **MOTION CARRIED.**

Discussion: Annual Meeting

Lynn emailed Board members the draft agenda for the Annual Meeting at 8:08 pm during the Policy Board meeting. We have been asked to let her know if we have any questions and if it looks okay. Steve wants us to check what our roles are during the meeting.

Discussion: Review of our experiences as board members

As part of this exercise, Rev. Kim shared a list we had generated during our retreat last August. Specifically, we identified practices adopted during the pandemic that we wanted to keep and those that we wanted to change. We wanted to and have kept digital giving via Text-to-give; Alison reported that she has had trouble updating her card information and so has not been able to take advantage of this program for a long time. We probably need to help people who are experiencing similar problems. We haven't accomplished a few goals like setting aside a Sunday a month with no scheduled meetings and consolidating committees. Jeremy thinks nametags are still a source of confusion. Happily, we have been able to move beyond all of our Covid protocols and keep our church doors open! We also have discerned a list of values that we are going to present at the Annual Meeting.

Alison commented that she has found incorporating leadership training into our regularly scheduled meetings to be helpful. As much as Rev. Kim hoped that expanding the role of the Nominations and Leadership Development Committee would help build a pool of potential leaders, it hasn't turned out that way. On the job leadership training, on the other hand, has given us the opportunity to apply what we have learned to real-life issues that we are addressing on the Policy Board.

Rev. Kim asked Cathy if we should expand this training to the Church Council. As far as the Board is concerned, there was general agreement that some repetition of topics would be alright with those who are continuing on the Board; there will be new issues to which to apply them, after all.

Process Observer check-in: We went overtime.

Meeting adjourned at 8:17 pm.

The next Policy Board meeting will be held after the Annual Meeting on May 21, which begins at 11:30 am on Sunday, May 21 in the Sanctuary. This is traditionally a very short meeting!

Respectfully submitted,

Alison Lamothe