

First Unitarian Church of St. Louis
Policy Board Meeting Minutes
17 November 2022 via Zoom

Meeting was called to order by President Steve Wilke at 6:34 pm.

Others in attendance: Erin Milligan, Vice President; Alison Lamothe, Secretary; Jeremy Colton, Treasurer; Susan Lammert, Trustee; Rebecca (Becca) McBride, Trustee; Norma Vogelweid, Trustee

Absent: Joel Hickman, Trustee

Staff: Rev. Kim Mason, Lynn Hunt, Danielle Kocemczak

Church Council: Cathy Rauch

Chalice Lighting: Steve Wilke

Opening Words: Norma Vogelweid

Reading of Board Covenant: Alison Lamothe

Process Observer: Erin Milligan (Happy birthday to her!)

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

- a. Minutes of Previous Meeting: 10-16-2022
- b. Report of the Minister – Rev. Kim Mason
- c. Report of the Administrator – Lynn Hunt
- d. RE Report- Danielle Kozemczak
- e. Report of the Board President – Steve Wilke

Norma wanted to discuss a topic raised in the Rev. Kim Mason’s report, specifically: “The biggest challenge right now is managing all the expectations for our ‘return to normal.’ This fall the staff have consistently bumped up against challenges of what people expect from before the pandemic and what we have the volunteer capacity to offer in this current moment.” We are facing a volunteer shortage that has impacted our RE program and the church auction, among other programs and activities. The Rev. Kim suggests we ask ourselves, what are our priorities? What are the congregation’s priorities? What adaptations can we make? How can we support staff? In essence, we are in a period of transition. Things aren’t and won’t be the same as they were prior to Covid. The times call for patience, flexibility and experimentation.

Regarding attendance, Rev. Kim stated that a rate of 50% of membership participating in services is considered healthy. We are averaging below that, around 64 attendees out of 212, including online. We don’t know if the folks who are missing are coming back or not. This is happening in churches across the country. Lynn observes that online participation does not promote connection at a community level. People who got out of the habit of attending Sunday services are having a hard time re-establishing that habit. There is more competition from community events. Susan asked what reasons newcomers have given for visiting our church. Rev. Kim answered that they have watched us online, and are looking for in-person connection. Some come but don’t return. Visiting young adults who come have no active young adult group with which to connect.

Active Hope Project Discussion

The Rev. Kim introduced the Active Hope Project in her 10/09/2022 sermon. We have just begun a series of conversations with members of our congregation to discern their ideas and preferences regarding a church-wide initiative to address social justice in our larger community.

Norma shared her reflections on this topic prior to the meeting: “How might the design and execution of the Active Hope Project change by a macroscopic lens which seeks to find the deep connections within First U’s full mission, between nurturing spirituality, and advancing justice?” She had asked us via email to review the project description on our website and wondered if it aligns with how we as Board members view this project (<https://www.firstuustlouis.org/news/2022/11/16/active-hope-project>).

Cathy reminded Board members that the Active Hope task force is composed of different groups within our church and is not committee specific. The Board and Council are not dictating but rather asking what congregants want to do.

Alison noted that the current iteration of the Green Sanctuary program has been updated to be more expansive and includes a social justice component. While we are currently certified as a Green Sanctuary by the UUA, any new initiative could help us achieve reaccreditation under Green Sanctuary 2030.¹ In other words, our new project(s) can be part of an ongoing initiative. We can build upon promises we have already made.

Evaluation Process of Rev. Kim

The Committee on Ministry and the Policy Board are once again tasked with evaluating Rev. Kim. Susan Lammert, Steve Wilke and Alison Lamothe agreed to prepare the Policy Board’s evaluation. The official deadline is 02/01/2023 but should be completed ahead of time so that Kim has the opportunity to review.

Board committees (ie- Ministry, Personnel, Nominations) update

Becca was unable to attend the Nominations and Leadership Committee’s meeting. The Personnel Committee did not meet. Susan offered her summary from the Committee on Ministry’s meeting during our discussion of Rev. Kim’s report because it echoes the theme of adjusting to our post-pandemic reality: “we need to consider/re-consider what we have done in the past with what is possible now with the limitations of volunteer and low numbers of children. Until we know how big our congregation is we may need to manage with smaller groups- it’s called ‘right-sizing.’ How do we bring back activities when we haven’t done them in a while? Yet, people are hungry for the ‘way it used to be.’ It’s an awkward time, no matter what.” Amen to that!

RE Concerns

As outlined in her report, Danielle is worried that our RE program is stagnating. We have a very small number of participating young children. She would like to make space for families with younger children but we have too few volunteers to staff more grades/levels. Although parents of children who participate in RE have traditionally been the backbone of our program, we need more members who do not fit this profile to volunteer to keep the program going and, ideally, growing. Steve asked if the RE Committee was sufficiently supportive. Danielle reported that it consists of only three members. Alison mentioned that from an educator’s perspective, it can be difficult to teach RE classes when attendance is often inconsistent.

Governance Basics- How to be the BEST Board we can be!

The topic of this month’s training was “Finding Your Center: Spiritual Grounding as Leaders.” Regarding the segment entitled “The Dance of Shared Ministry,” Susan said that for her, Zoom

¹ To receive Green Sanctuary 2030 reaccreditation, “congregations must complete projects within three intersectional domains: mitigation, adaptation, resilience and justice. Mitigation refers to projects that reduce the causes of climate change, the adaptation and resilience goal helps congregations create a foundation for long-term climate work, and the justice component asks congregations to collaborate with frontline communities in fighting climate change.” Source: “What is Green Sanctuary 2030?” *UUWorld* Fall/Winter 2022, p. 21.

meetings don't really allow us to "dance." Rev. Kim reminded us that in this "dance," we are sharing leadership with Kim and she, with us. The training included two videos produced by Erik Walker Wikstrom on the topic of "Lay Leadership as Spiritual Practice." Susan said that she has perceived her leadership role as a spiritual practice. Erin said she views her leadership role as a covenantal practice (and yes, this *is a word!*). Jeremy also preferred the word covenantal as opposed to spiritual because of its emphasis on the promises we make to one another.² Alison liked this segment's focus on process as opposed to accomplishments; in other words, how we work together versus what we get done.

Introduction to Values discussion

Rev. Kim briefly returned to a theme we discussed during our August retreat: we have not yet articulated our values as a congregation. She asked how Board members define values. Alison and Steve describe values as what we prioritize. Jeremy defines values as lines in the sand that determine what we will or will not do. Becca sees values as a matter of importance. For Norma, they dictate how we treat people. Erin defines values as that for which we stand. Rev. Kim proposed this definition: values are what we prize or cherish and what we publicly affirm. We were asked to consider prior to our next Board meeting: What are the things that *we* prize and cherish? What do *we* publicly affirm? This topic will also be considered with the larger congregation during our mid-winter meeting.

Check-in with process observer: Erin observed that we did a good job and commended us for not interrupting one another. We also ended on time although we didn't entirely stick to allotted times for discussion.

Meeting adjourned at 8:01 pm.

The next Policy Board meeting will be held Monday, December 12, at 6:30 pm via Zoom.

Respectfully submitted,

Alison Lamothe

² Erin and Jeremy's views are in line with the first segment of the training, "Covenant is Foundational to Unitarian Universalism": "The practice of promising to walk together is the precious core of our creedless faith." [3. Finding Your Center: Spiritual Grounding as Leaders | Congregational Board Member Training | LeaderLab | UUA.org](#)