

**First Unitarian Church of St. Louis
Policy Board Meeting Minutes
13 December 2021 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; Mitch Herzog, Trustee; Jason McClure, Trustee

Staff: Rev. Kim Mason

Church Council: Cathy Rauch

Guest: Jama Dodson, Nominations and Leadership Development Committee

Chalice Lighting: Gene Rubin

Opening Words: Rev. Kim Mason

Reading of Board Covenant: Sarah Francois

Process Observer: Steve Wilke

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

- a. Minutes of Previous Meeting: 11-8-2021
- 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

1. Personnel Policy regarding staff and Covid. Gene motioned that we approve the Personnel Committee Recommendations on COVID-19 policies for church staff, which were submitted to and read by Board members prior to the meeting. Sarah seconded; motion passed.

2. Committee reports:

a) Personnel Committee—Sarah

The Personnel Committee’s main task recently has been to develop the policy regarding staff and Covid. A final decision for the Director of Religious Education is anticipated by Sunday, December 19.

b) Nominations and Leadership Development Committee (NLDC)—Kathy

Kathy deferred to Jama Dodson, who was scheduled to speak for the NLDC later in the meeting.

c) Report on member retention submitted by the Committee on Ministry—Steve

Steve highlighted the following messages from this report:

- 1) “Every church member and friend is in fact a member of the membership committee, whether they intentionally function as such or not.”
- 2) The importance of “[d]ealing with, rather than ignoring or tolerating, conflict when it occurs.”

In addition, it was clear that Gene had read the following recommendation and practiced it during our meeting:

3) “Recognizing and acknowledging member contributions in small ways.”

Steve conceded that it will be much easier to implement the report’s recommendations when we can meet in-person with fewer restrictions. We will discuss the report in greater detail in a future Board meeting.

3. Report on opening up the church for services – Rev. Kim Mason

We have now had four hybrid services, with attendance gradually increasing. RSVPs for attendance have been left open after deadlines for as long as space remained. There is overflow space available in Fellowship Hall.

There are some ongoing sound issues in both the sanctuary and livestreamed services.

We are in a one-month trial period for our new way of approaching Joys and Concerns. Gene noted that the current approach is anonymous by nature and suggested we encourage members to identify themselves when they submit a joy or concern. Some members find the QR code awkward to use. Someone suggested we offer an option to write comments on paper and collect them in a basket.

Another challenge has been managing post-service events in a hybrid format.

At the recommendation of the Covid Task Force, we are not offering food or drink in Fellowship Hall at this time. However, coffee has been served after services outside so that members who wanted to stay and chat could do so over hot coffee. Jason suggested we also offer donuts. Further discussion is required.

Gene congratulated the team in charge of our hybrid services for their efforts and the improvements they continue to make.

4. Discussion regarding Covid and discussion of welcoming families with children

Our conversation took place against a backdrop of rapidly increasing case numbers and hospitalizations. Prior to the Board meeting, Gene shared information about current Covid trends in the Saint Louis area and a CDC report regarding children and transmissibility. Jason shared some New York Times opinion articles regarding the relative vulnerability of unvaccinated children versus vaccinated adults.

Recently, families have been turned away from the sanctuary because they brought children too young to be eligible for vaccination. This has necessitated the development of a clear policy regarding families with young children who want to enter our church. This policy must balance the need to keep our most vulnerable members safe with the need to be welcoming to families whose membership is essential to our future.

This matter generated a good deal of discussion. Jason argued that not to allow very young, unvaccinated children into the sanctuary was a form of discrimination; the Covid Task Force and Executive Committee prefer that only fully vaccinated people be allowed in the sanctuary at this time. However, we can provide an alternative space for those with young children who want to enter our church. We discussed the Dodson Room and Fellowship Hall, deciding that Fellowship Hall offered greater flexibility for families. Gene reminded us that exclusion from the sanctuary does not mean we cannot engage with families in a welcoming way. He had been able to converse amicably with one of the families who were turned away from the sanctuary and chose to watch the service from Fellowship Hall.

Given that the holidays bring visitors, and some will be families with young children, we need to come up with a solution quickly.

5. Jama Dodson representing the Nomination and Leadership Development Committee (NLDC)

Jama requested that Sydney Watson be allowed to join the Committee, since they have lost a member. Gene motioned that we approve this request, Kathy seconded; motion passed.

Jama asked the Board what type of skills are desirable in a Policy Board member. Gene suggested organizational skills; Kathy recommended a good sense of church history and the community; Susan proposed social skills, in particular communication skills and the ability to talk with and listen to church members; Gene added a willingness to be honest, direct and willing to have tough discussions; Alison advised that potential Board nominees be clearly informed of the responsibilities and expectations of their role.

Jama also expressed that the NLDC would like to play a major role in this year's Midyear Meeting. The Board agreed to grant this request.

4. Discussion: Midyear Meeting:

a) mechanics

After considering the logistics of a hybrid meeting, the Board voted to hold the Midyear Meeting via Zoom only. The tentative date is Saturday January 22, sometime in the afternoon. It will be limited to two hours with a break. Steve agreed to find ways to make the meeting entertaining.

b) topics

As mentioned above, the Nomination and Leadership Development Committee (NLDC) will play a major role in this year's Midyear Meeting and would like to focus on leadership development. They want to develop a better understanding of how the church works, especially among newer members.

Process observer check-in: Steve observed that we treated one another well but that the meeting ran well over schedule.

Meeting adjourned at 8:32 pm.

The next Policy Board meeting will be held Monday, January 10, 2022, at 6:30 pm via Zoom.

Respectfully submitted,

Alison Lamothe