

FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH OF ST. LOUIS

Policy Board Meeting Minutes

08 November 2021 via zoom

Meeting was called to order by President Gene Rubin at 6:37 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

Guest: Covid Task Force Chair, Lisa Ross

Chalice Lighting: Gene

Opening Words: Sarah Francois

Reading of Board Covenant: Joel Hickman

Process Observer: Sarah Francois

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

- a. Minutes of Previous Meeting: 10-11-2021
- b. Report of the Minister – Rev. Kim Mason
- c. Report of the Administrator – Lynn Hunt
- d. Report of the Committee on Ministry—Steve Wilke
- e. Report of the Board President – Gene Rubin
- f. Report of the Council Chair – Cathy Rauch
- g. Report of the Acting Religious Education Coordinator—Claire Weichselbaum

Updates

Committee reports

a. Nominations and Leadership Development Committee-Kathy Wilke

The NLDC compiled a list of potential nominees for open positions and has been contacting them. There are a lot of positions to fill. Of particular concern are the Stewardship Cluster Chair and Finance Committee Chair positions.

b. Personnel Committee-Sarah Francois

The Committee is working on a requirement that staff be vaccinated. This is made more complicated by the Parsons administration's Executive Order to prevent such workplace mandates. They are also working on policy regarding pay for people who are on sick leave.

Discussions:

1. Covid Task Force and the Policy Board

The Board engaged in a lengthy discussion about the much-anticipated return to in-person services later this month.

Jason requested a brief history of the Covid Task Force. Early in the pandemic, the Policy Board decided it was necessary to form an advisory group of deliberate thinkers, including healthcare professionals, who would track area statistics, establish guidelines and make recommendations. The Task Force has created a table that has gone through various iterations based on CDC guidelines and other churches' Covid mitigation practices. These recommendations are available to our membership, and weekly updates are published in our E-News.

The Board discussed our members' understanding of our role regarding the Task Force's recommendations. Gene summarized that the Task Force's responsibilities include studying the area's¹ Covid statistics and making recommendations based on medical advice. Our job as the Policy Board is to discuss their recommendations and make decisions based on their recommendations—in short, to devise policy. We agreed that we can modify their recommendations somewhat when we are close to the border between different phases of transmission.

We talked about the need to strike a balance between protecting the community versus individual rights. Interestingly, we viewed the latter not as libertarian resistance to Covid mitigation strategies, but rather the desire of some individuals to be more cautious regarding the return to in-person services. Fortunately, our live-streaming option allows these members to continue to take part in services in a manner that feels safer for them.

Currently, we are planning to return to limited in-person services on November 21, following the Task Force's recommendations for Phase 2, or Substantial Transmission phase. We recognize that as area statistics fluctuate in the weeks ahead, we may need to make decisions regarding Covid policy in between our regularly scheduled monthly meetings, and agreed to confer via email if this becomes necessary.

Members discussed the importance of having policies in place prior to re-opening concerning proof of vaccination status, use of facial coverings, and disruptive behavior regarding our Covid mitigation policies. People should not be allowed to enter the church without face masks and proof of vaccination status. The former aligns with a current city ordinance; we need to figure out ways to streamline the latter so that members and repeat visitors will not have to re-verify their status every time they enter the church. We will need to beef up our number of greeters, and consider having at least one positioned outside to prevent bottlenecks in the foyer. People who desire to enter who cannot verify their vaccination status and/or do not wish to wear a facial covering will be asked to leave. We can still welcome them to join our services remotely and could provide printed information on how to do so. If people become overly disruptive, either staff can try to de-escalate the situation and escort them away from or out of the building, or our Security service can intervene if absolutely necessary.

¹ The Task Force looks at statistics from Saint Louis City and Saint Louis County in Missouri, as well as Madison and Saint Clair counties in Illinois, since our members reside in these areas.

2. Religious Education electronic communications draft policy

The Religious Education Committee has been working on updating their policy regarding electronic communication between adult teachers and mentors and their students and advisees. The Board supports their efforts and the proposed revisions to the RE electronic communications policy.

3. Opening the church this month

As noted earlier, we are planning to return to limited in-person services on November 21. Given the growing pains as we implement live-streaming, Rev. Kim is hoping that the November 14 service will be an opportunity to make sure that everything is working prior to a larger re-opening the following weekend.

Installation of the large television screen in the sanctuary is pending.

If people show up to our in-person services without reservations and we are at capacity² in the Sanctuary, we can offer that they view the service from Fellowship Hall on a television purchased for this purpose, thanks to the generosity of the Women's Alliance.

We will not be hosting Coffee Hour in Fellowship Hall for the time being. Weather conditions as we enter into the colder months will probably also preclude gathering outdoors. We can revisit in-person Coffee Hour after seeing how the return to in-person services goes.

4. Who speaks for the church?

Some members have expressed concern regarding public actions and displays that may be viewed as representative of the Church, for example, the weekly Black Lives Matter witnessing event on Kingshighway and signs hung on our second floor railing and visible to the public supporting Black Lives Matter and Progressive Pride. Specifically, who decides what actions or displays represent the Church?

It is always helpful to have the legal expertise of board members Kathy and Steve Wilke. Kathy argued that the witnessing event is an example of members exercising their right to free speech and is thus protected. Signs and banners hung within our church are a different matter. Gene motioned that 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. Alison seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Process observer check-in: Sarah observed that we went off topic at times but treated each other respectfully, even when we disagreed.

Meeting adjourned at 8:37 pm.

The next Policy Board meeting will be held Monday, December 13, 2021 at 6:30 pm via Zoom.

Respectfully submitted,

Alison Lamothe

² 50 per large room, according to the Covid Task Force's recommendations for Phase 2.