

First Unitarian Church of St. Louis
Policy Board Meeting Minutes
October 9, 2023 Virtual

President Steve Wilke called the meeting to order at xx p.m.

Others in attendance: Jeremy Colton, Treasurer; Sidney Watson, Secretary; Susan Lammert, Trustee; Chris Kocher, Trustee

Absent: Alison Lamothe, Vice President; Rebecca (Becca) McBride, Trustee;

Staff: Rev. Kim Mason, Lynn Hunt

Church Council: Sherry Bassi

Chalice Lighting: Rev. Kim

Opening Words: Rev. Kim

Reading of Board Covenant: Steve Wilke

Process Observer: Jeremy Colton

Special guest Kevin Kellogg- Should the Church endorse the UAW strike?

Kevin requested that the Board approve displaying a small yard sign in the church front window to support the UAW strike in Wentzville, part of a national strike against the Big 3 automakers.

Kevin explained the historical significance of this strike, which will likely set the pace for the American labor movement over the next decade. The union asks the automakers, who reported a 44% increase in corporate profits over the last four years, to share with their workers. During the economic downturns in the 1980s, workers agreed to several wage and benefit concessions to help the companies stay afloat. Now, workers are asking for their fair share during good times. Kevin stressed that this union effort is a democratic and transparent process. It is also an inclusive movement that includes demands to improve wages and working conditions for new and contingent workers.

President Steve opened the floor for questions.

Kevin explained that he had talked with members of the congregation about supporting the strikes. While members had questions, no one had pushed back on support for the strike.

In response to a question about the specific demands and the issues that precipitated the strike, Kevin responded that one issue is a 2-tier system where newer hires get lower wages. During economic hard times, the unions agreed to the 2-tier system to save their jobs. Another is temporary workers; some have been temps for up to three years. The union also wants a 40% wage increase and cost of living adjustment. The union members also gave up their retirement health plan, and they want to be rolled back into the UAW health plan to get better coverage to supplement Medicare.

Kevin also explained how the automakers have already agreed to meet some union demands. Ford has decided to get rid of temporary workers and to eliminate the 2-tier system. GM has agreed that new plants making electric autos will be union, a big deal.

President Steve asked Kevin: How does supporting the UAW support the church's mission? Kevin responded that the only protection workers have comes from coming together and supporting each other. The only real power is within the union. This union has been democratic and inclusive, bringing in workers of all tiers and temporary workers.

Rev. Kim noted that the UUA 2017 [Statement of Conscience on Escalating Economic Inequity](#) supports worker protections, worker rights, and worker organizing efforts. First U social justice efforts have long supported worker rights.

President Steve said that the church has displayed two signs on church grounds since he has been on the church Policy Board: a Black Lives Matter sign and a Pride flag. In 2014, after the killing of Michael Brown, the Board approved displaying a Black Lives Matter sign. The Pride Flags were a gift to the congregation, and the decision to hang them went through the facilities committee because we had already decided to be a welcoming congregation. For this request, President Steve brought the issue to the Policy Board because the church has supported several social justice efforts on behalf of workers. Still, we have not had a request related explicitly to union organizing on behalf of worker protections.

Susan indicated that the Toward Justice Committee would support the sign, given the background laid out by Kevin.

Susan moved to approve Kevin's request, and Chris seconded.

Discussion on the Motion:

During the discussion of the motion, it was clear that the members of the Board supported the motion. Discussion centered around the need for more explicit policies for these requests, but members did not want to delay action because of the lack of specific policy.

Members also felt it was important to share with the congregation Kevin's information about the importance of this strike and how they can support these workers. One member said, "Social justice is not just putting up a sign. We need to be willing to commit to education and action in the community, so it's not a hollow symbol when we put up a sign."

President Steve and Kevin will write something for the newsletter and a fact sheet to share more information about the strike and the labor movement with the congregation.

The motion was approved unanimously.

Who speaks for the church? How do we decide? What do other congregations do?

A request to post a sign in the church window is not the same as a request for the church to publicly endorse the right of workers to form unions or to support the UAW strike. First Unitarian Church does not have a process for taking public positions on issues, and the Board has begun considering what such a process might look like.

In preparation for the board meeting, members received bylaws from two UUA congregations that provide a process for how and when the church speaks out on public issues. The First

Unitarian Church of Providence requires that a draft statement on a public issue first be presented at a special congregational meeting. If a majority of the members present at the special meeting vote to proceed, a mail ballot is sent to all voting members of the congregation. Upon a two-thirds vote of at least one-third of the voting members, there is deemed a consensus of the congregation either for or against the proposition. The church's stand is then published as an official statement to the general public, along with the actual number of votes, pro and con, and the total number of members entitled to vote.

The UU Church of Bloomington-Normal bylaws provide two avenues by which the church can take a position on public issues. General advocacy of principles such as marriage equality, solidarity with immigrant families, opposition to fracking, and similar issues may require a two-thirds vote of the congregation at a congregational meeting. The bylaws also provide a process by which the church's Board can issue a public statement or make an institutional endorsement, including supporting and endorsing legislative bills and ordinances. Requests for Board statements and endorsements must first obtain consensus support from the appropriate committee of the church. Sponsors must address specific questions about how the issues relate to UU Principles. and sponsors must address specific

Board members agreed there is a need for a process for First U to take a position on public issues. The sample bylaws offered different approaches. The UUA's Social Justice Empowerment Program Handbook, recommended by Lisa Ross at the Congregational Outreach and Community Engagement Summit, also has helpful information.

The Board charged President Steve and Sidney with meeting to identify members who might work with them on a committee to provide study materials and draft processes for the Board to consider.

Consent Agenda

- Minutes of Previous Meeting
- Report of the Minister - Kim Mason
- Report of the Administration - Lynn Hunt
- Report of the Board President – Steve Wilke

Jeremy moved to approve the minutes and Susan seconded. **Motion passed.**

Trunk or Treat?

The first all-UU Trunk or Treat is Saturday, October 21, in our church parking lot. Rather than have kids go house-to-house, which can raise safety concerns, many communities have moved to trunk and treating. People decorate the cars, bring them to a designated parking area, and children go from car to car in a traffic-free area. As Rev. Kim pointed out, it's also a quick way to fill up a bowl of candy.

All the area UUs will participate in the event hosted in our parking lot. The Eliot Chapel Board plans to have a decorated car. President Steve asked if we were crafty enough for a First U Board trunk or treat.

Board members expressed plenty of enthusiasm about decorating Sidney's truck, named Truckie. Sherry volunteered to make a scarecrow. Steve will buy candy. Board members are to donate money to Steve to cover the costs.

Community Outreach and Engagement Summit Revisited- What do we do now?

Board Members commented on the impressive attendance and discussion during the Community Outreach and Engagement Summit. In particular, members found the visual history of the church's involvement with social justice helped put the Summit into context. It showed that social action is something that is part of the mission of this church.

Rev. Kim and Lisa Ross will be meeting to collate the data gathered from the lists of church assets. They now know that there are two threads of interest: First, many people have expressed an interest in housing and homelessness. Second, the history of the church exercise uncovered the congregation's long history of advocating on behalf of education. Collating this information may help point to an area where we have expertise that would point us in a particular direction.

Rev. Kim also noted that the Active Hope Project wants to gather information from those who could not attend the Summit.

Article II Revision- Orientation to Article II

Rev. Kim continued to educate board members about the proposed revision of Article II of the UUA bylaws. This month's discussion focused on a close reading of the text comparing existing Article II and the proposed revision,

<https://www.uua.org/files/2023-02/article-II-study-report-2021-23.pdf>

Article II presently consists of four parts: principles, purposes, inclusion, and freedom of belief. Under the proposed revision, the purposes section remains with a few language changes and a new ending that says the purpose of the UUA is to transform the world through "liberating love." The proposed revision replaces the present statement of principles with a statement of values and covenant that also stresses the central role of love. The last two sections on inclusion and freedom of belief remain similar to the present version.

The Board broke into groups of two to discuss the proposed replacement of the present principles with a statement and graphic image of values and covenant that place love at the center. Upon reconvening, Rev. Kim reminded us these are bylaws for the UUA. The principles were never an individual covenant that people had to agree with to become members of congregations, but principles to guide the UUA and congregations that wanted to join the UUA. The proposed values and covenant are also a statement for the UUA and congregations, not a personal statement that individuals must adopt.

Board members commented that the revisions feel familiar, like a rewording of what we have been doing. Rev. Kim noted that the revision committee wanted to use more poetic language. The prior language was a bit esoteric, and the revisers hoped to make Article II more accessible.

We will talk about the proposed revisions at the Mid-Winter Meeting. Rev. Kim will preach about the revisions at least once monthly, focusing on each value.

New Business. None

Wrap-up: What do we need to do before the next board meeting?

- UAW Sign – Steve will work with Kevin to write a newsletter article and fact sheet
- Who Speaks for the Church? Sidney and Steve will confer about who to invite to be on a committee to create study materials and draft recommendations for the Board to consider
- Trunk or Treat on Saturday, October 21, 4:30-6:00
 - Please get cash donations to Steve for treats and decorations
 - Steve will take the lead on decorations and day-of events. Chris will help if he can. Sidney will get her truck, Truckie, to Steve the day before.
 - Sherry will make a scarecrow
 - We could use more help with decorations and handing out treats
- At the next meeting, Opening Words by Alison and Reading of Board Covenant by Chris

Process Observer check-in: Jeremy proclaimed we “did really, really well.” We kept to the allotted times for agenda items. “Good Job, everyone.”

The meeting adjourned at 8:07 p.m.

The next Policy Board meeting is scheduled for Monday, November 13, at 6:30 p.m. on Zoom, but Rev. Kim is out of town. We will try to move the November meeting to Sunday, November 19, or Sunday, November 12. President Steve (or someone) will send a Doodle Poll to determine the best time.

Respectfully submitted,
Sidney Watson, Secretary