

MINUTES
Board of Trustees: December 21, 2022 Meeting
First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh

Board Members Attending: Rob Schwartz, President; Bob Mitchell; Amy DeChicchis; Christine Milcarek; Kate Snow (Secretary, 2023); Nick Izzo; Raeann Olander Murray; Heather Masterson (2023); Kyle Gracey, Treasurer (2023).

Board Members Absent: None.

Ex Officio Members: Rev. Kate R. Walker, Minister.

Others: Pat Schuetz, Temporary Recording Secretary.

Visitors: None.

1. **Call to Order (Rob, 7:04).** Rob called the meeting to order.
2. **Opening Words (Heather, 7:04).** “In Celebration of the Winter Solstice,” by Stephanie Noble.
3. **Welcoming guests (Rob).** Pat Schuetz.
4. **Announcements (Raeann, 7:06).**
 - Next Board meeting: Wednesday, January 18, 2023.
 - January opening words: Bob Mitchell.
 - Committee reports due in January: Stewardship, Personnel, Program Endowments, VIM.
 - January 21, 2023, 10:30 to noon, via Zoom. Meeting with committee chairs to discuss challenges and opportunities. (Must be rescheduled due to a conflict with a racial justice workshop.)
 - January 22, 2023, 11:30 to 12:15, in person. Meeting to discuss membership and growth.
 - Board is doing the EECM shelter meal January 1. Heather is coordinating.
5. **Consent agenda (Rob, 7:10).**
 - **Draft minutes.**

Kate Snow moved to accept the minutes; Chris seconded. Minutes accepted as presented, 7 in favor, 2 abstentions.
 - **Minister’s Report.**
 - **LRED Report.**

Rob asked if we ever ask non-member parents with children in RE to contribute. Rev. Kate noted that other congregations do. Heather recalled that this was discussed pre-pandemic; it is a question for Heather Cunningham and the RE council. Rob will reach out to Erica.
 - **Committee reports: Stewardship, COSM, Safety.**
 - **Board 2022-2023 Priorities (review).**

Rob noted the pot-luck.

- **Minutes of December Finance Committee meeting.**

Rob noted their completeness.

- **Building committee update.**

Kyle noted that money from the Memorial Garden committee can be spent for other Building & Grounds projects, and even other church needs, but the priority is always for the Memorial Garden.

6. VOTE: 2023 Budget (Kyle,7:18).

- The Church finances are improving so we can increase COLAs to 3%, possibly higher, and restore program budgets.
- Rev. Kate and Rita are looking into a better dental and vision plan for the staff: Erica and spouse, Rev. Kate and spouse, and Dan. Also, there is an increase to Erica's benefit structure to cover 80% of her premium and 50% of her spouse's premium.
- Motion by Kyle, seconded by Bob. Motion passed without opposition.

7. VOTE: Approve \$12,000 for Roof Repair - \$5,000 from Extraordinary Building Repair and Maintenance Reserve; \$7,000 from Organ Restoration Project Reserve (Kyle, 7:23).

- The estimate from Burns and Scallow is a little over \$20,000. Kyle observed that it is a good thing we have insurance - we've received \$9,000 from them, with a \$1,000 deductible, which means \$8,000 and leaves us with a \$12,000 bill.
- There are no plans to restore the organ, which would cost about \$100,000 in any case.
- An alternative is to take money from our investment, which would result in less income from it, which would affect the budget.
- Nick asked if the estimate is to repair the roof itself or if it includes the interior damage from the leak. Kyle says, only the roof.
- Nick asked how much would be left in the Building repair fund. Kyle says about \$5,000 which he thinks needs to stay there for other unanticipated problems.
- Motion by Chris, seconded by Nick, to approve Kyle's proposal. Motion passed without opposition.

8. VOTE: Draft update to VIM Charter (Bob,7:32).

- Bob presented a draft of a revision to the charter, noting that it was the product of discussions with Rev. Kate and others, and that it had been first approved in 2017, to authorize VIM to take over the Board functions of discernment (of the Church's identity, mission and vision) and strategic planning. These are divided into three components: 1) open questions to be shared with the Congregation, 2) annual priorities of the ministry, and 3) an updated, rolling 3-year plan. Rob asked if Rev. Kate was considered staff. She is.
 - Rob asked about the territory covered by "small group meeting."
 - Bob suggested that the concept is flexible but a small group is the most efficient way to hear every viewpoint.
 - Chris concurred that it's useful for the members to get to know each other.

- Rob asked about the possibility of surveying information from the congregation at large.
- Bob explained that small groups are specified by design.
- Rev. Kate suggested that the intimacy of a small group might be a good outcome, but was not necessarily the goal of VIM, but is a great outcome.
- Rob suggested opening the charter to other processes. Kyle suggested, in the interest of efficiency, a simple change in the wording to add “utilize other tools,” which satisfied everyone.
- Motion by Chris, seconded by Heather, to extend the charter, as revised. Motion passed without opposition.

9. Board guidance on VIM’s open questions for 2023 (Bob, 7:46).

- Bob described the role of Open Questions in the discernment-planning-assessment cycle, and illustrated with the questions posed in 2017.
- Chris asked if anything that had been proposed was actually implemented. Rob said yes.
 - Bob made a case that we need an assessment to measure how well proposals are implemented but noted that the committee had never been able to stand up an assessment team. He mentioned two items - a wider variety in services and community partnerships - as changes that came out of the process.
 - Rev. Kate observed that the intervention of the pandemic and the change in ministry makes it hard to identify progress over those years.
- Kyle noted that we have no strategic plan at present. What he wants from the congregation is a prioritization of issues, not a vote for a single issue.
- Rob pointed out that membership is a huge goal, and suggested we need to talk to people outside the church as well as to members if we want to know why people don’t come, and what might draw them in.
 - Bob agreed that hosting community events is an idea that’s been tried.
 - Rev. Kate suggested interviews with community leaders to get a fix on our reputation.
 - Chris mentioned the loss of the Sunday Forum, which used to bring in people outside the congregation.
- Rev. Kate urged strategy before action – that the Board consider what’s in the national interest that we can tap into that no one else is yet doing.
- Nick pointed out that Covid has changed people, and suggested it might have changed what people are looking for in a church.
- Rev. Kate has been reading and thinking about exactly that – anxiety is up, and drug overdose is now the greatest cause of death among people under 35.
- Chris noted that some popular churches are providing simple answers, including making people feel loved; we may be in a different time zone, but Nick agrees that people may really need connection.

- Bob thought it would be useful for Board members to look at the responses VIM has received when questions like these were posed in the past. He observed that there have been influxes of newcomers in the past, but they mainly haven't stayed. He thinks growth is an outcome of meaningful programming, using Allegheny Church's social justice program as an example.
- Heather asked if a question could involve people looking at themselves for skills they could contribute to the Church. Bob saw a connection to current environmental justice thinking in the congregation: they've identified tasks to be done and now have to find people to do them.
- Rob tried to summarize: looking outward; post-Covid; examining your own skill-set.
- Chris noted the excitement generated in the congregation by Denice Galpern's pre-election letter-writing and Annie Stunden's pillowcase-sewing for Children's Hospital, as an indication we need more social action we can do within the church.
- Rob emphasized the greater importance of talking to the newer than the established members.
- Chris mentioned the extra importance of keeping RE families in the church so we can sustain an RE program. – again, giving people projects.
- Kate Snow asked Bob for a deadline for Board feedback. He suggested no later than February, to have a plan to present at the annual meeting in May.
- Chris asked if a VIM committee currently existed. Bob assured her it did – two or three members besides himself.

10. Board succession (specifically Treasurer position) (Raeann, 8:24).

- Raeann is the liaison to the Nominating Committee. She and Heather met with Martin Schmidt. The committee met with Raeann and she reviewed the job descriptions and talked about the skill set for the position of Treasurer. If the Board wants to change the by-laws specifying the Treasurer's responsibility and term of service, a team needs to be created and get to work soon. Otherwise the position has to be filled as specified.
- Kyle presented his own proposal for a by-law revision.
 - He thinks the Treasurer's mandated single term is a problem – it's too hard to recruit for the position and too short a time to build up expertise.
 - He noted that we also need to find a Controller – the Nominating Committee needs to take the lead on that, though he will help as he can. Raeann confirmed that the Nominating Committee knows this is their responsibility.
- Heather reported that Martin had asked her why so many people were refusing to serve when asked. Heather suggested that it would be useful to actually train the members of the committee in how to ask.
 - Rev. Kate asked if the Board had considered an appointed *ex officio* Treasurer.
 - Kyle explained that the Church had long had a volunteer treasurer, not an appointed one, who attended Board meetings *ex officio*.

- He likes the idea of a Treasurer as a voting Board member to head off financially unsound decisions.
- Rev. Kate's goal is to keep the level of expertise we have now, because it lowers the level of stress on the staff as well as the congregation.
- Rob asked for an explanation of *ex officio*. Rev. Kate explained that that was what we used to have – the Treasurer sat in board meetings but did not vote.
- Rob wasn't sure why there should be an objection to a limit of two consecutive three-year terms for any Board member.
- Nick wondered whether a four-year term would be a deal-breaker for anyone willing to serve for three years on the Board.
 - He also remembered a suggestion a few years ago to decrease the size of the Board. Kyle recalled that this was a suggestion of Rev. Connie Grant. The Board at the time was not in favor of it – the members already felt stretched to capacity and could not imagine providing a comparable level of governance and oversight with fewer people.
 - Rob suggested that a three-year commitment with the possibility of continuing would be less threatening than a four-year commitment and noted that the danger would be an incompetent or disruptive member who then would not leave. Nick's belief is that the Nominating Committee serves as a useful filter on the front end.
- Raeann thinks Covid may have altered people's view of service to the church. She urged the Board to continue to work with the Nominating Committee.
- Rev. Kate offered to survey other UU churches in the area to find out how the Treasurer functions.
- Rob urged that, at the end of a Board term, the Nominating Committee be required to endorse a member's re-election to a second term. Chris and Kyle suggested alternate wording.
- Heather and Raeann pressed the urgency of a decision, to give the Nominating Committee time to recruit before the May congregational meeting. Rob suggested the January Board meeting, and Heather will seek other input as needed.

11. Appreciations & Aspirations (All, 8:46).

12. Adjourn (Rob, 9:00).

Respectfully submitted,
 Pat Schuetz, Temporary Recording Secretary
 Approved by the Board: January 18, 2023
 Kate Snow, Secretary