

First Unitarian Church of Des Moines

Board of Trustees Minutes | Thursday, July 23, 2023 at 6:00 PM
Stonewall Conference Room | Virtual Access via Zoom

Board Members: LeeAnn Back, Kevin Boeckholt, Jeremy Guenther, Crystal Loving, Kathryn Sutton and Natalie Mason

Staff: Interim Minister Rev. Meredith Garman and Alice Stewart

The meeting was called to order at 6:08 p.m. by Board President Kevin Boekholdt. The chalice was presented. LeeAnn Back provided a reading.

Timekeeper & Process Observer: Crystal Loving

Checkin: What is your favorite local restaurant? A-Dong, Panka Peruvian, Skip's on Fleur, Eatery A, Little Brother, The Banana Leaf, Chuck's, Thai Flavors, Baja Cocina, Christopher's, Baratta's, The Waveland

Public Comment:

From Dave Witke: In recent months as we've prepared for our future, there's been emphasis placed on communicating with members. The Intercom has been a big help, but as far as official actions, the most recently published minutes Dave could find were from April. After speaking with Kevin, Dave got good feedback. Minutes are published after they are approved at First Unitarian. Dave mentioned that other orgs publish un-approved minutes soon after the meeting, with a clear disclaimer that they're un-approved.

Crystal Loving asked if the board secretary can have a 2-week grace period to get them out. Dave wants the congregation to have these handy so they can review and make preparations for the next board meeting.

Alice Stewart mentioned that minutes are published on the website; it's not known whether they're linked in the Intercom. Everything is posted as soon as we get it. Alice recommended our process remains simple for the time being until more staff are hired.

Consent Agenda:

Approval of board minutes: Crystal motion; LeeAnn Back second. Unanimous vote in favor of the motion.

Interim Minister's Report:

Garmon wanted to let the board be aware that he met with the adult programming committee last night. They are "gung-ho" to push a 2-pronged effort to meet our mission

with strategies that involve themes of the month and an effort to get people to meet once a month. Garmon will be preaching on the theme; the goal is to have “every member in a small group.” Themes are drawn from the Article II Bylaws. This will be a central part of Garmon’s mission to advance the congregation over the next couple years.

Director of Finance Report:

Alice Stewart

- Revenue exceeded expenses by \$6,000 in June.
- After 3 months of being in the red, we are in the black by about \$48,000
- Pledge payments and fundraising are indicated in the packet.
- Variable expenses have increased
- In the new fiscal year, this is expected to impact “some of our practices” such as trash pickup.
- May need to rethink expenses over the next 3 months
- Musician payments have been higher; suggested we have a conversation about rethinking expenses
- Restricted funds quarterly reports are available via email to Alice
- New members on the board are welcome to 1:1 time with Alice
- Fees associated with building usage is low
 - Alice recommended a marketing plan/strategy to increase prices for building usage (at some point in the future)
 - Alice recommended it not go to the buildings committee
 - Attendees agreed that it may be a combination of members from various committees and interests (coordinating house, FOC, buildings & grounds, kitchen), etc.

Staffing changes

Kevin shared news that Emily Petty left her role. Alice is picking up some communications responsibilities/roles (e.g. sharing Intercom). Hannah is still on social media. When Rev. Garmon comes back from vacation in August there will be more discussion around staffing.

Cleaning contract ends August 7th; which cannot be extended beyond the signed contract. In the short-term, we are hoping to engage with a contractor soon.

New Business

Member Bylaw Change

Former board member Greg was tasked with drafting a letter to communicate with members that their presence on the roles is due for expiration (due to the pledge change in the bylaws). Walter Pearson offered to take that on with the stewardship committee. Walter

asked “how hard should we go on this thing” and to understand who those people are; would like those involved to consider it further. In January, we submit a certification of members to the UUA. So at some point it may be needed to define who is a member in this transitional period and to develop thoughtful communication to those on our rolls. There are those who fall outside the traditional notion of “member” such as those who donate, those who sign the book and give but don’t pledge, etc.

A letter may be a part of a comprehensive plan that involves identifying the people to communicate with, channels/tactics of communication and escalation. The overall goal isn’t to “cleave people from our membership”. Average pledge is too low, not enough pledges from members; which is a “big issue” for Walt.

Walt agreed to be the point of contact for this effort.

Crystal emphasized that this is interconnected with who is able to participate at the annual meeting as well.

Governance Retreat

From Bill Brauch: 90 minutes to 2 hours with the Board to discuss policy, governance, etc. Relationship between senior minister and the board will also be a big part of that conversation.

We will be targeting the end of August for the retreat and a Board retreat in September. Crystal will do the Doodle poll for those.

Committee Appointments

Appointments:

Congregational Life: Walt (needs vote)

Financial Oversight: Jeremy & Walt (needs vote)

Governance: Crystal & Natalie (both need vote)

Human Resources: Reba & LeeAnn & Kevin (Kevin needs vote only)

Leadership Support: Sally & Natalie (Natalie needs vote only)

Ministerial Review: Kevin & Jeremy (needs vote)

Nominating: LeeAnn & Crystal (Crystal needs vote only)

Stewardship: Kathryn (needs vote)

Crystal motioned to accept the nominations. LeeAnn second. Unanimous approval from the board.

Members Sally Boeckholdt is joining Financial Oversight and Bill Brauch is joining Governance

Jeremy made a motion to approve the two members to join the committees. Unanimous approval from the board.

Crystal recommended communication be sent to the committees that all new members be voted on by the board as it pertains to our bylaws. She will send that communication.

Ames Neutral Pulpit

Up to 3 candidates for Ames's senior settled minister would preach from First Unitarian's pulpit; likely in the springtime. Kevin will forward communication to the Celebrant team leadership.

Other New Business

Secretary

Reba is resigning as secretary. Walt moved for Kathryn to be secretary with Jeremy's second; the motion is approved.

Benchmarking

Walt Pearson wants us to look at similarly-sized congregations to evaluate/compare members vs. those participating in RE. Some areas of inquiry:

- First Unitarian has low RE participation compared to those stats.
- 40% of the congregation participates in RE. First Unitarian's rate is 8%.
- Finances, pledges, stewardship

Walt has artifacts (spreadsheets, slides, information) available for the board. Some time on the agenda can be dedicated to digesting the data. All Board members are asked to review the information ahead of the next meeting.

What is the goal? Walt wants us to see "500 members" (growth) and balance with living within our means. "Strengthened from within" was something that the board discussed in their visioning last year.

"New places for people to plug in to" is also what Walter is interested in seeing more of.

One-on-ones

Kevin asked to do a once-a-month connection with members they don't know. The goal is to widen circles, find connections and opportunities for people to plug in to. Jeremy & Kevin are going to do some accountability work — perhaps shift check-in questions to hear feedback from 1:1s.

"Coffee with the board" An hour before service, maybe 1–2x a month, we have open-door-conversation with congregants.

We will revisit the matter at our retreat.

Suggestion arised to have an “introvert corner” to allow people to gather quietly.

Binders for board members

Contain governance documents, policies, etc. to reference during meetings.

There’s a OneDrive available for the Board to have access to; which will later go to SharePoint.

Janitorial contract

Can we reallocate funds for one month for the janitorial services? Alice Stewart can have a conversation with a contractor she has in mind. Alice doesn’t have the exact figures, but it may be in the realm of \$1500.

Jeremy motioned that we reallocate the funds to this contractor for 2 months, to not exceed \$4000 for one month beginning after August 7. Walt seconded. Unanimous approval.

Community minister

Ministers who are not settled at a congregation. Community ministers have affiliations, but not a paid relationship. This can be counseling, chaplaincy, etc. Should we support Rev. Dr. LoraKim Joyner’s ministry (wife fo Garmon). She may preach or contribute ministerial work to our congregation directly over time. She can claim affiliation with First Unitarian as a community minister. She was a community minister at Garmon’s last congregation. Those attending spoke approvingly of the suggestion but no action will be taken now. The decision would be between the Board and there would need to be agreement to a covenant.

This can be put on a vote at the next meeting.

Announcements

Our congregation is hosting a RAGBRAI team of 18 people. There will be a potluck dinner Wednesday night.

Next board meeting is Thursday, August 17th at 6:00 PM

Meeting was adjourned at 7:45 PM by Kevin Boeckholdt.

Submitted by Kathryn Sutton, Secretary