

First Unitarian Church of Des Moines

Board of Trustees Minutes

Thursday, June 22, 2023

Board Members: LeeAnn Back, Kevin Boeckholt, Reba Eagles, Jeremy Guenther, Crystal Loving, Greg Nichols, Fern Stewart

Incoming Board Members: Kathryn Sutton and Natalie Mason

Staff: Interim Minister Rev. Meredith Garman

The meeting was called to order at 6:04 p.m. by Board President Reba Eagles. The chalice was presented. LeeAnn Back provided a reading.

Timekeeper: Greg Nichols and Process Observer: Jeremy Guenther

Board of Trustee members responded to the question of what the biggest takeaway was this year. Comments included a return of members to service, a better balance between the old guard and new members serving on the Board reflecting the membership of the church, greater involvement in the church as a board member, energy into the church and desire to increase the energy in downstairs church, positive energy and recognition that there is still more work to do. We are on a positive trajectory. Board spoke with one voice.

Public Comment: Mike Merritt hypocrite and old guard terms were used.

It was moved by LeeAnn Back, seconded by Crystal Loving to approve the agenda and minutes from the May 14, 18, and 20, 2023 meetings. Motion approved.

Minister's Report:

Director of Finance Report:

Alice Stewart, Director of Finance, was on vacation and Reba Eagles reviewed her report. Fundraising discussion included the costs of the concert series and the expenses exceeded revenue by \$2,500. The Board recognized the hard decisions made during this year's budget process. At the time, the expense was unknown and acknowledged the concert series would need to be examined and a conversation needed to be had. Jeremy Guether offered to meet with Doug Aupperle, Alice Stewart and Eileen Bowerman. It was suggested the Board, with Alice, conduct a budget session in June or July with committees to review where we are at and respond to questions. Current Faith in Action partners will continue to receive their basket funding until September per our commitment.

Interim Minister Report: Interim Minister Meredith Garmon stated he looked forward to the challenge ahead to stabilize and solidify what is working and the improvement of relationships. He noted he would be available and would provide a schedule.

New Business

Family Promise: Reba Eagles reviewed the need for additional housing due to the end of COVID restrictions and congregations using spaces that had been available. Elaine Imlau has scheduled to host two weeks in a row, three times next year after discussing it with staff. The Board supported the decision and recognized Elaine's efforts.

Cleaning Crews: The current cleaning service contract is \$25,500, twice a week, and will be in effect until the first week of August. Alice has contacted various services all of which were similar in costs. The budgeted amount is \$4,000. A Sign Up Genius will be created for volunteers, Crystal Loving and Kevin Boeckholt volunteered to meet with the Building Committee and Alice to review the next steps.

Membership By-Law Change: The membership by-law change approved at the annual meeting led to discussion regarding enforcement and how it occurred. Margaret Schultz had recommended a letter be sent, regarding the changes, assurances of pastoral exemption be sent to members. Greg Nichols volunteered to create the letter. Membership certified in February, we should publicize what we have as members at that time. Letters have not been responded to before, it was recommended for the next Stewardship Drive we reach out with a personal contact. Reba Eagles reviewed our membership numbers from the early teens going from 350 to 515 but generally was a steady 250 to 300 for the past 20 years. The reality is determining what size church we are and what services we will be able to provide.

Master Board Calendar: The goal is to have things booked out on the calendar, budget dates, round table meetings to allow for better planning and avoid conflicting activities. This would provide a cohesive plan for childcare provision, minister involvement and board meetings.

Budget Continuum: Barb Royal and Harvey Harrison have opted to further review the budget and met with Reba Eagles, Greg Nichols and Kevin Boeckholt. It was noted at the meeting that recommendations would be sent to the Financial Oversight Committee which would review and forward comments to the Board.

Officer Voting: Reba Eagles invited Mike Merritt for comments, since Sally was not present. He stated his only comment was to see if there was a public vote, whether it was unanimous or not, and see who is on the ballot as would Sally. The by-laws were

reviewed, they specify at the June meeting, officers are chosen from current members, not incoming. Kevin Boeckholt and Sally Merritt had come to an agreement to be co-presidents, however Walter Pearson questioned whether we were following the by-laws. Kevin met with Walter and after review, agreed with Walter. The question was taken to Bill Brauch, Governance Committee, who confirmed our by-laws don't allow for a co-presidency. Sally Merritt was sent an email regarding the issue and did not respond. It was noted that only in the past five years had the first year vice-president, second year president and third year past-president become a habit. Bill Brauch had commented during their discussion that 2018-19 was the first time that that happened. The succession is not included in the by-laws. It was a rare opportunity to have two individuals willing to serve as president. Reba confirmed she did not call for votes prior to tonight's meeting. Jeremy Guenther was noted as having had two additional members running for president in his former church. This is not a personal issue.

Mike Merritt stated Sally did not want to stand in the way of anything the church wanted to do. Board members asked if Sally was planning to express her interest in the position, he explained she had opted to sit in another room and was not going to participate with this process. Sally's position is that she would like to see the vote and live with what happens.

Board members reflected on the process, the two people who are interested in the role, the concept of the precedent being the driving reason, that there is something beyond that and desire to hear those reasons articulated.

A clarification of the positions and their responsibilities to be voted on as well as a review of the by-laws which state: The Board of Trustees selects its own officers, who shall also serve as congregational officers according to the following procedures.

a. The Board shall meet each year, after the annual congregational meeting and before July 1 to select officers for the coming year. The term of those selected shall begin July 1, and end June 30 of the following year.

b. The officers of the congregation to be chosen shall be current Board members and shall include: President, Vice President, and Secretary

Reba Eagles reported having had many conversations with Sally and noting she would support her if elected. She stated she struggled with Sally not being present to say who she is, what her vision is, to not being here. Greg Nichols responded to Mike Merritt's comment stating if there was such a thing as a predetermined slate, he did not know what it was and therefore his vote is not committed for any of these three positions.

Kevin Boeckholt stated he was excited for the opportunity to serve. He acknowledged our present tight financial spot and that he has experience in that space. He also noted several people have stated how happy they are to see younger people on the board and taking on leadership roles. He also pointed out his long standing relationship with the church which makes it easier to navigate the role. He is excited, nervous and ready to do all he can to move the Board forward. Fern Stewart stated she had been part of a conversation with Sally and having a co-presidency with Kevin would have been excellent. She noted we tried to work through this to recognize everyone's value with the co-presidency being a solution and then not. She voiced concern regarding Sally's absence and therefore inability to speak her truth to the group.

The Board extended another invitation for Sally to participate. Mike Merritt stated no.

Reba Eagles stated it was difficult for her because there will be so many times, no matter who does this in the next year, that there will be conflict, confrontation and attack. If this is hard to show up for, how will she show up for the whole year.

Crystal Loving made note, with the comments that have been made, that Sally is not here and conflict is a normal part of this church and the way that we work. Showing up for that is important, and what we've lived through in the last two years shows that and we have to continue to show up. She hadn't seen Sally in a lot of meetings, to be here, what's the leadership style in a meeting, the ability to be part of the congregation just as it is and showing up in a space that is hard, matters. I hope we can grow and heal from this, the congregation should be what's on our mind, not our personal space. We are here to serve and this is all of us coming together to make a decision about serving and there are lots of spaces to do so.

Vote for Sally Merritt: 0

Vote for Kevin: 6

Vote: 1 present

Greg Nichols noted a change in the by-laws was necessary to allow a structured solution. He also commented how ridiculous it was that the two incoming members serving with the new president are disenfranchised and that retiring members are voting. He emphasized a structured solution would have resolved this in a much better manner.

Without objection, Jeremy Guenther was elected Vice President.

Without objection, Reba Eagles was elected Secretary.

A retreat training will be held late summer with the Governance Committee. A poll will be sent with dates and times.

Committee appointments will be worked on in the next month by the Nomination Committee.

LeeAnn Back provided the closing and the chalice was extinguished.

Motion by Crystal Loving, second by Jeremy Guenther to adjourn.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:50 p.m.,

Submitted by Fern Stewart, Secretary