

Unitarian Society of New Haven
Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Trustees
November 12, 2020

Accepted December 10, 2020

Board Members Present: President Nancy Apfel, Vice President Emily McCave, Clerk Becky Friedkin, Past President Al Bosch; Trustees at Large, Craig Machado, Bernice Marie-Daly, Rich Stockton, Tina Santoni; Youth Trustee Elizabeth S.; Rev. Lindasusan Ulrich, ex officio

Others Present: Gwen Heuss-Severance and David Stagg (Management Team)

1. Gather

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Board met online via Zoom.

Nancy called the meeting to order at 6:33 pm.

Emily lit a chalice and read [*The Longing for Home*](#) by Starhawk.

We read the FY22 Board Covenant, then followed with a life check-in.

There were no changes to the agenda.

2. Reports

President's Report

Nancy reported that the Nominating Committee will be recruiting a Treasurer and an At-Large Trustee to fill Christina Allen's position. Craig will attend our Retreat on Nov. 21 and Nancy expressed her deep appreciation for Craig's service on the Board and to the congregation.

(Note: after consultation with the Nominating Committee, the officers decided to wait until the spring to potentially fill Craig's open position.)

Minister's Report

Rev. Lindasusan's report is attached to these minutes. Key points include:

- The desire for connection is palpable and was especially so in the run-up to the election. She is planning to offer some Adult Religious Education classes in early 2021 which will help congregants connect with each other and with her.
- There seems to be a strong need for comfort in this congregation. But is it possible to ask uncomfortable questions? This is especially important in a predominantly white congregation such as ours.
- We need a sustainable plan to regularly update the website. This is the primary way people find us and the website is rather stale. This needs to be a high priority.

Management Team Reports

Budget Update: David reported that the Finance Committee met last night. Terry produced a financial statement through October 2020 (4 months, or one-third of the congregational year). Income is good (35% of budget), largely because of nearly \$58,000 in pre-paid pledges. It is impossible to project how pledge fulfillment will continue for the rest of the year. We are not doing well in the general fundraising line (\$0 of \$14,000), although grocery cards are doing well. There is nothing remarkable in expenses, which are down slightly, overall. Income is running just over \$4,000 over expenses at the end of October.

Some discussion about fundraising followed. We discussed the possibility of an online auction but generally felt that people are financially and otherwise stressed (although Craig reported that Columbus House recently held a successful online auction). It was suggested that we appeal for special December donations to USNH, with an inspiring message from Rev. Lindasusan.

Rev. Lindasusan reported that the Stewardship team will be starting monthly stewardship testimonials during the worship services, beginning in December.

Building Re-Opening Advisory Group: Gwen reported that CT is back to phase 2 until January and on Wednesday, the *Register* reported that CT's positivity rate is greater than 6%. Requests to enter the building are few and carefully thought out. CYRE is returning to virtual meeting next week and will remain virtual for some time.

Other Business – David reported that USNH has a fixed-fee contract for snow removal this year. In recent years we paid by the storm, which was very expensive and anxiety-provoking. He also reported that the Management Team worked with the Personnel and Finance Committees to eliminate the Flexible Spending program, which was not being used much and was expensive and difficult to administer. The Employee Handbook is being revised to reflect this change.

3. Future Planning

Retreat Planning

The Board Retreat will be held on November 21, from 9 to 12 noon, via Zoom. Jean Rosenthal will attend as a lay member of the Management Team. All Board members plan to attend. Nancy, Emily, Becky, Bernice, and Rev. Lindasusan have met several times to plan the retreat and develop the Draft agenda. Please reread the Nested Bowls and think about the questions and Ends statements in advance of the retreat. (Note: The FINAL Retreat agenda is attached to these minutes.)

Emily described the retreat plan, which will be divided into two halves. We've asked everyone to read *The Nested Bowls*, by Laura Park. This will inspire our work in retreat, most of which will be in small groups. The first half will be diving into four questions inspired by the Nested Bowls. This will help board members to get to know one another and also to explore more deeply questions that will lead us to our visioning process. We plan to focus on the past two years, during which Rev. Megan departed; we had a successful Interim Ministry with John Marsh, which ended suddenly with John's stroke in May; the pandemic and remote services and gatherings; and the beginning of Rev. Lindasusan's ministry. We've been challenged but also resilient.

The second part will explore where we are with our Ends statements and where we want to prioritize our work as a congregation for the rest of the pandemic. Note that all of the Ends work will continue, but we will be focused on a key priority for Rev. Lindasusan and the paid and volunteer staff.

Fall Congregational Meeting

Although we had initially decided on December 6, there are two events that Sunday, shortly after service ends. There are no such conflicts on Dec 13. David and Gwen are available for the 13th and we will commence the Meeting at 11:45 am. The notice, agenda, and Board candidate bios must be emailed to members two weeks before the meeting, on Saturday, November 28.

The agenda includes a budget report (David), a BRAG report (Gwen), a minister's report (Rev. Lindasusan), a motion to request congregational approval of an experiment with a smaller board through FY22, and approval of Board candidates brought forth by the Nominating Committee. Rev. Lindasusan suggested that the Stewardship Team speak.

Becky shared advice she had sought from several members who were former clerks and Board presidents and who have lots of experience with non-profit and church boards, which led to a slightly revised motion to experiment with the Board size. Most notably, not to specify a minimum number of Board members required.

We discussed further education of the congregation about the motion to temporarily approve a smaller board, as an experiment. Tina, Nancy, and Becky will work on this.

Congregational Leadership Development

This led to a discussion of congregational leadership and how much work is done by the same people. The Nominating Committee worked really hard on this about 4 years ago, and younger, newer members were lifted up and contributed a lot.

We discussed the possibility of a questionnaire to members about their strengths and interests. Becky had drafted one recently and Jesse did something a few years ago. Personal conversations would be a stronger option.

Rev. Lindasusan asked if there has been leadership training, mentorship, and succession planning for committees. The Board agreed that there has not been any of this in recent years.

Craig is moving to a co-housing community run by sociocracy, which uses consent decision making and discussions by people well-known to one another.

Other Board comments include:

- We need a clear idea of roles and responsibilities and expected term in office
- We should make sure we are creating environments that people want to be part of and that these roles aren't just work with no benefits. They should be growth experiences. It should be good to be on these committees.
- There is a perception that new and especially younger blood is not wanted in leadership. Younger people don't want to be tokenized.

Rev. Lindasusan suggested that we offer some leadership training about being a leader in the time of COVID.

4. Consent Agenda

There were no changes to the minutes of the October 8, 2020 Board meeting, which were accepted.

5. Meeting Process Observations

Craig noted that the meeting was well-run and moved along, and that people are respectful of one another. He also commented that we have a static format. One person talks. We all look at the screen. He suggested that brainstorming and ideas might be richer if we broke out into small groups to discuss, then come back together to share.

Elizabeth will be the process observer for December.

6. Thank you notes

We agreed on a number of thank you notes to write.

Tina and Rich will write them this month.

7. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:05 pm

Respectfully submitted,
Becky Friedkin, Clerk

Note: Although the Board discussed a revised motion concerning Board size, we neglected to formally adopt it via a vote at the meeting. Nancy emailed the Board the next day, requesting email votes on the revised motion, which reads:

Motion "to allow the USNH Board to experiment with a smaller Board, effective immediately and continuing through FY22, i.e., through June 30, 2022. The Board shall comprise not more than nine Trustees, plus the Youth Trustee, if elected.

The Board will provide the congregation periodic updates on the experiment, and, in advance of the spring 2022 annual meeting, a recommendation to do one of the following:

- Change the by-laws to reduce the Board size,
- Keep the relevant by-laws unchanged, or
- Extend and/or modify the experiment."

The Board voted unanimously to present this motion to the congregation on December 13.

Attachments:

Minister's Report, November 2020

Final Board Retreat Agenda for November 21, 2020

November 12, 2020

What do you notice?

- The desire for connection remains palpable. I'm working to create some adult RE opportunities to address this need (lectio divina, group spiritual direction), especially as the season changes and as we head into another potential COVID lockdown.
- The election results have given everyone a chance to exhale.
- The Stewardship Team is full of excitement and ready for this new year-round model.

Do you have questions?

- Will the natural search for comfort during pandemic times get in the way of asking uncomfortable questions?
- Besides the BoT, how robust are committees' plans for leadership succession? (It seems like a mixed bag.)
- Given Robb Camm's ongoing commitment with putting together Sunday services, where do things with the Nominating Committee stand?

What do you need?

- We need to make a plan for updating and sustaining the website. Without a team designated to this ministry, it languishes. Given that newcomers are even more dependent on a congregation's website to get information (and websites were already the main entrée even before the pandemic), we need to bump this up as a priority. (As an example, the top story on the site for months now has been the calling of a new minister.) Do we know of volunteers who might be interested in taking this on?
- The more that the BoT can talk about and live into covenant, the better. Nancy and I will be setting up a meeting with the CRC to look at goals for the year, which I hope will give them a kind of role within the congregation that sets aside some of the unhelpful history.
- FYI, RJ's school is virtual through 11/23 because of two COVID cases, and we wouldn't be surprised if that gets extended (as Hamden schools are likely to do). Please have extra patience with all of the staff members navigating this weirdness.

FINAL Fall 2020 Board Retreat Schedule
Saturday, November 21, 9 am - 12 noon, via Zoom

Overall Goal - Identifying Congregational Priorities (Ends) for the COVID pandemic

8:45 - 9:00 Gather and chat All
9:00 - 9:15 Chalice Lighting/Opening Words Rev. Lindasusan
Welcome, Board Covenant, and orientation to the morning Nancy

Part 1 - Deep dives into 4 questions

9:15 - 9:25 Introduction to the Four Questions and process (10 minutes) Emily
9:25 - 9:37 Break into **three random groups** (size=3 or 4) to consider (12 minutes):
Share a time when you have experienced the holy (a connection to something larger than yourself, or a time when you felt your heart and mind expand) in the recent past within our USNH community?
9:37 - 9:45 Back together - each group shares their findings (8 minutes)
9:45 - 9:57 Break into **three new random groups** (size=3 or 4) to consider (12 minutes):
In what ways have we been living the USNH covenant in the recent past and how has that helped sustain you?
9:57 - 10:05 Back together - each group shares their findings (8 minutes)
10:05 - 10:17 Break into **three new random groups** (size=3 or 4) to consider (12 minutes):
What could we build together on the strengths of our recent past? How would you describe the USNH community you long to see and live in (10 years out)?
10:17 - 10:25 Back together - each group shares their findings (8 minutes)
10:25 - 10:40 15-minute break

Part 2 - using the 4 questions to explore the Ends Statements

10:40 - 10:45 Introduction to Part 2 Nancy
Divide into three groups (random assignment, size=3 or 4), each to explore **one set** of the Within/Among/Beyond Ends (assigned randomly)
What is still relevant? Is anything missing? What is most important NOW?
10:45 - 11:05 Breakout groups explore Ends statements
11:05 - 11:20 Back together, each group shares findings (5 min each)
11:20 - 11:50 Priorities discussion - what does the congregation need to focus on during the pandemic?
11:50 - 12:00 **Closing** Nancy