

Unitarian Society of New Haven  
Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Trustees  
December 10, 2020

Accepted January 14, 2021

**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 6:34 pm.

Al lit a chalice and read [\*As the Wild Wind Bites\*](#) by Ben Soule.

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 reviewed the November 21 Board Retreat, noting that we delved deeply into questions and used the breakout room technology productively. It was suggested that we consider using breakout rooms in Board meetings to encourage deeper conversations. Feedback from retreat participants includes:

- It was well organized, moved along well, and we achieved our goal of identifying a priority for Rev. Lindasusan and the paid and volunteer staff.
- It felt like we were much more doing what the Board is supposed to be doing
- There was a wonderful spirit amongst us – very open, spontaneous, relaxed. Welcoming and positive tone/atmosphere.
- Most enjoyable Board retreat ever attended
- Breakouts worked well, especially random assignment
- Felt shorter than regular Board meetings, even though it was longer
- Everyone brought interesting thoughts, their best selves, took the tasks very seriously – thought hard, shared, good listening.
- Interesting how inter-related many activities are.
- Glad we read *The Nested Bowls* – it helped to ground us
- Really impressed with how honest people were, what good listeners we were, and how willing people were to respond to what they heard, perhaps with a change of mind.

Rev. Lindasusan asked that we think about the individual items under Relationships Among. What are the highest priorities? Are they all still worthy of time and attention? Is there anything missing?

Comments include:

- **Treat people with respect** makes me think of our congregational covenant. We have a strong culture of entitlement. There is lots of work to do around this.
- **Give and receive support** is crucial during Covid
- During Covid, people are often going for short-term relief things (e.g., more time on social media, one's phone, etc.), which is easier than long-term coping strategies (e.g., reading, exercise, etc.), which may not be as gratifying in the moment but can make you stronger in the long term. This makes **life-long learning** stand out. It's important to keep yourself well. People need to keep growing, learning, finding purpose.
- **Generosity of spirit** – Taking care of others, in whatever way we can, is very restorative. Doesn't have to be financial, can be calling people; Also, generosity towards USNH
- The comment about generosity towards USNH sparked a conversation about money and generosity:
  - Finances should never be an obstacle to participation in USNH or any spiritual community – members can get a pledge waiver, by simple request (no justification needed)
  - Generosity is a spiritual value; practicing generosity towards our own spiritual community normalizes that practice, and “works the muscle.”
  - Congregational polity – we are in charge of ourselves – both good and challenging. Generous giving to USNH makes all of our programs possible, it is how we can make a difference as a spiritual community. There is power in naming that money is a tool for transformation. It's just a tool – name it.
  - Recently got an email about gifts to the endowment – keep in mind that, relative to a lot of other churches, we are a wealthy congregation. This raises issues about entitlement, the “haves.” We are sitting on a big pile of money – what does that call us to do?
  - Need to think carefully about stewardship messaging – are we radically welcoming to all?
- There is not necessarily widespread commitment to or understanding of **covenant**. We need to address this. What is the Covenantal Relations Committee about for this congregation? (Note: See the Minister's Report for more on this.)
- **Diversity** goes back to life-long learning and trying to understand those who might be different from us. Also goes to treating each other with respect. There are a fair number of mostly unintentional micro-aggressions committed in our congregation; hopefully more learning will help reduce this
  - Importance of holding up that everyone has a story, and to be curious about others' stories.
  - There are challenges in embracing diversity within a predominantly white culture.
  - Rev. Lindasusan identifies as a person of color, so we have a person of color in worship pretty much every week.

- More important for the congregation to be radically welcoming and accepting/curious of others' stories – diversity is likely to follow
- To this question of who is being represented, diversity is more than just race and ethnicity.

Should we revise our Ends statements to reflect the above comments?

- Rev. Lindasusan: Typically, we should renew our Ends statements about every five years. But in our case, there were several ministerial transitions, so there wasn't as much chance to work on implementation, and because they are solid Ends, recommends that we keep steady for now and revisit the Ends in 2-3 years.
- Suggestion – think of the first item more broadly, something like: "To honor and respect our covenant with one another."
- Emily and Nancy will work on wording for the Relationships Among individual statements.

Nancy reviewed the agenda for the Fall Congregational Meeting. There was some clarifying discussion about the motion to experiment with a smaller board. Emily will make it clear that we are proposing only reductions in the number of At-Large Trustees, not officers or the Past President. Emily and Bernice will count the chat votes, if needed for a close vote.

### **Minister's Report**

The Lectio Divina class has been fully subscribed and Rev. Lindasusan may start a second session. People are engaged and thoughtful; it's definitely an hour well-spent on spiritual practice and a way to get to know one another.

The pace, intensity, and level of expectations in congregational life seems to be picking up. Rev. Lindasusan would like, as much as possible, for us to maintain the more spacious pace that has been happening so far, and help it permeate everything we do. It is very counter-cultural to take one's time and have space for ruminating. This is something to keep our eyes on.

Next year is USNH's 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary. What are essential qualities of USNH that we want to celebrate? Is there a theme we want to highlight?

Leigh Powers has volunteered to work on the website. Rev. Lindasusan is working on guidelines for how we might rethink the website.

Covenantal Relations Committee: Rev. Lindasusan, Nancy Apfel, Bernice Marie-Daly, and Paul Trotta drafted a new charge for the CRC, hoping it will help focus their work and clarify how it can be a resource for the congregation. There are three main modalities of the committee's work: preventing harm; interrupting harm; and facilitating restorative conversations when there has been harm. The charge also tells a new story about the CRC. It is every single person's responsibility to live into our covenant, and the CRC is here to help us do so.

Rev. Lindasusan's written report is attached to these minutes.

### **Management Team Reports**

David reported on the Management Team's compliance with Policy 1.10, Safety. The report is attached to these minutes and was accepted by the Board.

Gwen reported on the Building Re-Opening Advisory Group (BRAG). Essentially, current policies, protocols, and monitoring will continue, especially as the COVID test positivity rate in CT is rising. Gwen noted that the UUA is planning for a virtual General Assembly (GA) in June and continues to recommend that congregations plan to stay closed until June. Her report is attached to these minutes.

### **3. Future Planning**

We postponed until the January meeting the need for one or two volunteers to research measures to use in Board self-evaluation.

### **4. Closing**

#### **Consent Agenda**

The minutes of the November 11, 2020 Board meeting were accepted without changes.

#### **Process Observations**

Elizabeth noted that energy and engagement were much higher in the beginning than towards the end. Perhaps a short break in the middle might be useful. Elizabeth also offered insightful analysis of a specific interaction.

#### **Thank you notes**

Nancy and Emily will write thank you notes this month.

#### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:29 pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Becky Friedkin, Clerk

#### **Attachments:**

Minister's Report to the Board of Trustees  
Management Team Report on Compliance with Policy 1.10 – Safety  
BRAG Report

## What do you notice?

- At the end of November, I started a lectio divina class, which has had excellent turnout. The fact that the eight spots are regularly filling took me by surprise! People have engaged deeply with the process. Based on the success so far, I'm considering starting an additional session on a different day/time. The class is part of encouraging and supporting Relationships Among (as well as Within).
- I've felt as though congregational life is starting to pick up speed a bit. There are likely multiple reasons for this — the winter holidays, the increase in COVID cases, the promise of a vaccine, the fact that I've been here four months, etc. — but as much as possible, I want to maintain the steady pace we've had going. Just something to watch.

## Do you have questions?

- I want to plant a seed: what essential aspect of USNH might we celebrate during next year's 70th anniversary? Is there a particular theme around which we might organize various activities? (Side note: 70th anniversaries are associated with platinum, in case that's helpful.)

## What do you need?

- Following up on last month's report, I'm delighted to share that Leigh Powers has volunteered to help with website updates. My next task — which likely won't happen until the new year — is to create guidance on the general direction for the website. (The Management Team is helping me resist the temptation to do website changes myself.)
- Nancy and I met with the CRC co-chairs, and we collectively drafted a new charge for the committee. It says, in part, that the CRC will engage in its work of supporting covenant-based relationality through three modalities:
  1. **In the absence of harm or conflict:** Supporting covenant-based relationship, through such proactive, skills-building activities as workshops, seminars, and discussion circles, among other possibilities.
  2. **In the moment of potential or actual harm or conflict:** Serving as proactive bystanders and reminders of healthy covenant and mutual care.
  3. **After harm or conflict has been caused:** Serving as facilitators and guides who assist/support the conversation, healing, recommittal to covenant, and affirmation of love and care that is sometimes needed.

Minister's Report to the Board of Trustees  
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We could use your help telling a new story about covenant and the CRC. First and foremost, covenant is EVERYONE'S responsibility. The CRC can model certain behaviors (eg, bystander interventions) and facilitate healing conversations, but **all of us** need to advocate for coming back into covenant with each other. As Board members, you can model covenantal behavior as well. Second, the CRC doesn't decide "who's right or wrong" in a given conflict. They're responsible to the congregation as a whole and to the process of strengthening relationships when conflict goes beyond what the involved parties can mend on their own.

Zoom difficulties meant the CRC didn't have enough time to discuss the charge fully at their most recent meeting, but I'm hopeful about these changes.

## Monitoring of Policy 1.10: Safety

Rev Lindasusan Ulrich, Gwen Heuss-Severance, Jean Rosenthal, David Stagg and Jeremy Hill

Last reported 12.10.19

Blue text is the approved interpretation; red text is the MT report.

### 1.10 Safety

The Management Team shall not fail:

- a. To ensure that all appropriate activities and actions are performed to ensure that staff, visitors, and congregants are provided with a safe environment.
- b. To assess and report to the Board as appropriate regarding safety issues in order to give the Board information that should be addressed in the budget for the next year.

***Policy approved by the Board: March 12, 2015***

#### **MT Interpretation:**

We assume that a safe environment includes protection from threats such as fire and burglary as well as protection from acts of terror. We also assume our responsibility extends to maintaining and improving aspects of personal safety such as freedom from harassment and any situation that would diminish our goal of offering radical hospitality.

We will work with our B&G Committee on safety aspects of our buildings and our grounds and with all staff, committees and the congregation on all aspects of personal safety.

***MT Interpretation Approved by the Board: December 12, 2019***

#### **MT Report:**

At the beginning of 2020 we continued to work on our Standard Operating Procedure SOP-0010 – Emergency Procedures: “To provide clear procedures for all those who use the USNH buildings to be followed in the event of threats to the safety of occupants. These may be internal threats, external threats or threats arising from a natural disaster”. This SOP was completed and published on 3/12/2020.

In January 2020 we received complaints that traffic was travelling along our driveway and parking lots at excessive speed. We researched various options for installing rumble strips and/or other options for “traffic calming” and signage to slow down traffic. None of the options seemed practical and we asked the Daycare Director and our Administrator to appeal to drivers via email and/or newsletters for reduced speed.

At the beginning of March 2020, after discussions with Al Bosch and Nancy Apfel, MT proposed discouraging anyone over 70 from attending the Sanctuary service, streaming the service live via Zoom and discontinuing Coffee Hour. Almost immediately after that our Minister, John Marsh, the Board and the Management Team decided that the building should be closed except for visits that were essential for continued running of the society. Services and meetings were moved online using Zoom.

## Monitoring of Policy 1.10: Safety

In April, we developed contingency plans that identified personnel who would perform essential tasks in the event of illness of our staff or volunteers.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> week of May 2020, MT proposed the creation of a task force to advise on questions of access to the building and to plan for its eventual reopening. The group became known as the Building Reopening Advisory Group (BRAG). We invited 3 Board members, 2 Staff members and an ER physician visitor (now member) to join us. The first meeting of the group was scheduled for early June. BRAG developed guidelines for the use of the building that were published in the newsletter in July. BRAG continues to meet as needed and has updated and clarified building and parking lot use guidelines.

In July, we worked with Buildings and Grounds to install a camera at the front door to observe activity at the door and on the front patio. The camera allows real time monitoring from a smartphone or from a PC. The camera also records when there is movement so that events can be reviewed over a period going back for several months.

We report compliance with section 1.10

MT December 10<sup>th</sup> 2020



## BRAG Update for BoT 12.10.2020

1. BRAG meeting 12.09.2020
2. CT/New Haven County Covid 19 Status: Risk level: severe outbreak  
Positivity rate: 7.0
3. Report on Building Use since the week before Thanksgiving – Jamie Ross
  - a. BRAG protocols continue
  - b. Front door video monitoring
  - c. Individual access of the building : Rev. Linda Susan, Jesse, Oscar, Terry Durham; Worship Service video taping as needed on Thursday, Friday, Saturday.
  - d. Group access: Lobby only for occasional Saturday mornings (shopping cards, Waverly, etc.) and Sunday mornings choir.
  - e. Another Octave wreath and poinsettia sale outdoor pickup
4. Cuddle Time Nursery School: use of lower level and 2<sup>nd</sup> floor Children's Chapel and unisex bathroom.
  - a. Dec. 2/3 Staff member tested positive. Maria notified Dept. of Health, closed the school, everyone (staff, children, parents) was tested, deep cleaning of the spaces. School reopened Dec. 9.
5. Orchestra New England (ONE) rental late afternoon Dec. 15 of sanctuary for a rehearsal for 6 instrumentalists. Oscar will be present to open and close the building and clean the women's bathroom. 36 hours before sanctuary space is used again.
6. RE classes: Jesse Geist  
All RE classes have been remote and virtual since before Thanksgiving and will continue so into mid-January.
7. Christmas Eve Plans: Rev. Lindasusan
8. Looking ahead into 2021
  - a. Current protocols and monitoring will continue
  - b. UUA guidance: buildings should remain closed until June
  - c. GA planning: the event will be on Zoom.