

Unitarian Society of New Haven  
Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Trustees  
February 11, 2021

Accepted March 11, 2021

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

**Board Members Absent:** Tina Santoni

**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

Bernice lit the chalice and read an excerpt from the book *Caste: The Origins of our Discontent*, by Isabel Wilkerson.

We read the Board Covenant and followed with a life check-in.

There were no changes to the agenda.

## 2. Reports

### Minister's Report

Rev. Lindasusan reported that feedback on the CT Worship Tour was mixed. Some loved it, others missed our services. A main goal for the five congregations was to give the worship teams a break, which was accomplished.

Nearly all the committees Rev. Lindasusan has been meeting with are asking the right kind of questions about their work, which is encouraging and a sign of good congregational health.

Rev. Lindasusan has been fielding more pastoral calls, probably due to better understanding of how to reach them, rather than to increased need.

Rev. Lindasusan asked if the Board needs anything in particular from them, or has any expectations about how many committees they will attend. The Board expressed trust in Rev. Lindasusan's allocation of their time, urging them to be protective of the number of evening meetings. We also encouraged Rev. Lindasusan to consider attending parts of meetings.

They brought up the Commission on Institutional Change report – what is the low-hanging fruit that USNH could implement fairly easily? What is appropriate for ministerial leadership, Board leadership, and for other lay leadership?

Finally, Rev. Lindasusan has an essay in a forthcoming book, *The Through-Line*, which reflects on 200 years of the [Berry Street Essay](#), North America's longest continuously running lecture

series, which was started by William Ellery Channing. Rev. Lindasusan's chapter reflects on the essays of the 1990s.

Rev. Lindasusan's report to the Board is appended to these minutes.

## **Financial Reports**

Larry reported on our current financial status through December 31, 2020. He shared a summary report on the balance sheet (USNH's Assets and Liabilities) and walked us through a summary Profit & Loss statement. Although expenses are less than revenue, a good portion of our pledge revenue was prepaid in the previous fiscal year. Excluding those prepaid pledges, our pledges are at 47% halfway through the year.

Although there is still significant uncertainty, our operating budget looks promising and our overall financial position is strong.

Larry also reported on the Ad-hoc Committee on Financial Roles and Responsibilities (CFRR), which the Board appointed at its January meeting, and which Larry is chairing. As a first step, he used several source documents to create a spreadsheet listing roles and responsibilities. He will identify conflicting comments, then the committee will meet to resolve conflicts and decide how things should be done.

## **Management Team Reports**

***Building Reopening Advisory Group:*** Gwen reported that BRAG last met in December and will meet later in February. Nothing has really changed since December, the protocols in place seem to be working. The positivity rate for CT has gone down to < 4%. Rev. Lindasusan noted that many people are waiting to have memorial services either outside or in the sanctuary.

***Council of Chairs:*** Gwen reported that 24 people attended the meeting, which began and ended on time. David took an excellent set of notes, which the MT will share with us. Cindy Chelcun made a well-received presentation on the Stewardship Ambassadors initiative. The Council will meet next in May.

*{We took a five-minute break.}*

## **Monitoring of Policies**

David reviewed that the policies were developed by previous Boards, and the Interpretations were developed by previous Management Teams, although revisions to interpretations are presented to the Board when appropriate. David walked us through his report on

1.2: Emergency Management Team Succession and

1.7: Asset Protection

David noted that he will have been on the team for five years in July and Gwen has been on the team for three years.

Asked about strategies for recruiting new Management Team members, David replied that team members are appointed by the Board but usually recruited by word of mouth by the Management Team.

Asked why policies are phrased in the negative, Rev. Lindasusan explained that the policy governance idea is to give the operational team as much freedom and creativity to pursue means toward the Ends. The Board sets policy to define the parameters of a “sandbox.” Then the Management Team and staff have the freedom to act within those parameters.

The Board accepted the two compliance reports, which are appended to these minutes.

### **3. Future Planning**

**Lighthouse Structure:** Nancy reviewed the issue of the lighthouse structure offered us by the Yale Humanist Society. Lots of detail-oriented questions have been posed, which would take time to investigate. More fundamentally: Do we want it? Does it represent us?

Board comments include:

The structure is a quite a presence and would, effectively, sit on our grounds permanently.

What would be the purpose of our accepting the gift?

The energy has been mixed – it’s an interesting piece of art, but there are lots of concerns.

Conflicted – likes the humanist message expressing what they do believe, instead of what they don’t believe; the structure seems to incorporate humanist symbols in a way that is also respectful to theists; concerns that the message might be lost out of context, about the size, and about how it would serve our community.

The saying resonates, but there may be other pieces of art that resonate more widely, perhaps from our own community.

Several members noted that they continue to be opposed to accepting it.

**MOTION:** Nancy moved and Bernice seconded We will graciously decline the offer from the Yale Humanist Society of the lighthouse structure. **The motion passed unanimously.**

Rev. Lindasusan reflected that we seemed to have a good process. We asked the right questions, we had time to sit with it, but also didn’t drag it out endlessly.

### **Discussion of *Widening the Circle of Concern, Hospitality and Inclusion***

Emily reiterated the main takeaways of this chapter that resonated for her. Namely, that for USNH, as for many UU congregations, we like to think of ourselves as radically welcoming but we are not actually welcoming to all. The report cited experiences of people being “repelled” by UU congregations.

Emily noted that Hospitality and Inclusion firmly resonate with our Among Ends and asked what pieces of these recommendations can we incorporate at USNH, either through our Board processes, or working with the Management Team, Rev. Lindasusan, and the congregation.

Board member comments include:

Is the UUA building resources for training and certification on hospitality and inclusion? Rev. Lindasusan is unsure of the timeline for that.

Someone who has been on the Sunday Morning Team noted that there was essentially no training.

In the notes from the January 31 meeting, Jesse suggested we look at some of our unwritten rules, for example, about how our service should run or how food should be distributed, are inclusive or exclusive. For example, we tend to hold dear a quiet sanctuary. Although we have an insert in the hymnals welcoming children, people get annoyed when children make noise. Around food, people get upset about kids grabbing cookies, being impolite, taking “too much.” There are probably general expectations of behavior that are well beyond that – perhaps things that we all do without even thinking about.

The UUA already has resources and we should use them. Not just the greeters and ushers, but all of us, need to be educated about what radical welcome means. As an example, someone had related to them that some people were very put off by overhearing casual comments in the social hall about how easy it would be to raise \$100,000 for the kitchen renovation – they felt like maybe they didn’t belong here.

What do we really mean by radical acceptance? We should have some discussion on this.

We talked about allowing ourselves to be changed by newcomers; has been thinking about how difficult it is to do. How would youth and younger people especially even know how to make changes, who to talk to. We have the Board and Management Team emails but most of the congregation doesn’t know what the Board or MT does. This may speak to a larger problem. We need to work on making it more accessible to influence how things are done.

In the chapter on [Congregations and Communities](#), there is an example of an aging congregation (Malden, MA) that decided to actively recruit more diverse leadership and is now a thriving congregation with a young adult focus.

Although our email aliases are useful, they mean that you don’t really know who is receiving those emails.

Rev. Lindasusan noted that a congregation’s website is often the first point of contact potential newcomers have to a congregation, and that our website is not welcoming. They are starting to work on it, but it needs a lot of work. For example, if the website is more user friendly and gives people access to information more efficiently, if you send an email to [worship@usnh.org](mailto:worship@usnh.org), you may have found that email alias on a website page that has pictures of the worship committee, maybe a video from a committee member. They cannot

overstate the importance of the website as a hospitality tool. Concern was mentioned about placing all the technical burden on one person. Rev. Lindasusan said that we don't have a communications plan but are working on it. It will take time but it is a fixable problem.

A member recalled a powerful sermon at previous church on these kinds of issues. How do you greet someone new or who you don't know. Being open not just as a community but as individual people. How are we behaving in ways that are not really the way we want to be in the world?

The bigger issue is our overall culture. Maybe we are *good enough* but we have a long way to go.

Rev. Lindasusan noted that the Board can be leaders. We can go through training, name this as core to who we are and want to be, and model for others (which is easier in person).

Rev. Lindasusan engaged in a role play with a Board member. Instead of saying "are you new here" say "I don't think we've met." This avoids embarrassment and possible insult if the person has been coming for a while.

To sum up, Emily asked how we move forward and suggested that we spend time at the spring board retreat digging into the report. Do we hand this off to the Management Team?

Rev. Lindasusan suggested we see if the Adult RE committee would be interested in facilitating training. Anna Flores, Membership Coordinator, may be a person to interface with the Sunday Morning Team.

Becky will talk to Becky Sandmann, co-chair of the Sunday Morning Team and of Adult RE.

#### **Evaluating our effectiveness as a Board**

Rich said that he doesn't have a good way to evaluate board size, due to too many confounding factors, namely our interim ministry, welcoming a new minister, COVID, changing board members, and the fact that we have had a smaller Board this entire year – no "pre-test." He did find some UUA comments recommending smaller boards.

Rev. Lindasusan suggested that we reach out to regional UUA staff to see if they have resources. Rich will do so.

Nancy asked if there are other ways we can self-evaluate, for example regularly asking ourselves How are we doing? How effective are we?

#### **4. Closing**

##### **Process Observation**

Nancy said that she would like to talk about doing process observations at our next meeting. How do people feel about it? Is it working?

Bernice observed that we have good reporting. What impresses her most is that there is a respectful and open way in which we have a generally fluid conversation around a variety of topics. There's a good rapport among Board members. A good process, good discussion, openness to listening to people. Regarding the break, she didn't notice an uptick in energy after the break but not anything negative either.

### **Consent Agenda**

The Board accepted the minutes from the regular January 10, 2021 and special January 28, 2021 Board meetings, and the revision to the Policy Governance Manual, which includes the revised Among Ends and use of inclusive pronouns.

### **Thank-you notes**

Nancy will write the thank-you note this month.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:37.

Respectfully submitted,  
Becky Friedkin, Clerk

### **Attachments:**

- Rev. Lindasusan's report to the Board
- Management Team reports of compliance with policies 1.2 and 1.7

### What do you notice?

- From late December through the end of January, we'd participated in a "worship tour" with four other UU congregations in CT. I heard a mix of feedback, from those who loved getting the chance to experience the way others do worship to those who missed the sense of home in USNH services. I do believe we succeeded at our main goal, which was to give the different congregations' worship teams a breather.
- I feel as though nearly all of the committees I've met with are asking the right questions about their work. For example, the Board's examination of who should hold the responsibility for different financial processes will give you a clearer view on your fiduciary duties.
- I've been fielding more pastoral calls. I suspect this is primarily a function of people now knowing how to get a hold of me rather than an increase in need.

### Do you have questions?

- Are there things you need from me that haven't come up yet? Or more of things I'm already doing?
- What are your expectations, if any, around which/how many committees I meet with regularly? (This is a check-in about assumptions, not an active issue.)

### What do you need?

- I'd love to figure out a plan around how to move forward on the COIC recommendations, following up on the 1/31 conversation. What is the low-hanging fruit for USNH? Which aspects are best led by the minister and which by the laity (and in particular the board)? How do the recommendations affect USNH's policies, both for governance and operations?

### Anything else?

- "The Through-Line," a book reflecting on the 200th anniversary (in 2020) of the Berry Street Essay, is in the final stages before publication. I'm thrilled to be among such excellent contributors. (I wrote the chapter about the essays from 1990-1999.) What a delight that it's finally coming out!

## Management Team monitoring of Policy Governance Sections 1.2 and 1.7

Current Governance Policy sections are in black; MT interpretations in blue; MT report is in red

### 1.2 Emergency Management Team Succession

In order to protect the congregation and Board from sudden loss of Management Team services, each Management Team member must not fail to designate and keep informed at least one other Management Team member of their activities as they relate to Board and Management Team issues and processes.

#### MT Interpretation:

The Management Team shall ensure that there are at least two people informed of Board and Management Team issues and processes. Key leadership requirements include familiarity with the board's role and functions, with the day-to-day operations of USNH.

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

**MT Interpretation Approved by the Board: October 12, 2017**

Members of the Management Team are appointed by the Board. The management team presently has 3 members plus the Minister. (Jeremy Hill resigned from the Management Team on 1/12/2021 having served since April 2018) We work collaboratively. All of the members are involved in decision making and aware of financial and operations situations. We are informed of what other members are working on at our bi-weekly meetings and keep track of tasks assigned through carefully recorded minutes. Between meetings we keep in touch by email and phone. Should one member of the team become, for some reason, unable to serve, we are equipped to reassign their duties and tasks to other members of the team.

We report compliance with section 1.2

### 1.7 Asset Protection

The Management Team shall not allow the assets of the Society to be unprotected, inadequately maintained, inappropriately used, or unnecessarily risked.

#### 1.7.1 Insurance

The Management Team shall not fail to assure that:

- a. The building and its contents are insured against losses from fire, wind, flood, theft and vandalism.

#### MT Interpretation:

Property Liability Insurance on the USNH buildings and contents shall be purchased and renewed on an annual basis. Timely payment of insurance premiums shall be made to prevent gaps in coverage.

We have maintained an Insurance Policy with the Church Mutual Insurance Company for many years. The current policy was renewed on 10/17/2020 and provides a blanket liability of \$4,129,200 for the building and personal property with a \$1,000 deductible. Our two outbuildings are also covered for the cost of replacement.

- b. The officers, Board, Management Team and staff have professional liability insurance.

#### MT Interpretation:

Professional liability coverage protects against lawsuits which claim that people as individuals or collectively have used bad judgment, have a conflict of interest in decision making, or have used funds improperly. (It does not protect against illegal actions.)



## Management Team monitoring of Policy Governance Sections 1.2 and 1.7

Our Insurance Policy includes an umbrella of \$1,000,000 per claim and an aggregate limit of \$3,000,000. The policy insurance review document states; “The General Liability insures your organization, members, clergy, board members, employees, volunteers, and most organizations you control for claims for negligence involving your premises, sponsored activities (on-or-off premises) operations, products (including food preparation), construction, athletics, and the use of nonowned watercraft”

- c. The Society has General Liability insurance.

### MT Interpretation:

General Liability insurance shall be purchased and renewed on an annual basis. Insurance against theft of property and cash is part of the Property Liability coverage. The cash theft limit is \$2,000, based on the underwriter’s assessment of the maximum amount of cash that would ever be by on the property at one time.

Our Insurance Policy takes the form of General Liability Insurance with an Umbrella policy addition. The policy covers loss of cash up to \$2,000 with a \$250 deductible.

We report Compliance with a), b) and c).

*Policy approved by the Board: May 14, 2015; revised February 14, 2019*

**MT Interpretation Approved by the Board: June 9, 2016; revised February 14, 2019**

### 1.7.2 Other

The Management Team shall not fail to assure that:

- a. The buildings and grounds and equipment are maintained to allow continued value and use.

### MT Interpretation:

Through its oversight of staff and committees and through preparation of the annual capital and operating budgets, the MT will assure that the building, grounds, and equipment are maintained, repaired, and replaced as necessary, within the financial capabilities of the Society.

The Covid 19 pandemic has required us to keep our building closed except for the activities of the daycare and essential visits by our staff to keep the building and its programs running. Our Sexton has continued to work his normal schedule to maintain the building and grounds and to make minor repairs when necessary.

On July 18<sup>th</sup> 2020 a security camera was installed by Buildings and Grounds to allow monitoring and recording of all activity at the front double doors and patio area. Our administrator has an “app” installed on her smartphone that allows her to see who is entering and/or leaving the building.

The MT created a Building Reopening Advisory Group to issue recommendations concerning the safe use of the buildings and grounds. This group will advise on when we can begin to use our building more fully again.

Much of the regular volunteer led work on our grounds has continued, coordinated by our Building and Grounds Committee. This has included spring and fall cleanups, plantings and maintenance of trees and shrubs.

- b. Financial controls are in place to guard against loss and mismanagement of funds.

### MT Interpretation:

## Management Team monitoring of Policy Governance Sections 1.2 and 1.7

The treasurers and Finance Committee have implemented procedures for counting, handling, and securing cash and checks, making weekly bank deposits, timely recording of financial information in USNH databases, monthly reconciliations of bank accounts, and oversight of these financial tasks as they are carried out by staff and volunteers.

The Management Team and the Finance Committee has continued to work on the “Financial Roles and Responsibilities” document originally produced in 2019. This document was reformatted as a “Standard Operating Procedure”, SOP-00013 and was posted on our website and a printed copy saved in the office in May 2020. A new group called “Committee on Financial Roles and Responsibilities” has been created by the Board. That committee will be chaired by the Treasurer and will revisit the roles and responsibilities of all the groups involved in financial management.

- c. Funds used for operations are kept in insured instruments.

MT Interpretation:

Operating cash (currently set at an average of 15% of the annual operating budget) is held in FDIC insured checking accounts, money market accounts, and/or CDs.

Liquid funds are kept in Citizen’s Bank accounts and are FDIC insured. CD’s have been purchased from TIAA and are also FDIC insured.

In addition, the Management Team shall not:

- d. Unnecessarily expose the organization, its Board, or staff to claims of liability or risk the nonprofit status of the Society.

MT Interpretation:

Through its oversight of staff and volunteer operational activities, the MT will endeavor to prevent activities and behaviors that are a) illegal; b) inconsistent with the mission, values, and ends of the Society, or c) inconsistent with the Society’s Covenant of Right Relations.

Many of the programs and activities of the society have continued and even expanded in spite of the pandemic. Face to face meetings have largely been replaced by “zoom” sessions. Though many changes have happened, the MT has not become aware of any activities that are a) illegal, b) inconsistent with the mission, values, and ends of the Society, or c) inconsistent with the Society’s Covenant of Right Relations

We report compliance with Section 1.7

*Policy approved by the Board: May 14, 2015*

**MT Interpretation Approved by the Board: June 9, 2016; revised February 14, 2019**

MT 2/11/2021