

Unitarian Society of New Haven
Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Trustees
June 10, 2021

Accepted July 8, 2021

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

Board Members Absent: Clerk Becky Friedkin

Others Present: David Stagg (Management Team); Jean Rosenthal (also MT) attended for a short while to report on the activities of the Building Reopening Advisory Group (BRAG)

1. Gather

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

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

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

Agenda change: Rev. Lindasusan gave their report first, as they were not feeling well.

Minister's Report

In reflecting on their first year, Rev. Lindasusan noted how feeling “not alone” was so palpable and helpful to them. They offered gratitude for the collaborative spirit they have encountered in all their work at USNH this first year, including from the Board. They do not take this for granted and are exceedingly thankful. They also expressed special gratitude for the departing Board members, noting that this gratitude is also on behalf of the congregation

They are impressed that the Board self-evaluation is being taken so seriously and wonders if it might be shared with other UU Boards once it is well established.

In looking towards the summer, Rev. Lindasusan elaborated on the trauma of the past 15 months and its impact emerging now. Rev. Lindasusan noted their own weariness and suggesting that this may come up for all of us. It is so important to make space for this, to acknowledge the trauma, and to be intentional in taking care of ourselves.

Rev. Lindasusan will be attending virtual General Assembly from June 21-27 and will be on vacation for the month of July. Jamie and Jesse will know how to reach them in case of a true emergency.

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

{Rev. Lindasusan left the meeting}

2. Future Planning

Board Evaluation

Rich reviewed the progress made on the Board self-evaluation. The details are being worked through regarding layout with the assistance of Becky and Emily. The self-evaluation form will be sent out very soon and all Board members are asked to complete it in a timely manner so that results can be collated and results reviewed at July's Board meeting.

The final assessment instrument is appended to these minutes.

Leadership Development

Nancy reported that Bobbi Pace (Management Team) would like to lead this effort. Bobbi attended a two-part UUA workshop on *Centering Gifts*, which recommends conducting structured one-on-one conversations with, ideally, all members of the congregation, focused on identifying gifts people have to offer USNH. Gifts are defined very broadly and are distinct from skills. The intention is to deepen meaningful engagement with the congregation, which fits well with the emphasis on our Among Ends.

It is also more appropriate for this effort, which is implementation, to be led by the Management Team than by the Board. Bobbi will convene an ad-hoc group to develop a structure in which to implement this idea, so that it is sustainable. The group will also work on some conventional leadership development, such as identifying and offering resources to those in and considering leadership roles. The Board affirmed its strong support for this project and voted unanimously to approve this.

Board Summer Service – volunteers, date, and after-service Board chat

Rich will be the Worship Associate for the virtual Board summer service on August 1st. Emily, Nancy, Becky, and Tina volunteered to participate. Incoming members of the Board will also be invited to participate. Leadership as Ministry will be the focus, as well as time given to the 8th principle.

{A 10 minute break was taken at this point}

3. Reports

Management Team Reports

Monitoring of Policies

The Board accepted the compliance reports on Section 1.3 Treatment of Paid and Volunteer Staff and 1.4 Compensation and Benefits, which are appended to these minutes.

Building Reopening Advisory Group

Jean Rosenthal (Management Team) joined the meeting to report. Services are expected to be virtual through the summer with the first anticipated service in person in the sanctuary to be Water Communion on September 12, assuming safety indicators and scientific criteria allow.

Gwen will continue to lead the BRAG after stepping off the Management Team at the end of June. The next BRAG meeting will be on June 30.

Jean's written report is appended to these minutes.

Council of Chairs

Becky sent her report on the May 12 Council of Chairs meeting via email. Her report and the full notes of the Council of Chairs meeting are appended to these minutes.

4. Closing

Consent Agenda

The Board accepted the minutes from the May 13, 2021 Board meeting and the May 23, 2021 Congregational Meeting.

Process Observation

Bernice noted that our meeting had a very positive spin to it this evening, with much positive regard and gratitude for shared support expressed.

Thank-you notes

Emily, Elizabeth, and Tina will write thank you notes this month.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:11.

Respectfully submitted,

Becky Friedkin, Clerk, based on notes by Tina Santoni

Attachments:

- Rev. Lindasusan's report to the Board
- Final Board evaluation document
- Management Team reports of compliance with policies 1.3 and 1.4
- Building Reopening Advisory Group report
- Report to the Board about the May Council of Chairs meeting
- Complete Notes about the May Council of Chairs meeting

Rev. Lindasusan's Report to the Board

What do you notice?

- As I consider the challenges of the past year and those coming up as we prepare to reopen, I keep coming back to a fundamental principle operating at USNH: I know I'm not doing any of this alone. I love being part of the conversations and adding my perspective, but what a gift to trust that the staff, board, lay leaders, and the rest of the congregation are truly in this together. This kind of collaboration increases my confidence that we'll find the best way forward on any given task. Let's continue to nurture it!
- I'm excited that the Board is taking self-evaluation so seriously. Once we land on a tool that feels useful and effective, I'd love for USNH to share it as a resource with other congregations.

Do you have questions?

- Is it possible to be more grateful for Nancy Apfel as President, Becky Friedkin as Clerk, or Elizabeth Soderholm as the first youth trustee? I'm pretty confident the answer is no. BIG THANKS to you all for your leadership, thoughtfulness, commitment, and good cheer. What a joy it has been to work with you this year.
- This summer, how will you give your body the space it needs to begin processing the trauma of the past 15 months? Particularly if you don't have any vacation time planned?

What do you need?

- The Ministerial Advisory and Support Team (MAST) had our first meeting on June 2. As the name implies, this team — which consists of Linda Barrett, Cindy Chelcun, Becky Friedkin, and Jim Peters — is charged with encouraging my ministry through shared reflection, feedback, cheerleading, and confidential support. (Please note that this model is different from the previous Committee on Ministry.) Even in our first meeting, they've already proven helpful. I'm grateful to each of them for saying yes.
- I'll have limited availability while attending Ministry Days/General Assembly (June 21-27). I'll also be away for July, during which time I plan to pause email and leave my work phone unattended in the hope of decompressing before the new congregational year starts. In case of a true emergency (death, fire), Jamie and Jesse will know how to reach me.

Board Assessment Questions June 2021

This survey is a pilot of a great many questions to help the Board assess its effectiveness in 2020-21. Most of the questions have been framed in terms of a five-point response scale. The language in quotation marks comes from sections 2 and 3 of the USNH Policy Governance Manual about the responsibilities of the Board. After each set of multiple-choice questions there is an opportunity to provide comments. The final questions are open-ended.

You may leave blank any questions for which you feel you cannot provide an assessment or do not apply to you.

Please respond honestly and in the spirit of constructive engagement and improvement, and complete the survey no later than Monday, June 28th, so that we may use the collated results for discussion at the July 8th Board meeting.

Please share your name:

To what extent did the Board:

Response scale: *Not at all / To a small extent / To a moderate extent / To a large extent / To a very large extent*

1. “re-explore Ends policies” (2.4 Agenda Planning)
2. engage in “ongoing discussions [with the congregation] that focus on achieving our shared values and mission” (2. Global Governance Commitment)
3. “systematically monitor and review Board policies” (2.4 Agenda Planning)
4. “continually improve Board performance through Board education and enriched input and deliberation” (2.4 Agenda Planning)
5. “provide education and communication to enhance the congregation’s understanding of policy-based governance” (2.4 Agenda Planning)

Opportunity for comments on the above 5 questions here

6. focus on “strategic leadership more than administrative detail” (2.2 Governing Style)
7. function with a “clear distinction of Board and Management Team roles” (2.2 Governing Style)
8. focus on “the future rather than the past or present” (2.2 Governing Style)
9. “focus...on the intended long-term impacts or ends...not on the administrative or programmatic means of attending those Ends” (2.2.3 Distinguishing Ends From Means)
10. stay informed regarding the financial needs and status of the congregation and provide appropriate financial oversight when needed?

Opportunity for comments on the above 5 questions here

11. encourage and consider a diversity of viewpoints (2.2 Governing Style)
12. keep deliberations “fair, open, and thorough but also timely, orderly, and kept to the point” (2.5.1.1. Meeting Leadership)

Board Assessment Questions
June 2021

13. “enforce upon itself whatever discipline is needed to govern with excellence..[in] matters such as attendance, preparation, policymaking principles, respect of roles, and ensuring continuance of governance capability” (2.2.4 Board Discipline)
14. “invest in its governance capacity” by using training and retraining to “orient new Board members, as well as to maintain and increase existing Board members’ skills and understandings” (2.8.b Cost of Governance)
15. maintain the highest of ethical standards and behaviors (2.2 Governing Style)
16. “monitor and regularly discuss the Board's process and performance as necessary and at least annually” (2.2.1 Excellence in Governing)
17. hold the Management Team accountable for pursuing the Ends prioritized by the Board

Opportunity for comments on the above 7 questions here

Please rate the following:

Response scale: *Poor / Fair / Good / Very good / Excellent*

18. the current Board size
19. the diversity of identities on the current Board
20. the balance of officers and at-large trustees on the current Board
21. the schedule of Board meetings (frequency, length)
22. the engagement and focus during Board meetings
23. the overall effectiveness of the FY21 Board

Opportunity for comments on the above 6 questions here

Open-ended questions:

24. What is most striking about feedback from the congregation to the Board?
25. What has been most **rewarding** for you as a Board member? Have you felt effective? Why or why not? Did you enjoy being on the Board? Was there a sense of trust and open/honest discussion?
26. What has been most **challenging** for you as a Board member?
27. What could make the Board more effective in the future?
28. Any other comments?

1.3 Treatment of Paid and Volunteer Staff

With respect to treatment of staff/volunteers, the Management Team may not act in a manner inconsistent with UU Principles or cause or allow conditions that are inhumane, unfair, or unprofessional.

Furthermore, the Management Team shall not:

- a. Discriminate against existing or potential paid or volunteer staff based on race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, physical disability, marital status, sexual orientation, or gender characteristics, identity, or expression.
- b. Operate without or fail to comply with written personnel policies that clarify personnel rules for staff, provide for effective handling of grievances, and protect against wrongful conditions.
- c. Subject paid or volunteer staff to unsafe or unhealthy conditions.

Approved by the Board: October 9, 2014; revised February 12, 2015

MT Interpretation.

Section 1.3 a. and b. are explicit and require no interpretation. However, we note that the USNH Employee Handbook elaborates the requirements of 1.3 a. and describes in detail the rules and procedures called for by 1.3b.

Section 1.3 c indicates two areas to be addressed. USNH must comply with longstanding regulations from the fire marshal and the building inspector. Examples include inspection of fire extinguishers, the sprinkler system and testing of the fire alarm. More recent safety concerns require that we develop new procedures e.g., lockdown procedures and new ways of alerting building occupants to emergency situations.

MT Interpretation submitted for approval May 9th 2019

MT Report

All staff members were asked by the Personnel Committee to report any issues covered by 1.3 that have not been properly addressed by the Management Team. There were no complaints.

We note that in May 2020 we reformatted the Employee Handbook into our "Standard Operating Format" and published it on the website as SOP-0016. We revised the document in November 2020 to reflect the discontinuance of the Section 125 Flexible Benefits Plan.

Monitoring of Policy 1.3: Treatment of Paid and Volunteer Staff

With the arrival of the pandemic in March 2020, a statewide “lockdown” began. The MT approved the closing of the building except for visits by staff for essential operations. The Daycare closed for a short period but was allowed to reopen within a few weeks with a limited enrollment. The MT continued to meet regularly via Zoom and kept in touch with staff and volunteers by email and phone.

In late May 2020 the Management Team formed the Building Reopening Advisory Group (BRAG) to create policies and procedures for the use of the building. We invited Board members, staff and a USNH ER physician member to be part of the group. The group met 12 times by Zoom and issued and revised guidelines for building use that were published in the Newsletter and on our website. Version 6 of the guidelines titled “USNH Access Policy for Outdoor Events” was released in August 2020.

Our Congregational Administrator, Jamie, continues to maintain the spreadsheet detailing regular inspections of fire extinguishers, sprinkler system, elevator maintenance, emergency lighting etc. Jamie also visits the property regularly and has reported to MT on any snow/ice conditions, downed trees, wildlife/insect problems, etc. that need MT attention.

A camera and associated equipment to allow Jamie to see personnel at our front door using her smartphone and to record all entry and exit from our front double doors was installed in July 2020.

We report compliance with section 1.3.

Submitted by the Management Team June 10th 2021

Submitted by the Management Team June 10th 2021

Monitoring of Policy 1.4: Compensation and Benefits

1.4 Compensation and Benefits

With respect to employment, compensation, and benefits to employees, consultants, contract workers, and volunteers, the Management Team shall not cause or allow jeopardy to the fiscal or institutional integrity of the Society.

Accordingly, the Management Team may not:

- a. Change any minister's compensation, benefits, or allocated professional expenses previously established by the Board.

MT Interpretation:

The management team includes changes to the minister's compensation, benefits, or allocated professional expenses only when staff-wide COLA or structural changes are recommended by the Personnel Committee as part of the new annual operating budget. When these changes are accepted by the Board and the Congregation we assume they replace the "previously established" numbers.

- b. Promise or imply permanent or guaranteed employment.

MT Interpretation: No interpretation required

- c. Recommend compensation and benefits that create obligations over a term longer than revenues can be safely projected.

MT Interpretation:

The Management Team is responsible for including compensation and benefit payments in the annual operating budget which projects sufficient income to make those payments. MT recommendations on compensation and benefits are limited to a single fiscal year.

- d. Establish current compensation and benefits that deviate materially from the non-profit, geographic, and professional market for the skills employed.

MT Interpretation:

The Management Team relies on the Personnel Committee for compensation and benefits advice. The committee has direct experience, is highly qualified and takes note of both UUA recommendations and general market conditions.

Policy sections approved by the Board: October 9, 2014; revised February 12, 2015

MT Interpretations approved by the Board April 2018; revisions to a., b. and c. approved June 2019

Monitoring of Policy 1.4: Compensation and Benefits

MT Report

There have been no variations to any of the salary provisions of the 2020-2021 operating budget with the exception of reduction in the hours for our childcare providers. When the building was closed due to the pandemic, the need for childcare during services ceased.

We received a Paycheck Protection Plan loan in May 2020 to assist with salaries. However, pledge income has kept up with our salary requirements and we are on track to finish the year within budget. The recommendations from the Board, the Finance Committee and the Personnel Committee for the next fiscal year were included in the budget and approved by the congregation on 23rd May 2021.

We report compliance with all the paragraphs of this section.

Report submitted by the Management Team June 10th 2021

Report to the Board on the Building Reopening Advisory Group (BRAG)

Gwen Severance will continue to facilitate the Building Reopening Advisory Group after she leaves the Management Team in July.

USNH will continue our online Sunday services through the summer. **We will return to indoor services in the fall, if safety indicators and scientific criteria allow.** We hope we can all come together in the sanctuary for the Water Communion service on September 12.

BRAG will hold its next meeting on Wednesday, June 30 on Zoom to talk about the process and timing of opening up the building for meetings and planning for fall services. In her invitation to the meeting, Gwen said, "The data is promising; vaccinations in SE Connecticut are rising, people are traveling, and we will want to proceed carefully and thoughtfully in making the right decisions."

She closed with a quote from Dr. Anthony Fauci, Director of NIAID, in his [virtual address](#) at the Yale School of Public Health's commencement on May 24.

"If it feels like you're asking too many questions, issuing too many warnings, and communicating too much, then you probably have it just about right."

Submitted by Jean Rosenthal, Management Team

Report to the Board on the May Council of Chairs Meeting

Becky reported on the May 12 meeting of the Council of Chairs, in Gwen's absence.

Twenty-two people attended the meeting, which was convened by Gwen Heuss-Severance.

In addition to the usual reports from USNH committee chairs, Lurline deVos, Becky Sandmann, and Tisa Wenger, of the Social Justice Council, reported on the activities of the social justice task forces. The contents of these reports are captured in the [USNH Annual Report](#) on the USNH website.

Bernice Marie-Daly reported that the Board Retreat of May 8 focused on radical welcome and anti-racist work, and that the Board would consider adopting the 8th principle at its May 13 meeting.

David Stagg walked through the proposed FY22 operating budget, which is funded in large part (\$60,000) by the forgiven PPP loan. Several expressed concern about this and there is strong interest in attracting more members into leadership and also speaking about our financial situation throughout the coming congregational year.

Rev. Lindasusan spoke briefly, offering her thanks to congregational leaders and her assessment that USNH is a vibrant and healthy congregation.

David offered special thanks to Gwen for her long service on the Management Team. She will be stepping off at the end of June. Bobbi Pace is joining the team.

Notes on the May 12, 2021 USNH Council of Chairs Meeting

Present: Gwen Heuss-Severance, Jean Rosenthal, David Stagg, and Rev. Lindasusan (Management Team), Becky Friedkin (scribe), Robb Camm, Lurline deVos, Terry Durham, Kathy Haskins, David Jones, Jenn Kapranov, Jason Kyle, Bernice Marie-Daly, Patricia McChesney, Susan Meredith, Fred Morrison, Bobbi Pace, Laura Patey, Jim Peters, Becky Sandmann, Tisa Wenger, Sarah Whitson (22 people)

Gwen opened the meeting shortly after 7 pm. Jean Rosenthal read the [chalice lighting](#) about doing the work of the congregation, while Gwen lit the chalice. Bobbi Pace read the first half of the [congregational covenant](#) and Sarah Whitson read the second half.

Most of the meeting was devoted to hearing **updates about the work of the congregation**. For the first time, the Council of Chairs heard updates, from Lurline deVos, Becky Sandmann, and Tisa Wenger of the Social Justice Council, about the work of the social justice task forces. The reports given at the Council of Chairs meeting are captured in the congregational [FY21 Annual Report](#) (on the USNH website – from the home page, to About Us, to [USNH online](#)), so are not repeated here.

Bernice made a report about the current work of the Board, which held a retreat on May 8. The intention was to explore our understanding of and commitment to radical welcome and anti-racist work. The Board had a very thoughtful and productive discussion. At our regular monthly meeting on May 13, we will consider whether the Board should adopt the 8th principle for its work.

David Stagg gave an update on the proposed FY22 budget. His remarks can be found appended to the draft minutes of the May 23 Congregational Meeting (also on the USNH website under [USNH online](#)). David noted that the budget meets the priorities communicated from the Board, including staff salary increases, an increase in our UUA dues, maintenance of key social justice programs, purchase of equipment for live-streaming of services, and funds for the installation of Rev. Lindasusan (which is planned for November, in conjunction with the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the founding of USNH).

A key reason we have a balanced budget for FY22 is the forgiven loan of more than \$70,000 from the Paycheck Protection Program, \$60,000 of which is being allocated to the FY22 budget. These funds will not be available for the following year; this is a large hole to fill in our already lean operating budget.

Discussion points on the proposed budget:

If we didn't have the \$60,000 from the PPP loan, we would be in a much different position. We need to realize that there is a financial hole that we need to figure out how to deal with.

We are hoping that the shortfall is due to the pandemic. Promised pledges barely cover personnel. Last year our goal was \$500,000 and we came much closer to meeting it.

Notes on the May 12, 2021 USNH Council of Chairs Meeting

This is *not* an unusual year, we have used temporarily restricted funds to cover budget holes for many years. The perspective of the Stewardship team is that we should spend the coming year talking about this. To continue to do the work that we value, people need to understand the cost.

We need to present the entire range of issues to the congregation. Many people don't read the newsletter. We would like to make our website a more active way of communicating with the congregation. Maybe we can feature some of these points during worship services

People often deepen their connection to USNH and understanding of its financial needs through work on committees and other leadership. We need more involvement in volunteering within the congregation, both to prevent leadership burnout and to deepen connections.

Gwen invited **Rev. Lindasusan** to speak to us

Rev. Lindasusan first thanked the group for all that they are doing, noting that there is a lot going on, even during the pandemic. This is a lively, vibrant congregation.

Rev. Lindasusan and the stewardship team want to have stewardship testimonials throughout the year to help normalize talking about money and have inspiring stories about money and giving. Having more people from the congregation feel engaged and feel ownership of the activities and how they further the mission of the congregation is crucial. Otherwise, there will be very difficult decisions to be made – what will we cut?

From a place of abundance, we have seen the generosity of the Saturday community events, and in the stewardship campaign. Let's make sure people understand how vital it is throughout the year. Rev. Lindasusan offered big kudos to the Stewardship team.

Rev. Lindasusan closed by noting that people are excited to get together again in person. Yes, we had to pull a lot of the PPP money for this year's budget and it is an unusual year. We have all been through a lot. Let's keep doing what we are doing and change course where we need to. You all are inspiring in what you make happen.

Gwen extinguished the chalice and spoke the chalice extinguishing words.

David noted that Gwen is stepping off the Management Team at the end of June and extended special thanks to Gwen. We are very fortunate that Bobbi Pace is joining the Management Team.

The meeting ended at 8:57 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Becky Friedkin