



Cultivate Courageous Connections

Board of Trustees Meeting

September 19th, 2023, at 6:30 PM in the Bernstein Room and via hybrid set-up.

Board members in attendance: Kurt Merkle, Michael Amy Rodriguez Cira, Laurie Reed, Shannon Maples, Gwynne Movius, Craig Miller, Bob Gorman, Ben Baxter

Board members absent: Kathleen Carpenter

Staff in attendance: Kelly Greene, Lisa Bovee-Kemper, Alesia Hutto

Transition Team (TT) in attendance: John Burns, Shandra Stout, Lisa Hagen

Settled Minister Search Team (SMST) in attendance: Dave Warren, Barry Ahrendt

Call to Order

- Chalice lighting words (Bob)
- Vision, Mission, and Leadership Covenant Statements

Transition Team Check-In

John expressed appreciation to the Board and especially Rev. Lisa for their respectful communication during a difficult time.

The Transition Team reviewed options for various paths we can take:

1. Settled minister search (path that we are already on)
2. Continued interim ministry (usually 2 years, but can be more or less)
3. Developmental ministry (an acknowledgement that we still need assistance in working through some things; typically 3-7 years)
4. Contract minister (can be any period of time)

UUCC bylaws require ministers to be in fellowship with the UUA. (At last Sunday's discussion, we heard someone say that only *settled* ministers need to be in fellowship. We will need to correct that.)

Approval of Minutes from August 2023 BOT meeting

The Board was notified of the bylaws requirement that "the names of the new members shall be read into the minutes of the Board." New members from July will be entered into the August minutes. The minutes were unanimously approved as amended.

Recognition of New Members (August 2023)

- Christy and Ryan Miller
- Cynthia Busher (reinstatement)

Eyes and Ears

Craig heard about technical difficulties from a group that hosted a meeting in Freeman Hall. There are written instructions available for how to operate the equipment and staff are onsite to assist. Craig will bring this information back to the group.

Shannon suggested the Board attempt to have a presence at most UUCC activities, which used to be an expectation (as we have heard from Kelly and others). The Board agreed to look at the calendar each month and strategically plan our time out since we are already spending so much time on Board activities. Kelly suggested the Common Read sessions would be good ones to attend (Thursdays in October via Zoom).

CT Report

MET audit information was included this month as a matter of process to ensure no errors or omissions in the accounting.

Settled Minister Search Team Update

Prior to the meeting, Kathleen had provided a report from the SMST. Two votes were needed:

- Negotiating Team approval – Three members will serve on the negotiating team. Ellen Holiday will be the SMST rep (with expertise in human resources). Ben Baxter will be the Board's rep (with financial expertise). Kathleen recommended Jane Gorman as the third member (with contract negotiating experience). The Board voted to appoint Jane as the third member (with Bob abstaining from the vote).
- Approval of budget increase for in-person facilitation of a training required by the UUA ("Beyond Categorical Thinking" or "Breaking Barriers, Building Beliefs"). The Board prefers in-person facilitation rather than virtual. The additional request for \$3k will include the honorarium for Sunday's preaching. All SMST expenses are coming from reserves (Alesia reported that we have \$230k in reserves as of the end of August). The vote for the budget increase passed unanimously.

The congregational survey has launched, significantly shortened from the version provided by the UUA.

The SMST is conducting focus groups with key constituencies. These last about one hour with limited questions asked of all focus groups. The Board scheduled its session for Oct. 4, 7pm, in-person.

Petition re: bylaws change to remove the requirement that ministers be in fellowship with the UUA

~57 people attended Sunday's discussion session in person. About 7 tried to attend via zoom but the sound was not conducive. We felt the meeting went well; respectful comments and we heard a number of fresh perspectives.

A question was asked about when the fellowship provision was added to the bylaws. Gwynne's research since then indicates that it went into effect in 2002, just before Jay arrived.

It appeared some attendees did not know that there are additional types of ministries than a settled minister. We have several decision points coming up through the UUA search process:

- 11/15: The congregational record (based on surveys and focus groups) must be submitted.
- 12/1: Decision about whether to continue contracting Rev. Lisa – in a third interim year or as a developmental minister. If we continue pursuing another minister, she will need to search for a new congregation. (She may be available to us later if she hasn't yet found a congregation, but no guarantee.)
- Jan/Feb: Interviewing of pre-candidates.
- 3/28: We can start making offers through the UUA search process.
- Approval from both the Board and the congregation will be required for a settled minister.

Any decision to change our direction will be the Board's in consultation with SMST and TT.

- The more specific we can be about the Board's intent, the better off we will be. The Transition Team thinks a failed ministerial search (not finding a good option OR not approving a candidate) would be the worst outcome. Rev. Lisa surfaced that hiring a minister who does not last long would also be a worst outcome.
- Since our charge to the SMST to find a settled minister, we learned that there are several members who say they will vote against any settled minister candidate who signed the "white ministers" letter against Todd Ekloff (~500 ministers signed out of ~1500 fellowshipped ministers, so there is a reasonable chance we might try to call one of the signers).
 - Rev. Lisa thinks there are things we can do to manage this conflict, but that this is the riskiest part of our search. She is already receiving inquiries from other ministers about "gadflies" at the UUCC. We are the only large east coast congregation dealing with the gadfly concern. Rev. Lisa also noted the

cumulative impact on her focus and energies from this group's efforts since February.

- Both staff and Board members expressed concern that if we change our current path in searching for a settled minister, it could harm the congregation. Concerns were also expressed that we could lose members who are "holding on" for a settled minister.
- The Board decided we are not going to consider changing our current path in search of a Settled Minister at this time. We will maintain awareness of upcoming timelines/checkpoints in case we need to make a change. The vote on the bylaws change on Oct. 1 may provide better information about the pulse of the congregation.

Next steps:

- The more we can educate the congregation, the better. SMST needs to be clear on their charge and be able to communicate that.
- SMST survey will allow us to take the temperature of the congregation; results available in a few weeks.
- John and Barry will work together to create a flowchart of upcoming checkpoints.
- A fact sheet from SMST and BOT with information about alternatives will be helpful.
- We need to quickly implement the Covenant of Right Relations, which may allow us to address this conflict in a healthy way that makes us look great to potential ministers.
- While there are ministers who seek out conflicts that they can help manage, Rev. Lisa said there is an expectation in a settled ministry that the system will be broadly able to manage conflict in a reasonably healthy way. We are on the path and time will tell.

Planning for the Special Congregational Meeting, 10/1/2023

At the next discussion session on 9/24, Board members will reprise their roles from the last meeting (Kurt and Michael opening and leading the meeting, Shannon in the sound booth with Alesia). Laurie will run the mic this week.

Anyone will be allowed in the sanctuary or the Zoom room to participate in the meeting, but only "members in good standing" may vote per the bylaws. The Board discussed how best to respect the confidentiality of members' votes while also efficiently conducting the meeting and ensuring votes are counted only for members eligible to vote. (Some of the petition signers were not voting members, including several youth.) Kelly will send a communication in advance to new members who are not yet eligible to vote.

The Board decided to set up the balloting just like we do at our local polling places. Members will check in at a table by last name to receive their ballot in advance of the meeting (preventing them from having to write their name on the ballot itself).

Alesia, Belinda, and Rev. Lisa are working out the details of virtual participation/voting. We will livestream the meeting but the livestream link will not be public; it will be streamed through the Zoom meeting. We will need two Board members (Laurie and Shannon) in the sound booth with Alesia to run the Zoom, relay questions/comments from the Zoom to the in-person meeting, and manage the voting. The vote can be through a Zoom poll or a Google doc. Final details will be worked out this week and we will start communicating in *Currents* on Thursday. Members will need to register to receive the Zoom link.

(Incidentally, staff noted that our *Currents* open rate is unheard of - higher than 50% generally and even higher lately with communications about the petition.)

Kelly will provide a list of voting members the Friday before the special meeting so that we can validate both in-person and Zoom voters.

If we do not have a quorum, we can continue with the meeting if 80% of those present vote to continue without a quorum. If 80% do not vote to continue, we will have to reschedule the meeting.

Healing Circles

Rev. Lisa reports that these are going well. The two sessions so far have had four participants each. Clarifying questions are allowed but otherwise participants are able to speak and be listened to, followed by a time of silence to hold what is shared.

Rev. Lisa's takeaways so far:

- There is not as much concern about change here as some of us think. There is some discomfort, though, that in this time of change, those dismantling may not be the same ones rebuilding.
- The UUA/gadfly conflict sounds coded to some people. They report that it is hard to understand what the conflict is really about.
- Anger/blame that some members previously directed to one of our former ministers seems to be shifting to the UUA.

Only two people have signed up for Thursday's healing circle; Rev. Lisa will post on Facebook to increase attendance. Scheduling of additional circles will be paused until after the SMST schedules its focus groups.

A healing circle specifically for the Board will be scheduled following the special congregational meeting and the Board's SMST focus group.

Deliberations

Several Board members wanted to discuss opportunities to improve our processes for deliberating/making decisions.

Kelly told the story of the "Abilene paradox," in which a group of people go along with the flow because they mistakenly believe everyone disagrees with their own perspective, allowing the group direction to end up counter to the preferences of many or all in the group.

Other concerns include:

- “Groupthink” - when some in the group go along with an idea to minimize conflict even if they don’t think it’s the right decision.
- We continue to give in to the “sense of urgency.”
- Some of us are processors and need time to think before voicing an opinion. By the time we speak up, the rest of the group may have already decided.
- A lot of discussion has been happening lately by email/text and needs a quick response. The multiple methods of communication can be confusing, and if discussions/decisions take place during work hours, not all can participate.

We discussed establishing best practices about how to operate. Suggestions during the meeting (and send later by Kelly via email) include:

- Be aware that a lack of opposition to an idea does not mean it is supported. Do not assume that silence means agreement.
- Ask for each person’s perspective before decisions are made.
- Actively encourage dissent. If needed, assign a person to be a dissenter.
 - Allow for and even appreciate disagreement. Consider how to make decisions when everyone does not agree.
 - Be willing to share your dissenting opinion.
 - Know decisions will be stronger with diverse opinions involved in the process.
- Understand the power dynamics in the group.
 - If your position or identity grant you more power and space in a conversation, avoid being the first person to talk or the one who talks the most.
 - If your position or identity grant you less power or space, speak up and take up more space.
 - Notice who speaks the most/least and adjust.
- Leave space for those who need time to consider their responses.
 - Provide relevant information in advance, allowing sufficient time for a thoughtful response whenever feedback is requested.
 - If you need more time to consider your response, let the group know. Sometimes we might need to move on without making a decision.
- Do not prioritize efficiency by default. Be clear about when a decision needs to be made. Whenever possible, leave time for discussion and collaboration.

Rev. Lisa will find the draft revised Board covenant from last year and send to us. We can incorporate some of these strategies.

Timeline of Interim Tasks

Rev. Lisa has created a Trello board with interim tasks that need to be completed.

We are prioritizing the petition response right now, but Rev. Lisa and staff continue to move forward on other items. Rev. Lisa believes we can complete the remaining interim tasks prior to June, when we hope to call a settled minister.

Covenant of Right Relations Policy

Rev. Lisa sent the draft policy out today via email. The Board agreed to review and provide feedback by Oct. 8. A Zoom meeting for discussion is scheduled for Oct. 11, 7:00 pm.

Transforming Conflict

A reminder that we agreed to read and discuss the book this year. Rev. Lisa has discussion questions for when we are ready.

Executive Session

The Board called an Executive Session to discuss concerns/emails received from individual members.

Adjournment