



Cultivate Courageous Connections

Board of Trustees Meeting

December 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, Gwynne Movius, Bob Gorman, Ben Baxter, Kathleen Carpenter, Craig Miller, Shannon Maples

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

Observers/Search Team Representatives: Barry Ahrendt, Kathryn Whitfield

Call to Order

Chalice lighting

Vision, Mission, and Leadership Covenant Statements

Discussion of Transforming Conflict, Chapter 2

Approval of minutes from November 2023 BOT meeting

- Approved unanimously as written.

Recognition of New Members (November 2023)

- Lilly Hagen
- Jean Ritok
- Peter Basone

Eyes and Ears

Rev. Lisa heard a couple of concerns about the recent service that featured JETPIG (values from the proposed Article II revision). She has apologized for not clarifying ahead of the service that staff intend to provide opportunities for the congregation to “try on” the proposed values so that members can make their own decisions by the time of the vote. Several Board members provided their own feedback about how they received the JETPIG story.

Board members who attended the Article II education session felt it was a good discussion, and the printout of proposed values side-by-side with current Principles was helpful. One noted that it was surprising how much of the conversation focused on undercurrents related to white supremacy rather than on the proposed revised text.

Kelly heard from several members in recent weeks who are pulling back from the congregation and stopping pledges because they feel this is a place of conflict. The Facebook group is part but not all of it. Several Board members offered to reach out to these members; Kelly will share the list.

Rev. Lisa noted that, prior to the interim period, most conflict was shut down privately and not engaged in a transparent way. The change of dynamic since then has been significant. She suggested that the only way forward is for the Board, staff, and other leaders to have open conversation and continue to articulate and support the change we are trying to create. Part of that is allowing the conflict to be known and processed, which is messy and hard. Alesia noted that there are ways to mitigate the conflict, such as reassuring messages from staff and Board about how to chart our path forward, and that even though this isn't comfortable, it is healthy.

Rev. Lisa suggested putting more energy toward the positive places. It is easy for the difficult conversation to take over. We can instead direct our conversation towards connecting – e.g. things we learned from our book read, things we are working on, and our plan to keep moving forward.

CT Reports

- 160 average attendance is an increase.
- The tree removal has been completed under budget.
- The CYRE report will be included in next month's report. Paula has not been feeling well.

Board Presence at Upcoming Events

Five Board members signed up to help serve hot cider at the Christmas Eve reception.

Staff Appreciation

Alesia has arranged for staff to receive a bonus this year to be paid from reserves. There were no raises this year and a bonus would help the staff feel more appreciated. The Board voted unanimously to approve the bonuses.

Land Acknowledgement / Mortgage Payoff

Since the mortgage has been paid off, Michael suggested that this would be a good time to develop a relationship with a local tribal community and to set up a contribution (one-time or ongoing). Rev. Lisa will take this suggestion to the Intersectional Justice Team (IJT) to thoroughly consider the request and determine whether it fits into the scope of IJT's work. If they choose to pursue it further, they can investigate whether any local indigenous groups would like our support, review what other UU communities and Charlotte organizations have done, and engage additional stakeholders.

Encouraging Pronouns as a Welcoming Norm/Practice

At the request of one congregation member, the Board talked about pronoun usage by congregation leadership.

Staff have been encouraging/modeling the use of pronouns here for several years and it is becoming a norm in most progressive spaces. Rev. Lisa's preference and encouragement is for speakers in the service to introduce themselves with pronouns, but it is not a "policy" and is not compulsory.

The Board recognizes the importance of us modeling this welcoming practice and encouraging it in others. Craig offered to write an article for *Currents*. The staff will note it to each leadership team too.

Settled Minister Search Team Update

The Search Team noted that Article VIII, Section 2 of the UUCB Bylaws titled "Professional Ministry: Selection" includes an unusual clause: "with the concurrence of the Board."

"Calling a Minister shall require an affirmative vote of at least ninety (90) percent of the members present and voting, by a secret ballot, at a duly authorized meeting of the Membership. Recommendations for shall be made by a Search Committee, *with the concurrence of the Board* (italics added), at a duly authorized meeting of the Membership. This Search Committee shall consist of seven (7) voting members elected at a duly authorized meeting of the Membership."

According to the UUA, it is unusual for a Board approval to be included in the Bylaws. The Search Team reads the clause to mean the Board could interview and approve the candidate before the vote.

The Search Team also referenced Rev. Lisa's previous recommendation (in an interim report) that the UUCB might benefit from a longer interim. They requested a definitive statement that the Board supports continuing with the settled minister search process.

Rev. Lisa believes the greatest risk to not finding a settled minister would be if we have an active, escalating conflict. The Gadfly conflict at the UUCB complicates the search but it is positive that we are moving toward more conversation. Rev. Lisa feels things are trending in the right direction. The vote on the petition and the feedback on the Search Team's focus groups/surveys has been positive and encouraging. The results of the data collection felt honest and accurate, which is important in ensuring the congregation is transparent with the ministerial candidates. Rev. Lisa now supports the decision to move forward with the search. She has noted that the congregation is deeply fatigued by change and transition (e.g. pandemic, staff changes). However, the settled minister will not stop the feelings of upheaval and change; we will still be in a time of transition and some of the interim tasks will continue.

It's important that we seek a candidate who has general experience and the ability to step into a large congregation. If the new minister understands where the congregation is and

can step in, Rev. Lisa thinks we will likely have a successful settled ministry. If the Search Team does not find the right candidate, she recommends we consider developmental ministry instead of extending the interim.

The Board discussed the clause, agreeing that it leaves room for interpretation. However, we feel that we have already concurred with the Search Team's choice by appointing the Team. The Board indicated that we trust the Search Team to make the final decision.

Barry, observing on behalf of the Search Team, felt reassured by the conversation and will take this back to the Search Team.

The Board noted that we need to bookmark this clause for the next bylaws review.

Right Relations Team Committee Nominations

Rev. Lisa has some candidates in mind. Laurie will schedule a meeting for discussion with Kelly and Rev. Lisa. They will have names ready for discussion at our January meeting.

Discussion of Language about Voting in the Bylaws

There are several specified exceptions in the Bylaws related to congregational voting on various matters. Article IV, Section 3 allows absentee balloting for congregational meetings; however, the sections about selection and dismissal of a minister, removal of a Trustee, and amendments to the Bylaws require members to be "present and voting."

The Board has mixed feelings about the "present and voting" language. There are advantages to requiring members to be engaged in and present for the discussion before the vote. On the other hand, life happens, and not everyone can attend the vote, even virtually. Times have also changed, and people expect to be able to vote absentee. Board members noted that it is important to provide multiple engagement opportunities before the vote.

The Board appointed a subcommittee (Gwynne, Kurt, and Bob) to research the voting methods of other congregations. They will provide an update in January and a recommendation in February. We would like an attorney to review the final proposal. The goal is for a final decision by March 31. The congregation must vote on any proposed changes by May 5, prior to the vote on the settled minister, and the Board must provide at least 15 days' notice of the vote in advance of the meeting.

The subcommittee will engage the Search Team for their feedback as well. Absentee votes for the settled minister, if allowed, would be due five days prior to the meeting – which would be during candidating week before everyone has had a chance to meet the minister.

Barry previously sent a link about virtual voting from the UUA; Alesia will forward it to the Board.

Discussion on whether the Board Should Take a Position on Article II

Gwynne does not remember the Board ever taking a position on a denominational vote. Board members agreed that it is appropriate for us to take positions on our own governance; however, we should encourage members to vote their conscience on denominational matters.

Summary of Action Items

- The Board will read chapter 3 of Transforming Conflict for discussion next month.
- Board members serving at the Christmas Eve service will coordinate shifts via email. Kelly will take a question from the October Executive Session, about connecting with formerly active members, to the Membership Team.
- Rev. Lisa will take the Board's suggestions about the land acknowledgement to the Intersectional Justice Team (IJT).
- Staff will note the welcoming nature of pronoun utilization to each leadership team, and Craig will write an article for Currents.
- Laurie, Kelly, and Rev. Lisa will discuss candidates for the Right Relations Team and bring suggestions to the January meeting.
- Gwynne, Kurt and Bob will research the question about voting in the bylaws and bring an update in January.
- Michael and Shannon will work on a Board orientation document and an annual calendar.

Meeting Adjourned