



Cultivate Courageous Connections

Board of Trustees Meeting

January 16th, 2024, 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: Barry Ahrendt (Search Team member), Ken Smalley

Call to Order

Chalice lighting

Vision, Mission, and Leadership Covenant Statements

Discussion of Transforming Conflict, Chapter 3

Approval of minutes from December 2023 BOT meeting

Approved following several corrections.

Recognition of New Members (December 2023) - No new members in December.

A higher than usual number of members were removed in December due to the winter stewardship campaign; typically, these members had not been involved for years. Kelly reported that the conversations with these former members were positive.

Eyes and Ears

Recent activity and staff moderation on the member Facebook page led to much discussion in-between Board meetings. Rev. Lisa held a meeting after a recent service with approximately 40 attendees, who were provided the opportunity to speak about the moderation decision and, more generally, about the way we communicate together. She is trying to model the importance of moving conversations offline. Rev. Lisa has also contacted several members over the past couple of weeks and had direct conversations with some. She has indicated that other staff and the Board are also available for conversation. Rev. Lisa and Belinda will meet Friday to review what happened in this specific instance, consider the expectations of the Facebook page, and discuss next steps (e.g. clarify existing policy or revise the policy).

The Board has received a couple of emails from members expressing concerns; we will work to develop responses.

CT Reports

A Board member asked about the possibility of adding paid long-term disability (LTD) insurance for the minister and full-time staff. The UCC currently offers LTD but staff pay the premiums. The Board became aware of the status of this benefit during discussions of the ministerial contract. (Paid LTD is a benefit recommended by the UUA.)

Alesia discussed LTD with the Finance team. They agreed to advise against adding LTD, for two reasons. First, staff must opt in within the first 90 days of employment, so current staff who have not opted into the existing benefit (at their own expense) would not have the option. Second, staff receive a tax benefit when paying their own LTD.

Board Presence at Upcoming Events

- Chili cookoff is Saturday, January 20
- The next Article II Discussion is January 21 after the service
- Board members should sign up for dates to be present in Freeman Hall
- The Adult Religious Education Team is seeking Credo speakers; Board volunteers are encouraged

Settled Minister Search Team Update

The Team spent December finalizing the documents packet, including information about how the UCC operates (budget and financials, Board minutes, vision, mission, ends statements, policies, personnel manual, etc.) Beginning in December, interested candidates could review the congregational record online.

The Team received the list of interested candidates on Jan. 2 and invited the ones they liked for Zoom interviews. In preparation for the interviews, the Team reviewed the ministerial records of these candidates, watched sermons online, and reviewed other materials posted on the candidates' websites. The next step is to determine who to invite for a "pre-candidating" weekend to preach at a neutral pulpit in February and March.

Candidating week is scheduled April 28 - May 5. The Board should ensure availability during this week to attend both services and other social events. The Team also asks the Board's support in encouraging members to be present for the service on May 5 and the following congregational vote. The Team is confident they will have a full publicity plan to ensure the congregation is aware of all the opportunities to meet with the candidate; suggestions are welcome in the meantime.

Team members are working to stay aware of what is going on in the congregation - both in general, and specifically related to the search. They have been asked about the candidates, and all they can say is that the process is moving along. A *Currents* article summarized the process: <https://uuccharlotte.org/minister-search-team-update-save-the-dates/>

Right Relations Team Committee Nominations

The subcommittee consisting of Laurie, Kelly, and Rev. Lisa developed a list of nominees to be reviewed with the full Board in Executive Session.

Board Candidate Recruiting Team Nominations

It is time to appoint a recruiting team to accept self-nominations and actively recruit new members for next year's Board.

Staff asked that the recruiting team coordinate with Kelly to prevent members from being asked to participate on multiple teams, which happened last year when there were several recruitments happening at the same time.

The Board will discuss recruiting for this team in Executive Session. Kelly can provide us with information about specific volunteer histories.

Discussion of Language about Voting in the Bylaws

Gwynne conducted research on the bylaws of several other UU congregations (including those in NC, Washington DC, Atlanta, and Pasadena CA) related to voting for a settled minister. She found a range of practices. At least two did not allow any absentee voting. Several congregations had recently conducted a ministerial search, and many others had updated their bylaws since the pandemic to clarify the "present and voting" question.

The subcommittee assigned to consideration of the language in the bylaws (Gwynne, Kurt, and Bob) agreed that the current "present and voting" language allows remote voting (taking place during the meeting), as was done during the vote on the petition earlier this year. Allowing remote voting does not require a change to the bylaws, although the subcommittee suggested that a policy should be created to ensure consistency from Board to Board in areas like remote voting, counting of ballots, etc.

The option to allow absentee voting (prior to the meeting) would require a bylaws amendment. The subcommittee looked to the full Board for the direction in which they should go. If we choose to amend the bylaws, we should consider the language about the timing of absentee balloting, as Board members interpret the current language in different ways.

The Board and staff held a lively discussion about the options. Overall, the group expressed a desire for a process that allows as many as possible to have input. Proxy voting, which allows members to delegate to other members to cast a vote on their behalf, was also discussed. A couple of congregations allow proxies instead of, or in addition to, absentee voting. The Board was overall not in favor of allowing proxy voting.

A significant concern was discussed about members voting absentee early in candidating week without the opportunity to get to know the candidate. Rev. Lisa noted that ministers in the high-pressure situation of having to make a good impression in just over a week would prefer that members have as much information about them as possible before voting. The Board learned from Barry that the congregation should know the name of the selected candidate around the first week of April, allowing members about three weeks to

research the candidates in depth and seek out their sermons online.

The subcommittee asked that the Board take a vote in favor or opposed to consideration of absentee balloting. The Board unanimously leans toward allowing absentee, with some caveats around the details of the implementation.

Kathleen will contact the Search Team to ask their input on the question of absentee voting. The Search Team may elect to reach out to the Transitions Office for guidance.

The Board's subcommittee will proceed with a draft amendment to allow absentee balloting. If there are concerns from the Search Team, the full Board will discuss.

Summary of Action Items

- The Board will read chapter 4 of Transforming Conflict for discussion next month.
- Kurt will draft responses to the concerned emails we have received from members.
- Board members should sign up for dates to be present in Freeman Hall.
- Kathleen will ask the Search Team for their feedback on allowing absentee voting for the settled minister.
- The subcommittee reviewing the bylaws will proceed with a draft revision to allow absentee voting.
- Craig has drafted an article for *Currents* about the Board's decision in December to encourage/model pronoun usage. He will share the draft.
- Michael and Shannon will work on a Board orientation document and an annual calendar.

Meeting Adjourned

Executive Session

The subcommittee responsible for identifying Right Relations Team nominees utilized the written qualifications from the Board's policy, considering the composition of the group as a whole:

- Involvement in the congregation
- Temperament
- Professional experience in counseling/mediation
- Team players
- Justice work
- Ability to manage conflict in a healthy and thoughtful way

The Board provided input on the subcommittee's nominees before discussing a recruiting plan.

For the Board Recruiting Team, Kelly will provide a matrix that includes volunteer involvement by member. All Board members are asked to review the matrix for nominees, with the goal to identify members who know a lot of people and can represent different segments. The goal is to be ready to approach nominees after the next meeting. Shannon will share the list of those who were asked last year.