

First Universalist Church, Unitarian Universalist  
Auburn, ME  
Board of Directors  
Meeting Minutes  
February 1, 2023

Joint Meeting with Committee Chairs and other Church Leaders

Present: Anne Perron (President), Linda Greathouse (Vice President), Claire Hebert (member-at-large) via Zoom, Jane Pentheny (member-at-large), Betty Riffin (member-at-large), David Das (Clerk), Rev. Jodi Hayashida (*ex officio*)

Committee Chairs and other Church Leaders: Esther Tucker, Bill Eldridge, Greg Whitney, Toby Haber-Giasson, Mary Sylvester, Ellen O'Brien, Ron Spofford, Angela Foss; Via Zoom: Sharon Kinsman, John Spruill, Paula Spruill, Bill Frayer

Guests: Levesque

6:30: Anne Perron called the meeting to order.

Anne read the Mission Statement and the Vision Statement.



**Board Chalice**

Anne brought out the “Board Chalice” that she has created: a piece of 60-80 year old apple wood (grows slowly; dense) with hieroglyph figures to represent the Church supported by 3 legs made of oak with similar figures to represent the many members of the congregation who support the church.

Remarkably brief sharing by all present.

**New Committee Structure:**

Anne thanked everyone for taking the time to attend this meeting. She summarized the proposed new vision of committee structure (discussed by the Board at its January 18, 2023 meeting). Presented the diagram: committees in clusters, supported by the mission, the history, the people, and money. Each cluster to have a Board member-at-large as its liaison to the Board. Reasons for the proposed change:

- Gaps in committee life
- Shortage of people to serve on committees
- Need for more communication between committees, between committees and the congregation, between committees and the Board

Anne initiated a brainstorming session on how to populate the clusters and she invited comment.

*There was a lively discussion. In the interests of clarity (and the sanity of the clerk), the minutes summarize each person's comments without attempting to give a detailed account of the actual back-and-forth nature of the discussion.*

**Toby Haber-Giasson:**

- Has there been consultation with committee chairs?
- Frankly insulted by the determination that the Council of Committees is not working. Council has been “on hold” waiting for board action to establish shared use of vestry space. *There were two meetings with the board (May and June), both of which failed to lead to a process for sharing space.*
- Council of Committees worked well in coordinating events. Non-event committees were invited to Council of Committees meetings, but they tended not to attend.
- Possible cluster: Finance, Membership, Stewardship.
- We need to compile an accurate member and friend list.
- Regardless of how we organize, we need to deal with the reasons members- and even chairs- are "taking a break" from church.

**Mary Sylvester:**

- Suggested a couple of clusters: Committee on Ministry, Worship Associates, RE, Music; Coffee Hour, Church Events, Membership.
- Create a cluster around Finances.
- Enthusiastic about the Board liaison.
- Need to prioritize: which committees should be addressed first?
- Introduced a broader perspective: the opportunities presented by the return to church post-COVID. Do we return to pre-pandemic models? Or do we now have an opportunity to do something different? To reinvent church reality? To be vital? The example of Trinity Episcopal in Lewiston reinventing themselves.
- PSDI has brought in new, young members to the church. For them, engagement in church life is volunteering at the PSDI.

**John Spruill:**

- Proposed model does not replace Council of Committees; it supplements the Council of Committees.
- Will help with communication between committees and with the Board; Board liaison a good idea. The value of frequent communication.
- In the past a specific committee would officially host coffee hour; now a cluster could take on that role.
- Send a copy of the diagram to the on-line attendees.

**Ellen O'Brien:**

- An idea worth exploring.
- The diagram honors the past, honors the present, helps us look to the future.
- Offers an opportunity to meet the current challenges; a way of bringing people back into active church life.
- Cluster that would allow us to coordinate fundraising activities
- Awareness that Finance is stretched; cluster model could help alleviate that stress.

**Greg Whitney:**

- Importance of linking Operations and Finance: not only bringing in money, but oversight on its disbursement.
- Plugging committees into the various clusters would reveal certain patterns; overlap between clusters.

**Esther Tucker:**

- The importance of the Opportunity Fair.

**Bill Eldridge:**

- Change is good, but should be careful not to throw out the baby with the bathwater.

**Anne Perron:**

**Summation:**

- No intention of insulting anybody.
- An initiative under development.
- Council of Committees could indeed continue to exist.
- The Board in November was starting from Square One; how do we all rebuild church life with so few people?
- How do we support a flourishing committee such as the PSDI?
- How do we support/revitalize other committees?
- Again thanked all attendees – clear that we are all committed to reviving church life.
- Will meet again for further discussion.

**Greg Whitney:**

Brief summary of our role in City of Auburn's efforts to provide a Warming Center over the weekend:

- First Universalist will be staging area for YMCA buses to/from the City's Warming Center on Valerie Drive.
- PSDI open: Friday Noon-4 pm; Saturday 9 am-3 pm; Sunday 8 am- 4 pm (regular hours). Will offer shelter and food to those waiting for the buses.

**8:50 Conclusion of Joint Meeting**

Regular Board Business:

**Consent Agenda:**

- Accepting the January 18, 2023 Meeting Minutes
- Board President's Report
- Minister's Report

**President's Report:**

- Anne gave an update on her work at refurbishing the church.
  - Creation of a church meeting room (in large RE classroom)
  - Plan to move church administrator into former Outright Room (former administrator office). Repaint in light green.
  - Plan to move Minister's office to former RE room (former minister's office). Minister can meet in church meeting room if accessibility is a concern.
  - Wi-Fi installed for entire first floor.
  - Has discussed all of the above with Greg Bianconi.
- Angela Foss is new chair of Music Committee
- February 18 Discernment sessions: Anne and Linda hope to establish exact times of sessions soon; inform the congregation ASAP.

**Minister's Report (see appended):**

- Jodi highlighted the challenges of being nimble in our response to emergency situations; how do we make quick decisions.
- Awareness of how the events of the past year conspire to make decision making difficult

**9:35: Adjournment**

Respectfully submitted,

David H. Das (Clerk)

**Minister's Report**  
**2.1.23**

Processes:

Linda and Anne will connect with Paul in preparation for the meeting on the 18th

I've put Anne and Linda in touch with Christine, who is the regional point person for transitional ministries. She will be the church's resource moving into the interim search process. You should have all received the transitional ministry handbook from me.

Warming space- it would be a good exercise for leadership at some point to analyze the process we went through after the city reached out to us. What was clear was that, while there were good intentions, we are not set up to be nimble in our decision making, which is what is required in such moments. It would benefit the church to spend some time reflecting on what served as barriers to rapid decision making and what we could expand on to continue to create a sleeker process. This is not the first and will not be the last time the church is asked to step up in a time of crisis.