

Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Montclair
December 15, 2015
Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
Meeting began at 7:35 pm

Staff: Revs. Justin Osterman and Judy Tomlinson

Members: Judith Rew, Chris Corbett, Mike Mernin, Ellen Fenster-Kuehl, Steve Ramshur, Dorothy Sommer, Mary Moriarty, Denise Rodgers, Dennis Drew, Jim Abramson, Dottie Hiebing

Visitor: Dave Bessey, Ministerial Transition Committee

Opening Words and Statement of Guiding Principles: Judith Rew
From *Just Mercy*, by Bryan Stevenson

Check in

Adoption of Board Minutes
Chris moved/Denise seconded/accepted

Thank you Notes
Laurice for the Pageant; Kate Conroy for the gift collection; Chris Glickson for the Christmas tree

President's Report: Mike Mernin
I concluded my appearance at the deposition and supplied the documents in the lawsuit. We were well served by our attorney. Final bill is about \$5,000.

Chris moved to accept the expense / Dennis seconded / passed

Interim Ministers Report: Justin
I sent out a show and tell about church growth. Jason Brome generated the excel sheet. I want to lay before you the context as we go forward. The reality in a nutshell is that since 1968 the U.S. population is about 200 million. By 1980 it surpassed 300 million. In UU it dropped from 177,000 to 161,000. Those numbers are reflected in this graphic. All three of the lines are arcing downward pretty steadily in the last 8 years. Institutional religion is under stress and strain in the U.S. today. Very few are growing in numbers and ours isn't one of them. Attendance is particularly declining among younger people. What we've been doing isn't working. This is real. So what do you want to do? This is a resource-full congregation. There are all sorts of reasons why the congregation could be thriving and growing and doing all sorts of exciting things. So we should chart our organizational assets and decide how you want to proceed. Making no decision is making a decision. On Sunday after I wrapped up a lovely day here I went and visited the congregation in Orange. I haven't been there in years. It's beautifully situated in downtown Orange. But the

town changed around the congregation and the congregation couldn't change to accommodate it. In our wired world today the change isn't just what's going on in Montclair, it's what's going on around us. I realize my reactivity to the calendar question [how to get it efficiently updated on the website] is a consequence of living with these numbers every day of my professional life. The significant drop was a consequence of scrubbing the rolls. The drop is from 361 to 337. We looked at our Fair Share contribution and realized it didn't reflect the reality of our membership.

Most people I've showed this to were surprised. This is eminently reversible. But probably will require some difficult conversations.

Chris: We're seeing it in our annual pledge drive. It's getting harder and harder.

Mike: It raises the issue of what we need to be doing as a congregation to attract new members: A different kind of ministry? A different kind of worship service? Who are we and what are we going to do?

Denise: One of the things I'm struck by is the nondoctrinal nature of UUism. A lot of people don't understand and lots of people have discomfort. Immigrants and people of color are not by in large Unitarian. Personally I don't think that's going to change. That said I think my experience is the tension is between how much are we about worship and how much are we about fellowship. So one of the things I experienced two Sundays ago there were a couple of places where there was a reaction to god references. How do we create a space where people understand that we have to recognize a spectrum of belief. We haven't figured out how we message that, how we come to terms with that as individuals.

Chris: On the other side there are more atheists than ever

Justin: There are more unaffiliated people; noncommittal, "Nones" who have no religious affiliation. It has nothing to do with their theology, their orientation. The data on those groups is that even among atheists the number of people who believe in a power greater than ourselves is close to 90 percent.

Steve: I see that drop starting around 1968. The way the UUA responded to the issues of the time caused African Americans to leave the UU in droves.

Justin: I have very definite personal opinions but I'm not here to stamp my opinion on foreheads. This is about helping you see what is really real. There are two courses you can take: one is the path to a great and proud future; the other leads to Cleveland Street (Orange Congregation).

Dorothy: Which groups are burgeoning and doing well?

Justin: The Mormons. The Evangelicals. The groups that are growing are churches with definite theologies.

Denise: The work is to hang onto the core of what we are.

Dave Bessey: Are their UUA congregations in this area that are solving this and doing it well? It would be interesting to do what they are doing.

Justin: My advice: look at people being successful, but look beyond the UU congregations as well. The UUA will give us all the data for the area. But we have to ask who are you today. I submit that there is a deep, broad, rich UU history and theology that most people don't know about.

We had four visitors this month [who signed the book].

Associate Ministers Report: Judy Tomlinson

The Christmas gift delivery happened today going to the William Horton School in Newark with a large number of Senior Youth. We are going to be hosting a Con for the first time in almost ten years. It is a district wide Con on Chaplain Training for young adults, to be held January 8, 9, 10.

This week Judith Stein-Farrell will have her final week with us and she will be leaving on Sunday. We have a number of possible candidates to fill this position. Peter Arian and Avron Stoloff have been on a team to interview candidates.

Harvest the Power is going well and you are all invited to the party on the 28th, in Fletcher Hall, 5:30-8.

Thursday night the Membership Committee is meeting to design and schedule a new New UU class for Spring.

Conventant Groups is vibrant and active, but I believe the program has kind of plateaued at this point.

Treasurer's Report: Chris Corbett

Good, Bad Interesting.

Pledges are coming in well. Short-term rentals are up. Collection in the plate is up. Auction proceeds came in slower this year, but they almost all came last year and expect that they will this year. We are basically even with last year instead of a shortfall.

The Auction was \$4,000 down from last year. We need a good fundraiser in the spring.

The bright side is we have dealt with our facility maintenance issue.

The Bad: The UUA endowment is coming in about two weeks later than usual.

The Emergency Capital Project: To date we have raised \$62,000, of which we've received \$54,000. Way over what we projected.

Roof: We are supposed to get the tiles in next week. We're hoping we'll have enough left to repair the floor under the piano.

One concern: The Nomination and Leadership Development Committee reports that they've asked and can't find anybody to be treasurer. We had planned to have someone on Board by February to go through the budgeting process. We are opening this for suggestions. Or perhaps someone is sitting on the Board who we haven't thought about overtly as a candidate.

Justin urged us not to stand up on Sunday and announce that we don't have a treasurer. It would be helpful to have a job description. Some who were interested thought it was too much work. Are we asking too much? Chris reports it is extremely time consuming and one needs to be here at the UUCM at least once a week.

The bylaws allow us to elect an assistant treasurer. That person wouldn't be on the Board as well. They'd have to be a fairly close team. There is a part of the job that is sort of fun, looking at where we're going, etc.

Justin: So I haven't given a sermon on Systems Theory but I should. Where you see stress in one area, the cause may be in another area. I encourage you to step back. We need to figure out what is the real problem, here. We don't have the data of who [our membes] are, what they do professionally, what their hobbies and interests there. What I am pointing out is that you have an organizational structural challenge. If every year you're putting out a fire you're never asking what's causing the fire.

Chris: I was approached by Teresa DeSousa and was impressed that I had been asked personally.

Jim: Nelia [Sellers] suggested that people here might know someone who might have that background.

Denise: I don't want us to underestimate Chris's point of who does the approaching. Consider where the ask comes from. Also, the email exchange I saw about asking so much for money may be part of the problem. We do have to be much more strategic.

Mike: Just from reading the list of names we have to be cognizant that there are a couple of people on the list who want to retain their eligibility to be on the search committee.

Dennis moves to accept the treasurers report / Dorothy seconded / accepted

Process to Select a Search Committee

Reached a consensus that we want to pursue the plan to call every member. Justin provided an awesome handout that was circulated with the agenda.

Justin spoke to David Keyes, one of our most successful interim ministers and has been an interim minister for over 20 years serving our biggest congregations, wrote this and if we follow this process we really don't have to create anything new. We need to get some communication out right away to announce that everybody will be receiving a phone call. Justin will write that letter. We will each be given 18 names. We don't have to chase people down like the pledge drive. This is telling people: here is your chance to be heard. We are looking for qualities you think will make a member of the search committee. And ask them if they would be interested themselves. Asking what are the good qualities of a candidate for this committee, who works well with others, who doesn't have an ax to grind, a particular agenda. Make the time commitment clear: 20 hours a week for 20 weeks. We will have a script. The Nominating Committee has to be brought into the flow. We need a sit down meeting with the Nominating Committee. Justin should be part of it.

The Board will keep track of the data, the names, "vette" the names. The expectation is that we will see the same 15 people again and again. Judith may record info manually, Steve may create some sort of algorithm.

Mary: My favorite motto is the devil is in the details: Letter, Script, Canvassing sheet of some kind: column identifying leadership skills; interest, etc. We are asking people to think about it in advance.

Justin will put together a script. A preamble, introduction, "I hope you received the letter (etc.)" and then go right to the questions on the David Keyes document. Script ready by the 22nd.

Time frame: Justin had a conversation with Craig Hirschberg. Her perception was that you were very anxious and she thought she should be helpful and wanted to do it quicker. So you all who thought she said this would happen by March. But it doesn't have to.

Should really start after the first of the year. The January board meeting is kind of a soft target, if we start on Jan. 2.

Donna will come up with lists of names.

Motion to accept plan for search committee.

Jim moved / seconded / Passed

Discussion of Board organization and delegation of tasks

We (the Executive Committee) decided to divide up our tasks toward completion of our Board goals. We thoughtfully put together some specific teams to do some

thinking and then come back and re-engage the whole board, setting direction. It has to square with the group consensus.

What Kind of Board do we want to be is a good place to start. Discussion:

Denise: How do the roles and responsibilities of a religious organization compare to a 501c3?

Jim and Chris: Pretty much the same. No major differences. The management is in the Board of Directors, which has the fiduciary responsibility; is responsible and liable. But it could be visionary.

Start by looking at the UUA site, which has a list of Board responsibilities:

Boards delegate CEO and others based on the vision; give them the rules and laws and expect accountability. That would be a visionary/policy board. An operational board decides what color to paint this room.

Mike: Our Wednesday MESH program is an example. The Board had nothing to do with its creation. It was organic. If in the past the Board had been a visionary board we could have implemented that through one or two volunteers and said go and do this. A management board would say let's have a Wednesday night meal. And MESH is a terrific program that we had nothing to do with creating.

Various points made:

The Board's obligation is to look at the risk of doing this. Not to stop this but to know the risks and issues.

What good are we trying to do in the world at what cost? Are we saying we can integrate better if you had task forces to delegate to?

There's no right way but the time we spend looking at operations issues is time not spent looking over the horizon to see what's coming.

What kind of structure do we want to have? Do we have a CEO minister or something else?

We need some time to understand an issue so we can intelligently make decisions: like the roof repair. Our obligation is that our money is being well spent.

How much are we willing to delegate as a board? We are going to get the right people in place and trust them to be accountable. How comfortable are we letting go of some big decisions?

I'm (Justin) not suggesting a particular answer but I did present a problem in my report: putting out fires / looking at a declining memberships. I'm raising a challenge to you. How are you going to best face the challenges of the future.

We are trying to describe what we are trying to figure out. The taskforce should do this...

Ellen: As a visionary board we have to be visionary. But I think we need a much tighter structure and know our congregation. We have not been strong enough in terms of understanding our committee structure. Getting our reports back. Knowing our problems. I think our visionary board must also be connected to the committees.

Mike: We haven't taken advantage of the committees. The flaw is that neither the committees nor the liaisons feel that accountable. We manage better with more time.

What do you want the four people on this task force to do? Come back in two months? Three months? Come up with some data from other congregations to have the pros and cons.

Communication will be discussed next meeting. And one other.

Steve has been reaching out to find someone as a consultant to advise us for digital communications. Justin thinks it was a little premature. Thinks we should put a pause on this.

Schedule board moments:

An announcement about search committee process. Mike will do it.

Personnel committee task force:

Chris says the task force will meet on Sunday.

Process: Observation: Dennis

Using the newer model: Check in was a nice respect for each other. Reading got us off on the right start. Things that struck me: How do we define God/ differences between worship and fellowship / what flowed out of the discussion is the general awareness of our decline institutionally. African Americans left en masse several years ago. The discussion was expansive, productive. Overall issues: Who are we as a congregation; who are we looking for as a minister; who and what is the board.

Denise moved to adjourn / Mary seconded / passed

Adjourned 9:45pm