

**Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Montclair**  
**August 18, 2015**  
**Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes**  
**Meeting began at 7:35 pm**

**Staff:** Rev. Dr. Justin Osterman

**Visitor:** Joe Thomasberger

**Members:** Mike Mernin, Judith Rew, Sue Raufer, Dottie Hiebing, Dorothy Sommer, Mary Moriarty, Ellen Fenster-Kuehl, Arlene Dodge, Chris Corbett, Denise Rodgers, Dennis Drew

**Opening Words:** Denise Rogers  
The Beatitudes for Justice Builders

**Statement of Guiding Principles:** Judith

**Introduction to Justin:** Mike

**Justin's response:** Delighted to be here, pleased to serve the UUCM. Will share some thoughts later on.

**Chris moved to accept the July minutes/seconded/passed**

**Thank you notes:**

Sue Raufer's brother; Teresa DeSousa for plaque; Emi who helped in the kitchen; the minister who was here on Sunday, Rev. Gina Jacobs-Strain

**President's Report:** Mike

I did not circulate a draft agenda for the retreat. In the next couple of weeks we'll do a joint back and forth about it. Friday night will be social; will focus on some issues on Saturday. We'll have to organize food.

**Interim Minister's Report:** Justin Osterman

I am very happy to be here; back in New Jersey; in Montclair with all of you. Thank you to the Interim Minister Search Committee. It's important to me as a minister that all of you who have busy lives and give to the congregation have fun and find the experience as meaningful as possible.

The first part of my report is "great cookies." Some of you know that I was here for the first time 15 years ago. I preached here as I candidated for the Paramus Congregation. When I was interviewing congregations [for interim positions], figuring out where I wanted to go, frankly this was the top of my list. This congregation has challenges and opportunities, but I don't think this congregation

has issues. It is healthy and strong. We are in the midst of a change already and change comes with uncertainty, anxiety, and fear. I was talking with Dana Moore and she is working with kids finishing high school and going off to college. Those kids were blessed by Charlie Ortman. He is not here anymore so this is a taste of mortality for these kids. There are older members who might not have thought about it consciously but who assumed that Charlie Ortman would preside over their funerals. There is real loss in the community. We can look forward this year to a series of firsts. A first time we do it without Charlie in recent memory. We cannot as leaders underestimate how this will affect us. The first task as your Interim Minister is pastoral. I am here to help and support you with this sense of loss. Things are changing because Charlie is gone but also because I am here. The only question is how are we going to be together through this uncertain change. I need to help the congregation become comfortable with this change. Part of my job is to normalize the idea of change. The settled minister will also change things. I'm here to help us through that. The first task before us is to reassure the people. I'm a lifelong Unitarian, but there are a lot of great stories in the Bible. The first words out of every angel in the Bible is Do Not Be Afraid. The English word Pastor comes from old French. The Pastor keeps the flock safe—calms an anxious community; tends to the grief; keeps us together. Second task, get folks thinking that change is okay. I'm doing some reading and we will be using the book *In the Interim*. I also like *Temporary Shepherds*. In both of these books you will find there are five developmental tasks:

1. Coming to terms with history
2. Discovering a new (current) "identity" as a congregation
3. Leadership changes during the transition
4. Renewing denominational connections
5. Committing to new directions in ministry

Prepare the way for another successful long-term ministry here in Montclair. You will figure out what sort of leader that is that you want.

You have set up with a transitions team. I am meeting with them this week.

As soon as possible I want an opportunity to sit down with each of you as leaders. Talk to you about your experience here.

The UUA has a kind of a time frame for things that a congregation needs to do. I want to make sure that I have alerted you a month ahead of time as to what you need to do.

What can you as a Board do this year? The first thing is read this book and we'll talk about it. I think you can:

- lead by example
- manage your own anxiety
- be patient

- be honest about what you do and don't know
- reassure people
- talk to me if you have questions
- nurture your souls

I feel confident that I will have a successful ministry and that you become an even stronger and more attractive congregation.

**Office of Administrator's Report:** Donna (read by Mike)

Our rentals ended the year almost \$10,000 higher. The year is getting a slow start but I suspect it will pickup. We have changed to a Vanco credit card system. We still have work to do with follow up to those who pledged but haven't paid, or didn't pledge this year. So how can we do this?

Chris: 1) circulate this list and see what information people have about these people; 2) Send out a letter that you have to have a pledge of record to be a member.

New need some direction on the UU Family Reunion, specifically what custodial care we'll need. Donna is out through September 1. Just make sure we all understand that there is no booking without Donna. We have an additional challenge with RE because of overlap with the nursery school. (Mike is emailing)...

We need a decision on where to put the plaque. It's a problem where it is. Judith will contain Karen Fried, photograph the hardware and send it to Dennis: show Rich Rew. Justin: try to have this up within a month.

**Facilities matters:** Chris with Justin

Gerry and Justin and I did a walk through to decide what to do before the first service. We are still concerned about the sanctuary floor. It's a safety issue. Moving the piano causes this problem. Dennis said it's "frightening. It's just open space with minimal support." The committee will report back. Two new areas need attention: ceiling in bathroom; ceiling in choir loft.

Repairs: Kitchen is definitely on the list; everything that MESH wants is on the list. We're aware of the problem with the other sink in the kitchen (brought up by Ellen).

Justin: Is this a commercially rated kitchen? We might have trouble passing inspection.

Chris: We have to decide how big this capital campaign should be. Immediate needs or do we want to go beyond that?

**Solitary Confinement initiative:** Joe Thomasberger

The URC has been working on Mass Incarceration and Black Lives Matter, etc. Through Diane Finn at our last meeting Sunday I took on with their approval a project called Out the Box: Setting up a model solitary confinement cell. There is a kit that can be bought to help us construct a model of a solitary confinement cell. I'd like to have it so that we could take it to other congregations in our midst. (Attach letter and project).

Sue: They have some boxes that travel around? We would get it for a time?

Joe: We would have some kind of box somewhere.

Chris: You have \$4,000 in the kitty. You can afford it.

Mike: The URC needs to formulate a plan. But in concept we support it. We could work with other congregations.

Denise: as someone teaching Heading the Call; it could potentially fit it into that curriculum. We could through our Sunday school activities fit this in to our work. The whole message got missed at the "Box" homelessness project. That's an example of what not to do.

**Treasurer's Report:** Chris

We balanced the budget. Barely but we did it.

Our income was ahead of expenses by \$76,000. But it's always a big month. But the surplus is \$19,000 more than last year.

The little bulge will go down and down and down. But don't panic. It was part of the plan.

September is always a terrible month. It's in the sandwich between two quarters.

I want to take the long view:

- 1) need to have a good pledge drive
- 2) need to achieve auction results and add another fundraiser, like the Prom
- 3) need to fund deferred maintenance of our facility

But thinking farther than that:

We should be talking about the challenges of next year's budget. Our budget today includes \$21,000 of one-time funding. Much of this will not be repeated. We have to fund our search next year, about \$15,000 under the guideline. We will not have the little savings by having the month between Charlie leaving and Justin arriving. And we need to continue to increase maintenance budget.

Mary: has anyone ever analyzed the auction results? Why is was so good last year?

Chris and others: The answer is parties. Parties went higher and there were more of them. Dennis Kurtti and Mike co-host a party that went to 30 people at \$40 a person. Went up each of the last three years. Bidding perhaps went high perhaps because this is Charlie's last auction.

Mike: We have good data because of the software we've used for a few years now. Erin Krupa is a math professor. We need to have a meeting in September.

Another consideration is that there is a problem of pricing people out of the auction. There need to be several events that are listed as a fixed price. No bidding. Make sure we have enough of those. We need to have more of a conversation about this. The auction is the Saturday before Thanksgiving.

Chris: We jumped from \$20,000 to \$38,000. That's a big jump. The year that Obama was elected we got in the high \$30s but it's been down since then.

Looking at income:

We are significantly ahead at this point but I don't know if that trend will continue. Expenses went up this month but they are all fairly standard expenses.

Summary: Not any big trend. We are doing better than last year in surplus.

UUCM Funds: Market has been down a bit and so the funds are a bit.

The Felix's annual stewardship drive summary (attached to this):

We hit our goal. We were stable but not really springing ahead. We only increased average pledge by 1%. We had a one-time anonymous grant of \$7,500, which we will not have next year. The pledges came in awfully slow. So we are in a position to have to guess when we presented and passed our budget. People procrastinate. We would love it if people would pay earlier. It got faster for a couple of years but now it's slow again.

Nancy Felix is a fundraiser. She really thinks that the place where we are weak is the mid numbers and going into the lower level. We need to target that group.

Denise: I'd be interested in having a sense of what percentage of pledge units falls into the giving categories. What number of people who attend are members?

Answer: We have 350 members. There are about 237 pledge units. We have a few "friends" who pledge. We have a few people who don't want to pledge but give donations. But it's only like \$2,000. We have some people who have their kids in RE but don't belong and/or don't give. But it is a relatively small number. The trick is also to get people to join because they love it.

Denise: It occurs to me that as we face the change you (Justin) describe, it feels like this is our task ongoing to help the congregation understand what a great place we are and need to be as we move to a new minister. Is there a potential that we could also get grants.

Chris: annual fund drive/onetime contributions/capital campaign/bequests are the four legs of stewardship. But there are some ways to attract some grants. We used to have a regular fundraising committee. We need to do that again.

Dotty: We should follow the Felix's suggestion that we gather four or five year's worth of pledge chairs.

Chris: We are keeping the same template how.

Mike: What about selecting some new pledge chairs for this year? Approach the NLC? We should reach out to former chairs. We also want to look at why the plate collection goes down.

Motion to accept treasurer's report  
Dotty moved/Mary seconded/passed

**Reunion: Sue**

We need to make sure all the committees are represented at the Reunion. Laura and Sue have agreed to call the groups. It's on the 13<sup>th</sup>. It's going to be across the street. Jerry is going to clear it with the Board of Ed. A committee could agree to ice cream or hotdogs; have for instance Green Sanctuary and Aesthetics Committees to the decorations. I'll email lists. Letting the congregation know, Covenant groups... etc.

**Retreat: Mike**

Justin and I have been engaging and we will circulate some kind of draft agenda. We will share a big meal.

Ellen Fenster-Kuehl might take charge of food but needs more information.

Justin: Things came to me as I was observing: Maybe part of the retreat could be a walk-through of our financial statement and pledge drive. I could do a short presentation on the current thinking on year-long stewardship. You're all setting aside an extra two days and a night to be together let us know what would be helpful.

Request made that Justin could walk us through the Interim process and calendar for the coming year and the schedule for voting in a new minister.

**Process observation:** Arlene and Dorothy.

**Board moments:** Chris should stand up and talk about that we made our pledge drive. We do it about once a month.

Suggestions:

Reflecting on a period of change. We should give the congregation a sense that there isn't just one person stewarding this process and that the work of the congregation continues to go on. We might want to come up with a list of topics and rotate them through Board members.

We need something like the sign-in sheet.

Mike: We should take advantage of coffee hour and have one or two of us at a table to discuss these things.

Dennis: One of the things that has impressed me about this structure is how well thought out this has been. Sometimes I think structure is not our strength but the Board moments can help convey that structure.

By the September Board meeting we will get this table organized and signed up for. Board moments/table.

**General Process Observation:** Dorothy

Arlene and Dorothy combined them into one form. [need form]

**New business:**

Justin: You can be helpful to me communicating with the congregation. I am comfortable being addressed by adults as Justin. With children and youth I prefer Dr. O. I take my role seriously. Monday I'm flying up to Minneapolis to the Interim Minister gathering...

Chris moves to adjourn/Dennis seconded/passed

9:35 adjourned.