

Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Montclair
January 19, 2016
Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
Meeting began at 7:33 pm

Staff: Dr. Reverend Justin Osterman

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

Visitors: Christian Turick, Ministerial Transition Committee; Jerry Fried, Chair, 2016 Pledge Campaign; Jill Wodnick, COA mentor; Isabel Eulette, COA candidate

Opening Words and Statement of Guiding Principles: Dennis Drew
Jewish koan and two poems (by Fernando Pessoa and e.e. Cummings)
addressing subject of Saints and Sinners

Check in

Adoption of Board Minutes

Chris moved/Dorothy seconded/accepted

Thank You Notes

Wassail: Deb Ellis and Hal; Laura Kushner

President's Report: Mike Mernin

Got new shoes; Martin Luther King Service was really terrific; I had the opportunity that morning I went to the MLK Scholarship Breakfast and that was terrific; great cause, outstanding speaker.

Interim Minister's Report: Justin Osterman

We've had 10 visitors to the congregation since the last Board meeting.

On January 31 I will conclude the first six months of my two years with you. When I came here and started I told all of you that this first year would be my pastoral ministry. This would be a year of "firsts": the first Thanksgiving, Auction, Christmas, etc. without Charlie Ortman. I knew when I arrived that Judy Tomlinson would be leaving. I hope that I have been effective gaining your trust, winning your confidence. Her leaving is difficult for the congregation and staff. Generally I think the Congregation is in a good place.

I'm going to start from this point forward offering some broad observations about the congregation:

--The first thing that I have observed is that it is not at all clear who is in charge at this congregation.

--It's not clear that this congregation has a clear sense of mission.

--It's not clear what the minister's role is here.

--A lot of people are busy doing things but it's not with a clear sense of purpose; when making decisions, highly effective congregations constantly ask themselves: "Is this consistent with our mission?" It is important that you revisit and talk about your mission.

Resolving the question of who is in charge is going to be a big challenge. You've got some really good Board goals. It's time to really roll up your sleeves and get to work on those. Clarifying your mission will help make more clear "who is in charge."

The February Focus Month theme is "Building for the Future" and I will be addressing the following topics in my sermons: vision, authority, leadership, and stewardship.

It is clear that you need to do some major work is your culture of stewardship.

I encourage you to be there every single Sunday in February.

Hopefully I'm equipping all of you to have a conversation about these things in the months ahead.

Now there needs to be a conversation about the new Associate minister. How do we decide how to structure our staff and leadership? There are big questions that need to be addressed that are precipitated by Judy's leaving. There is no Judy to replace Judy. No Minister of Religious Education category exists now. You will not find a minister to plug into that position. How will you find someone to lead an RE program effectively and find someone to continue the ministry that she has begun. I doubt there is someone out there to fill that role. So what do we do? We don't have a personnel committee. There have to be some difficult conversations, work between meetings in order to get this accomplished. We've got some big challenges.

One option is to have an Associate Minister and a RE Director.

Steve: Regarding the Mission, are you saying we need to examine our existing mission statement? Or are we not holding it up and evaluating our actions in terms of the mission? My mission aligns with the UU's mission. So are we measuring up to our mission statement?

Justin: I didn't really understand mission until I had my own personal mission statement: To be healthy and happy and whole, and also holy. When I hold this up it guides me through life. When a congregation has that clarity, it can make our decisions easier to make.

The key word is "measurable." Sometimes congregations make these grand missions but have no way of measuring them.

Dotty: She does a lot of sermons and is part of that structure. How does that figure in to replacing Judy?

Justin: An Associate Minister preaches 14 times a year: once a month and a month in the summer. But Judy doesn't preach even half that much. So if you have an Associate Minister that takes a lot of pressure off the Worship Committee. You are still partly in the transition between an RE Director and an Associate Minister.

Arlene: Making the calls brought out some great ideas... expand Markus's position, make a three-person team....

Justin: The natural human impulse is to solve things quickly. The more challenging thing for leaders is to take a deep breath and slow everything down. Twenty-five years from now, where do you want to be? That is not a quick solution. [A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of Quick Fix](#) is a book on my desk. Your community needs you to slow everyone down and not try to find quick fixes to big challenges.

Denise: I feel we frequently have these conversations that leave me with a to-do list that I'm not sure when we're going to get it done. It ties in to a conversation we had several months ago "who are we as UUs?" My own sense of our congregation is that we come when we come, we don't if we don't want to. If we really are focused, how do we express expectations? We don't talk about that. In my other life I review universities for accreditation. The heart of that is mission. Do you make budget decisions based on your mission? Do we develop extra curriculae based on our mission?

Associate Minister's report: Judy is away

Pledge campaign: Jerry Fried

I should say, first, I'm happy to be here and appreciate coming here and telling you what has been decided so far. One of the advantage of not being in a husband and wife team is I'm new to it. We have a four-person committee each with a different role: Erin events, Nancy co-chair, Judith communications, Jerry, chair.

When we started the canvass process Justin felt we are way behind. This should be more of a full year process. I'm putting together some thoughts for future canvasses so we won't have to start late in the future.

Our challenges this year: We need to be on a really sound financial footing to pay a new minister and to make sure we aren't operating from a sense of scarcity. Last year we raised \$430,000; the goal with the finance committee's input has been rounded up to \$500,000. A 15% increased from the prior year. That doesn't represent a mission or anything; just actually what we need.

Our team has been working on ways to make this feel different. I'm different, new, bright eyed bushy tailed, naïve.

The main difference about this year's annual pledge drive is to do as many one-on-one meetings with people; about 10 people doing 4 each one on one visits. So 40 one-on-one

meetings. Probably several of those people will be doing a lot more than 4. I'll take this as an opportunity to ask you guys to help us make calls, get more people to make the one-on-one visits. The reason for these meetings is that this is frankly the most effective way to get someone to commit and give more money. Anyone who has been involved in this knows that that's most effective. About another 150 people will be reached through meetings with committees and small group ministries. Anyone who goes to these meetings will get some degree to training. Everyone will be invited to a geographically local party. There's going to be a lot of overlap with these. The ones who don't make any of these will be called on the phone. The follow-up with the small groups will be mostly through the chairs or letters of those small groups and ministers. They can customize it to reflect their own motivation for pledging generously.

We're going to have a testimonial video, with statements by about 15 individuals, essentially saying why they pledge at such a high level. People are comfortable talking about percentages of their household income; one person has said they give 7% of their household income. We will have posters of these people as well.

We have a graphic designed by Judith and will have a poster in the Narthex to fill up.

I would personally like input from any and each of you if you have ideas of how to raise an extra \$70,000. It's very hard to do that. We need some people to really step up to the plate. If you do have people you think who might be good candidates for one-on-one meetings you can let us know privately if you want. Probably you will get a call from the committee.

The theme of our communications: Look at your big expenses, your household budget, and see what you can actually afford.

\$1,800 is median pledge. Average is under \$1,200. If everyone pledged at that level we would have less than half of the money we need to run the congregation.

Our theme is in lockstep with Justin's sermons in February: Building for the Future.

We'd be in great shape if we were getting 2% of most people's household income. We will be asking: Is your congregation as valuable to you as your cable bill?

[Jim reminded us of when Jerry canvassed him several years ago. He was shocked to find out he was among the higher donors. If you give me the recipe for the garlic soup I'll give you more money.]

Kick off is February 7, first February Focus Month sermon. We want to get done as much as we can in February; many will dribble into March.

Treasurer Report:

First thing: Dennis Kurtti has accepted the job as treasurer for next year.
Second thing: Take a look at the new roof. It's beautiful.

The Good, the Bad, and the Interesting

December was a really, really bad month on the surface.

Our expenses are generally on course.

Our income in the plates is even to last year.

Bad news: We are running a deficit of \$2,800, did not receive all the pledges (the letter didn't go out—just an administrative gaff), auction income hasn't come in but we should make our \$30,000 projection.

Short-term rentals are still low.

Not a great year but we will make it.

We are sending an email to all employees and committees asking them to keep track of their budgets.

Looking at our goals expressed in July: We've actually met our goals:

--We came close to meeting our auction goal

--Deferred maintenance has been addressed and taken care of

How much of our plate do we give away each year? 20%, which constitutes \$4,800, not including Human Needs Ministry, which we eliminated (except for once a year) in order to support MESH. About \$3,000 a year goes to MESH, but that does not go through the budget. They keep their own books and budget account for it very well.

Motion to accept Treasurer's Report

Dorothy moves to accept /Ellen seconded / moved

Interim Selection Committee phone calls:

Let's talk about it. Go around the room and give a general idea. Let's schedule another meeting in a week to sift through the names. Send your information in before the next meeting.

Mike made a number of calls and people were reticent.

Arlene: People were really enthused about being called. People had really strong ideas about what they want in a new minister. I stayed on the phone a long time with about five people. Some really want to suggest a particular person.

Denise: I ditched the script. It didn't feel comfortable. I had a couple of more general conversations. I got some names. It has me theoretically worried that the people who are the best are not necessarily the people who have the time. I talked to one young woman with three little kids but the notion to devote that kind of time is not an option. I think we should think outside the box.

Chris: Hard to keep people on the phone 15 minutes.

Christian: Ours was more conversational. Kate and I both heard that they couldn't spend that much time [on the committee]. We need to make the time commitment a little more clear.

Mike: We are looking at people who would represent the group as a whole, as well as diversity. We really want to get to a list of people and see who rises to the top.

Dorothy: Three of them were good friends of mine. I really challenged people to think about who they want to serve on the committee. The people who did respond varied in 2 to 8 or so suggestions. They were really good, dedicated members. On the question of specific interest groups vs. interest in the congregation as a whole: for the growth of the whole congregation I think it should certainly include individuals who have a clear vision of a specific area: RE or whatever.

Dottie: Some interesting stuff about characteristics.

Justin: Some of the questions right off the sheet to try to get people to think deeply about the qualities you're looking for. You can get 10 UUs in a circle and you're going to get really smart people. But not necessarily wise people. Think wisdom--not smart.

Denise: We should be cautious about what wisdom means. How do we get senior youth, younger people. We need to make sure we have diversity, age, race, etc. Wise may not be the best or only criteria. I certainly think we ought to talk about senior youth. This is thinking about the future. A diversity of voices may help us.

Dennis: Part of the mission of this process is to get everybody in the community thinking about just what is going to be our clear mission projecting out 25 years and how are we going to get there. Involvement in the community; social justice; are strong currents in this congregation. Where are we now and where would we like to go.

Justin: I want to be clear about why I disagree with Denise (about including youth): what really are the time commitments of the search committee. The value of what we consider diversity is so important to this congregation. My only concern is in our urge to be diverse we put some people on the committee who really do not have time and end up setting them up to fail. . I think it would be good to talk with some search committees to tighten up our understanding of the time commitment.

Arlene: The Senior Youth might want to have one member on the search committee.

Denise: We do not do a major search in a university without a student as part of it.

Justin: I think the key thing is let's get the calls completed. Have a meeting before next meeting to gather the information.

February, Tuesday the 9th will be a special meeting, 7pm.

Board Goals:

Communications: Judith, Steve, Mary

Around the Interim process and time period, communities do best when they receive frequent, clear communications during the next 18 months. We need to as a board and as a communications task force figure out how to communicate effectively with the congregation.

Questions and suggestions that came up:

--(Denise) Thing about strategies set up a “search minister” page at UUmontclair.org where we allow people to send us messages about the characteristics we are looking for. There are certain people who would rather communicate electronically. We need to know who is responsible for keeping the website up to date.

--(Steve) Internally we keep running up against the problem of how are we going to do it, and systems come into play. When I think goals, I think big, with each other and our world, regardless of the message.

--(Justin) I hear you loud and clear. But I go to the other end, we are six months in and the only reason the transition team knows what the board is doing is because a member comes to our meetings.

--(Steve) It was agreed that once a month we would have a Board Moment.

--(Christian) Have any of you got up on the pulpit on Sunday saying if you haven't gotten a call... give a two-minute synopsis of where the process is going.

--Send an email to everyone with this information.

Organizational chart: Sue, Dorothy, Ellen

Major points:

We just decided to meet and felt we would get our marching orders from this meeting. David Sailer is a great resource. We need to start with what's going on right now. Until we can look at that we don't have any sense of what's there, we can't know where we can go.

It's going to require interviewing some people, figuring out authority, because even having authority to fill out an organization chart requires that we have an authorized authority.

The authority goes from the congregation to the Board of Trustees and then we figure out where authority goes from there.

The staff reported to Charlie, but the lines of authority were not clear. A good organization chart will answer questions and point to where we don't have the answers.

Judy Tomlinson's succession: Justin (furthering the discussion)

This is a complicated situation because there isn't a Judy Tomlinson equivalent who can be plugged in. If Jerry and his team are successful and we are inundated with money then the easiest thing would be to create a DRE position fully focused on RE and also hire an associate minister. We need someone step into the staff position no later than Aug. 1 because Iris is not going to be able to run the RE program. Justin can't really shoulder his current responsibility and that as well.

Possible options and challenges:

--Finding an interim, a minister who could also do RE.

--Hiring a half-time person, but probably picking from the 2 or 3 people who live nearby.

--This points to our need for a personnel committee. This happening (Judy's leaving) behooves us to put this in place quicker. We have a task force to deal with it.

--Justin contacted a few people at the UUA and the upshot was we need to know our structure and have answered the question of What Kind of Board we want to be before we can form a personnel committee.

--A community minister is not a solution. They are out there in the community doing what they do (social work, etc.) and affiliating with us gives them credibility.

--Justin will contact Andrea Lerner in and help us talk through this.

Board Moments: Will figure out the Sundays and get them scheduled.

Process observation: Sue

It was suggested that we look at the process of process observation.

Motion to adjourn meeting.

Dottie moved / Steve seconded / Adjourned

Meeting adjourned 9:52