

UNITARIAN SOCIETY OF HARTFORD
Board of Directors Meeting
Date: April 7, 2015

Members Participating: Bill LaPorte-Bryan, Virginia de Lima, Louise Schmoll, Patrice Fitzgerald, Martha Bradley, John Clapp, Tina Davies, Rev. Cathy Rion Starr, Rev. Heather Rion Starr

Others Participating: David Newton, Janice Newton, Jim Venneman, Jean Groothuis, Richard Groothuis, Brian Harvey, Ron Friedman. (Ron Friedman left the meeting after giving the Nominating Committee report.)

Members Absent: Marye Gail Harrison
Call to Order: Meeting was called to order at 7:07 p.m.

Subject	Discussion	Action Required/Responsible
Opening Words	Rev. Cathy gave the opening words, followed by a reading of the USH Board Covenant.	
Public Comments	None.	
Vote to approve March minutes Report from Nominating Committee	<p>Minutes of March Board meeting approved unanimously.</p> <p>The Nominating Committee report was given by Chair Ron Friedman.</p> <p>Slate of candidates for Board of Directors positions:</p> <p>Board President: Virginia de Lima (one-year term) President elect: John Brancato (one-year term) Secretary: Margaret Leicach (two-year term)</p> <p>Council Chairs/Members at Large: Social Justice: Gloria Francesca Mengual and Vanessa Gonzalez-Rivera, co-chairs (two-year term) Spiritual Life: Martha Bradley (two-year term)</p> <p><i>Continuing in office terms not complete:</i> Treasurer: Louise Schmoll (one year remaining of two-year term) Administration: John Clapp (one year remaining of two-year term) Community Within: Tina Davies (one year remaining of two-year term)</p> <p>These are experienced and wonderful people. Bill LaPorte-Bryan thanked Ron and the committee for such excellent work on behalf of the Board and the Congregation. Applause followed!</p> <p>Bill thanked the ministers for a wonderful Easter service, both uplifting and solemn.</p>	Minutes approved.
Ministers' report including plans for Installation Service April 19 th	<p>Heather shared a written reflection (attached) and a video, to which Board members responded. There was also a written report about what the ministers have been doing in this very busy month.</p> <p>Invitations to the Installation were distributed in case we have others we want to invite.</p> <p>Music update: Rebecca Pacuk is staying through December 2015 as Acting Music Director. Cheryl Wadsworth needs to be replaced in the fall as organist/pianist.</p> <p>The Music Transition committee is meeting and discussing where we want to go with music long-term. They plan to hire a consultant for a one-day session regarding the "big picture" of our musical goals as a congregation. The Music Committee has agreed to allocate \$1,000 from the Friends of Music fund.</p>	

<p>Report from the Endowment Committee about the proposed change to the bylaws</p>	<p>Jim Venneman read the proposed Bylaw change regarding future restrictions on investments in the Endowment. The congregation will be formally notified of the proposed change and it will be voted on at the Annual Meeting on May 17th.</p> <p>The Board thanked the Endowment Committee for its careful work in crafting this proposal.</p> <p>This a forward-looking motion to permit greater input from the congregation in terms of Endowment decisions.</p> <p>There was discussion about the issue of getting the buy-in of the full congregation in the context of representative governance versus a “town meeting” governance structure.</p>	
<p>Vote on the Constitutional amendment to change our membership categories</p>	<p>Brian Harvey presented the proposal to revisit article IV of the USH Constitution, to reduce the number of types of membership at USH from six to one.</p> <p>There was a question about who will identify those who have made an annual contribution. Brian Mullen already does that each year in order to determine official member numbers for the purpose of the UUA roles.</p> <p>This amendment will be part of the agenda in the Annual Meeting and will be voted on.</p>	
<p>Discussion about responsibilities for the Annual report</p>	<p>Each Board member who has a section in the Annual Report is responsible for getting it in on time. The deadline is April 30th for submission.</p> <p>Louise suggested that we don’t need to print so many copies of the Annual Report. Disseminating an electronic copy in advance would be a good idea.</p>	
<p>Discussion about the Annual Meeting on May 17th</p>	<p>There is a good general understanding of what will take place at the Annual Meeting. We will discuss it in greater detail at the May Board meeting. Heather and Cathy would like to give an opening statement, as well as an oral minister’s report. The morning service will be multi-generational, so we need to allow time for children to leave after the service.</p>	
<p>Report from the Stewardship Committee</p>	<p>The Stewardship campaign is continuing to go well.</p> <p>There are sixteen new first-time pledgers who are averaging over \$1,000 for their first pledges!</p>	
<p>Report from the Finance Committee and discussion about the 2015-2016 budget</p>	<p>Louise gave an updated draft budget that was discussed at the Finance Committee meeting before the Board Meeting.</p> <p>“Fair” compensation for our employees was discussed. Connecticut’s minimum wage will go up in the next two years, and we need to be cognizant of that.</p> <p>Bill suggests that the May Finance Committee meeting may permit for an actual vote and approval of the budget (this would be earlier than it has been in recent years), and said budget could be presented to the congregation at the Annual Meeting.</p> <p>It was decided that it would be a good idea for all the Board members to attend the May Finance Committee at 6:00 before the regular Board Meeting. There will also be a Finance Committee meeting on Wednesday, April 29th at 5:30.</p>	
<p>Comments from Board members</p>	<p>None.</p>	
<p>Date of May Board meeting, April 26th “under the stairs”</p>	<p>The next Board meeting will take place on Tuesday, May 5th, at 7:00.</p> <p>Patrice, Martha, and Louise plan to be available for the April 26th conversations under the stairs.</p>	

Planning Board retreat	Bill and Virginia will be responsible for planning the schedule of the June Board retreat, in consultation with the ministers and other Board members.	
Closing words	Rev. Heather read from "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," by Wallace Stevens of Hartford.	

Meeting adjourned at 9:05. Next Board meeting scheduled for Tuesday, May 5, 2015 at 7:00 PM at USH.

Respectfully submitted by Patrice Fitzgerald, Secretary

See following page(s) Ministers' Report

April 7, 2015 | Ministers' Report—oral
presented by Rev. Heather Rion Starr on behalf of Revs. Cathy and Heather

There are so many things to be happy about in the life of USH right now—and we're going to hear about some of those things later in this meeting.

I continue to mull on the refrain of this past Sunday's sermon: "*How can we do better?*" And with that I'd like to share this oral report. I have written this down because I want to be careful neither to overstate things, nor understate them.

I've been feeling deeply discouraged these past few weeks. We have had four different households, for different reasons, threaten to "take their pledge and leave" if we or the congregation do not do certain things. Regardless of what the issue is, it ceases to be discussable if someone is threatening leadership financially or in any other way. I have not experienced this behavior before in other congregations and it greatly distresses and concerns us.

It is inappropriate and unhealthy for the congregation for anyone to use their financial support of or volunteer engagement with the congregation as a coercive tool. It perpetuates reactivity in the congregation and also coerces the Board and other leadership into spending far too much of our time and energy trying to please people who are behaving inappropriately. It also privileges people who have financial wealth in the congregation over those who do not and is thus unjust. As your new Co-Ministers, we come to you both deeply concerned about this behavior, dedicated to naming it when we see it, and doing our best to remain positive and calm in the face of it.

Cathy and I understand that a lot of people have left this congregation over the past five years. We can certainly see where the *pattern* of leaving comes from. However we are additionally concerned that in recent years the Board seems to have permitted itself to get caught up in this behavior, trying to appease people instead of being firm that unhealthy threatening behavior will not be tolerated here. If the Board continues in this trying-to-appease manner, and Cathy and I continue to hold firm in our clarity that threatening behavior is not okay, we risk being put into a "good cop," "bad cop" *split* and creating great harm and division within and amongst the congregation.

Our response to appease someone because they're threatening is *not* a healthy behavior for us. They might be trying to be communicate something meaningful, but the impact of them threatening to leave makes it impossible to hear them more fully. Senior congregational consultant Gil Rendle observes that "In a seeming paradox, efforts to 'fix' congregations [or appease particular congregants] usually just create opportunities for additional and competing complaints and distract from the overall mission of the church." This behavior is not healthy for us as a congregation.

...We are making a heartfelt request of you, as your Co-Ministers. We want to ask you, the Board, to work with us in observing and noticing this behavior. We

ask that you not perpetuate it by engaging and allowing it, and that you work together with us towards creating and being a healthier community.

As we think about the kind of environment we want to create here, it means all of us reflecting on what leadership means—what our leadership is about in *this* congregation. Our hope is that we, as your Co-Ministers, can work with the Board to do some earnest work and reflection on how to cultivate a healthier congregational environment. What does it mean for us to be leaders that can be firm for the long-term health of the congregation?