

UNITARIAN SOCIETY OF HARTFORD

Board of Directors Meeting

Date: August 5, 2014

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

Others Participating: David Newton, Janice Newton, Susan Spaniol

Members Absent:

Call to Order: Meeting was called to order at 7:10 p.m.

Subject	Discussion	Action Required/Responsible
Opening Words	Martha read the Opening Words.	
Public Comments	Those attending introduced themselves, indicated how long they had been at USH, and what their activities were in connection with the Board or in the congregation.	
Minutes of last meeting	The July 22, 2014 minutes were circulated and approved with one minor amendment, changing the word "She" to "Marye Gail Harrison."	
President's Report – Bill LaPorte-Bryan	<p>Bill indicated that his Report to the Board would be his upcoming sermon on Sunday, August 10. The report will be positive. In Bill's opinion, the Society is in a very good place. He's looking forward to the future. <i>See attached below.</i></p> <p>At some point, Bill believes the Board should consider its responsibility for job descriptions and employment contracts. That should be added to the agenda for discussion at a future meeting.</p> <p>Bill mentioned that USH meetings (not just Board meetings) should be accessible. There is a covenant to that effect. David Newton read the actual policy. <i>See attached below.</i></p>	
Ministers' Report: Heather and Cathy	<p>Cathy indicated that for this meeting, she and Heather would simply be greeting the Board. Cathy spent her first day as an official USH co-minister coming up on the train from D.C. where she had participated in civil disobedience regarding immigration, and had been purposely arrested. Heather was getting the office ready here in Hartford.</p> <p>Cathy is looking forward to finding out "how to dance" together with the folks from the Board and the congregation.</p> <p>Heather had a hand-off of keys with interim minister Rev. Dave Johnson, and met with Rayla just before she had her baby. She had a meeting with Bill and had met with Brian Mullen the day of the meeting. She chatted with John Bengtson and Kevin Girard last week. She has a meeting scheduled with the combined Worship Arts and Music members, and then with David and Janice Newton. She reported many more meetings to come!</p> <p>Both Cathy and Heather plan to be at all Board meetings going forward. Heather will be officiating at Barbara Hellenga's memorial service. She will be meeting with former Rev. Terasa Cooley at the new UUA Headquarters in Boston.</p> <p>Briefly discussed was the draft of a document describing plans for Division of Responsibilities between the two co-ministers. Bill thinks the document is excellent. He suggested some small changes, as did others. Board members and other attendees at the meeting were encouraged to share suggestions about wording and other specifics via email. Tina thought the document should be characterized as something subject to adjustment, considering resources and time commitments. We were reminded to recognize as congregants that we have two ministers but it is one job.</p>	

<p>Next Steps in Implementing recommendations of the Committee on Conflict Management</p>	<p>Martha discussed the lengthy conversation of last month's Board meeting (see July 22 minutes) regarding the recommendations on Conflict Management or "Healthy Relations." We'd love to have one of the UUA reps give a Sunday sermon and introduce this topic. Heather and Cathy also brought up the subject of a "Start-Up Workshop" regarding the new settled ministers getting started at USH, and though these are two different matters, we should consider the best way to schedule both. One possibility is for Cathy or Heather to start by giving a sermon or a class on the subject of healthy relations. That could be followed by involvement by the UUA.</p> <p>Virginia moved that members of the interim "committee on healthy relations" who are interested in continuing to work on this topic be encouraged to help plan the educational portion. Martha volunteered to coordinate said committee.</p> <p>The motion passed with one nay.</p> <p>Next steps: Heather, Cathy, Martha, and Bill will talk about how to move these plans forward.</p>	
<p>Treasurer's Report Louise Schmolli</p>	<p>Brian Mullen believes that the budget is in good shape; he has been on vacation and will finalize it soon. Louise moved that we allow an additional \$10,000 budgeted for "capital money." The motion passed unanimously.</p> <p>We need to figure out installation plans, the cost, and where that money will come from. Cathy indicated a spring installation is planned.</p> <p>There will be an Auction in the fall. Ginny Allen has agreed to chair the Auction on Saturday, October 25.</p> <p>We have no information yet about how best to replace Brian Mullen on the days he won't be in the office. Ron Friedman is pursuing that. Brian should perhaps be invited to the next Board Meeting.</p> <p>Ed Savage has mentioned that Amazon.com has a fundraising function. Patrice Fitzgerald volunteered to look into it and speak to David Newton and Ed about how to set it up.</p> <p>Question raised: Are Board meetings all on first Tuesday of month? Yes, unless we need to change on a specific month.</p> <p>Are "under the stairs" discussions always held on the fourth Sunday of the month? Yes.</p> <p>The semi-annual meeting will be held on Sunday, January 25, 2015 immediately after services.</p> <p>Louise mentioned that former Music Director Douglas-Jayd Burn gave a farewell concert and wanted the money raised to go to the Music budget, so part of that will go directly to Music and some to the General Fund so that it can be matched.</p> <p>Two miscellaneous checks and one envelope of cash were found behind the minister's desk from more than two years ago. Louise returned them to those whose names were on them.</p>	<p>Patrice will tell Brian about the planned 1/25/15 semi-annual meeting date. [Done.]</p>
<p>Plans for Board Retreat</p>	<p>Discussion tabled until a later meeting.</p>	
<p>Bill LaPorte-Bryan</p>	<p>Bill suggested we ask Ron Sexton to come to next Board meeting to discuss work hours for John Bengtson.</p>	
<p>August 24<sup>th</sup> meeting "under the stairs" -</p>	<p>Bill and Martha will be able to attend on this date.</p>	

who will attend		
Council on Social Justice — Mike Winterfield	<p>Mike wanted to encourage Board members and guests to realize that the upcoming Hiroshima/Nagasaki event will be a hopeful, not depressing event.</p> <p>This is the second year we've been trying to go all-out to help The Village for Families and Children with backpacks and school supplies. Please contribute.</p> <p>Mike is going to charge rent for an event on Oct. 11, Saturday, during which CT UN folks want to do big climate program which has synergy with Green Sanctuary.</p>	
Format of 2014-2015 Board meetings	Discussion tabled until later meeting.	
Misc.	<p>The "Art Around the West End" group will be giving an exhibit and opening reception party at the Meetinghouse during the last weekend of September.</p> <p>We postponed to a later date the Executive Session regarding appointments to the Nominating Committee. Plans for the Start-Up meeting will be firmed up via email.</p>	

The next Board meeting was originally scheduled for Sept. 2, but that date **has since been changed to Tuesday, Sept. 9, 2014.**

Meeting adjourned at 9:20.

Respectfully submitted by Patrice Fitzgerald, Secretary

### ***Attachments***

August 10, 2014 Sermon  
 Bill LaPorte-Bryan  
 "The State of the Church, Joys, and Concerns"

Near the beginning of every Unitarian Society of Hartford Board meeting, I give a brief, verbal "President's Report" to the assembled Board members and our guests. Every month, it's made up of the same three parts; first "the state of the church", second "joys", and lastly "& concerns". When I give the report, I'm talking to the people in the room but I'm thinking about you. If you ever want to read it, it's published on our website as part of the minutes of the meeting.

But this month, I'd like to do things a little differently. While my report will be organized under the same three topics, it will be somewhat longer and delivered directly to you in the form of a sermon. I really like that because, for a change I can see your faces and talk with you in person rather than just imagining you in my mind.

So ... here we go.

First ... the state of our church.

I'm very pleased to be able to tell you that our church is in really good shape. For starters, we welcomed Heather and Cathy Rion Starr last week as our brand new ministers. I have a feeling they'll be around for a very long time. As settled ministers ... I love the sound of that word "settled" ... there's no predetermined end to their ministry at USH. They'll be with us as long as we want to be together, and who knows how long that will be. I know all of us will make them feel welcomed and do what we can to help them get to know Hartford and their new church.

And we are doubly, or maybe I should say triply, blessed because Gretchen

Saathoff, a talented musician and choir director who works at the Hartt School of Music at the University of Hartford next door became our new Music Director in July. Not only that, but we have a wonderful Director of Religious Education, Rayla Mattson, who has breathed new life into our RE program (and, by the way, into Sage, her new baby daughter). And to top it all off, there's Brian Mullen, our faithful, talented Business Manager, keeping us and our books in good shape. All in all, we are blessed with a top notch, 14 member staff.

But a good staff by itself isn't enough to make a good church. It takes a good congregation, that's us, you and me, to complete the picture. And, in my opinion, we have a wonderful congregation, growing every day. The real reason we emerged from the "troubles", as we call them, of the last several years and landed on our feet is because of you, all of you. It was a tough slog but we made it and if you look around you and in the mirror you'll see the people who got us to where we are today.

So ... let's take a few minutes to take a closer look at what's going on in our church.

Our worship services are really good, Sunday after Sunday after Sunday. They're well planned and include inspiring, comforting and sometimes challenging words meshed well with beautiful music and hymns and quiet times for personal contemplation. I see more and more people visiting our services every Sunday to check us out and see what they think.

All week long, our programs and activities are flourishing. A glance at USH E-news, our weekly newsletter, or at our church calendar showcases all kinds of opportunities for spiritual development, getting to know each other better, intellectual stimulation, community building, physical exercise, good food, wonderful entertainment, or just plain fun. There are things for all ages and many of them combine more than one of the things I just mentioned. There's something for everybody, as there should be.

As I look around the Sanctuary this morning, I see many of my friends whose lives, like mine, have been changed for the better as a result of their association with USH. For me, there's nothing more heart-warming than that.

We come to church for many different reasons ... we have different needs to be filled and different expectations. I've heard it said that a church, or a minister, or a sermon can't please everybody all of the time. That's certainly true about sermons and probably true about ministers but I wonder about churches. Is it too much to expect a church to provide a place where all of its members and friends can feel better about themselves? After all, isn't that why churches exist? Isn't it our job to provide a place where everybody who wants to be a part of this congregation, who chooses to participate in some of the things we do and who resonates with what we stand for, can find a home ... a place that satisfies their spiritual needs, whatever they might be? I don't think that's too much for us to ask for. Think about our 3<sup>rd</sup> UU principle, "Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations." Isn't that what we're called to do?

The good news is that, as I see it, we're in a really good position to do just that.

So, you might ask ... Where do we go from here? What do we do now? A few weeks ago, Dana Capasso talked about taking a pause during renewal. I liked that idea and even considered calling this sermon, "Renewal: Enjoying the Pause". Before we move on, I'd like to suggest that we take a little time to stop and smell the roses and then

get on with it, whatever “it” is ... I’ll talk more about that in a minute. And, by the way, I don’t think there’s anything wrong with patting ourselves on the back. Frankly, I think we deserve it. It hasn’t been easy. It’s taken time, patience, trust, hard work, perseverance, dedication and love ... lots of love for each other and for our church. But isn’t that what we’re all about? What did we say a few minutes ago when we said our great covenant? “Love is the spirit of this church.”

Which brings me to the second part of my report.

Joys.

If you want to feel good about yourself and your church, when you’re next in the Berkshires in Western Massachusetts, perhaps for a concert at Tanglewood, take some time to visit a little white church at 1089 Main Street in Great Barrington. It’s the brand new home of the Unitarian Universalist Meeting of South Berkshire, a relatively new, small, vibrant congregation formed in the 1960’s ... it’s the first church they’ve ever owned. But it’s possible that they wouldn’t have been able to buy it without the help of a \$50,000 mortgage loan from our endowment. Some of you spent a lot of time working with people from their congregation to negotiate that loan.

For nearly 200 years, USH has been spreading liberal religion throughout Central Connecticut, and now, in a sense, we’ve extended our reach by helping to spread our liberal religion in Western Massachusetts as well. The people at UUMSB are so grateful for our help and we should be glad that we were in a position to give it to them when they needed it most. That makes me feel really good about our church and I hope it makes you feel much the same way.

One of the things that helped to get us where we are today is a good Constitution, and we have one. Our Constitution begins with the USH mission statement. Let me read it to you.

*“The following is the mission statement of the Society: As a growing, evolving spiritual community inspired by our denominational values, we will commit ourselves to: Nurture our needs for personal spiritual growth, inspirational worship and a mutually caring community. Devote ourselves to religious learning for all ages. Embrace human diversity by welcoming individuals and families of all kinds. Join with the larger community to promote love, justice and service to society. Toward these ends we pledge our talents, energies and resources.”*

Then the statement ends with these words, “The Unitarian Society of Hartford affirms and promotes the full participation of persons in membership, hiring practices, and the calling of religious professionals without regard to race, color, national origin, ancestry, sex, gender identity, marital status, sexual orientation, age, or mental or physical disability.”

I love that mission statement and I can’t tell you how much it means to me to find our church in a place where we can concentrate on doing what our faith calls us to do, and work together to bring our mission to life. What a joy! I hope you feel the same way I do. It’s such a wonderful feeling.

I've always thought that a church should feel like a home for anyone who wants to be there. A safe place where they can be comfortable being themselves, knowing that they'll be respected and loved for whoever they are, whatever their needs and whatever they believe. USH is such a place. It's changed my life. I moved to Hartford from New York City and joined this church about 10 years ago. My wife had recently died and I had just retired from IBM. A few weeks ago, from this pulpit, Brian Harvey talked about how unexpected events can change our lives for the better and both of those things were big ones for me. They came out of the blue. It's not too much to say that joining this church was a life-saver for me. I met Ann, my wife, at coffee hour the first time I visited the Meetinghouse and, in time, was blessed with a new family, new friends, and a nurturing place to continue my life's journey. And, as the lyrics in my favourite hymn say, my life goes on with endless song. If that's not joy, I don't know what is.

And now the third and final part of my report and this sermon ... I call it "& concerns". You knew it was coming, didn't you.

Over the past several weeks, I've spent a lot of time thinking about what my concerns for this church are. What am I worried about, and why? Where do my fears come from? You might be surprised to learn that after all that thought, I've decided that, while I do have some nagging concerns, as I'm sure some of you do too, none of them is worth losing any sleep over. I'm happy with where we are and frankly I'm not worried about the future, not one whit.

There will be changes and challenges, of course, there always are, and I'm sure some of them will be big. I know that we won't be the same church two years from now that we are today. While I expect our congregation will be younger, more diverse, more adventurous, more technologically astute, perhaps experimenting with things that we can't even imagine now, I can't envision, in any detail, what the specific changes will be. If I did, I'd be guessing. But I look forward to them, whatever they are, to finding out what will happen ... that's what makes it fun. Whatever the changes turn out to be, I know we'll accept them, adjust to them and go on being a really good church for our children and grandchildren. We've had to adapt to change before and I'm sure we'll do it again. I'm optimistic!

Anyway, those are **my** thoughts. Sometime I'd like to hear yours.

**Unitarian Society of Hartford  
Covenant on the Accessibility of Unitarian Society of Hartford  
Meetings, Programs, and Events**

We, the members and friends of the Unitarian Society of Hartford, covenant to affirm and promote:

- The ability of USH members and friends, adults and children, to participate in

USH meetings, programs, and events is founded on our belief in the inherent worth and dignity of every person;

- The ability of USH members and friends, adults and children, to participate in USH meetings, programs, and events is rooted in our belief in treating everyone with justice, equity, and compassion;
- The accessibility of USH meetings, programs, and events to the extent that those who wish to participate are able to do so, within the best of our ability;
- The good faith collaboration and cooperation of groups who are sponsoring meetings, programs, and events with the Disabilities Sub-Council to assess the accessibility of planned events;
- The good faith collaboration and cooperation of groups sponsoring programs, meetings, or events with the Disabilities Sub-Council to create and/ or recommend accommodations to provide accessibility for those who request it to the extent reasonably possible;
- The good faith collaboration and cooperation of groups sponsoring programs, meetings, and events with the Board of Directors, Councils and Sub-Councils of USH to foster an atmosphere of acceptance, respect, and welcome.

The Unitarian Society of Hartford affirms and promotes a theology of wholeness and justice. Accessibility is about social justice, acceptance, and the ability of every person to participate in the life of our congregation – in worship, in leadership, in study, in community building, in service . And so may it be.

*Adopted unanimously by the Unitarian Society of Hartford Board of Directors on 6/14/05.*