

United Church on the Green
Leadership Board Meeting July 19, 2023
Minutes
via zoom

1. The meeting was called to order by Al Forino, moderator of the congregation, at 7:20p.m. Present: Cher Balkcom, Tim Bertaccini, Abram Guerra, Benjamin Gyadu, Christine Maursky, Colleen O'Connor, Julie Peterman, June Richards, John Sawyer, Moderator Al Forino, Senior Minister Rev. Dr. Stephen J. Ray, Jr. Rev. Ray offered an opening prayer.

2. The Minutes of the June 14, 2023 meeting were approved by consent.

3. Annual Conflict of Interest Forms. It is important for every board member and officer to sign the Conflict of Interest Form. Al has sent everyone copies and asks that they sign and return the to him by the beginning of September.

4. Tim presented the Treasurer's Report. We have started the fiscal year with a deficit of \$57,000. We had budgeted for a deficit of \$15,000. The reason for the deficit is an increase in expenses. We have been paying more for projects than anticipated in keeping up our buildings, some search committee expenses to get Stephen hired, and some salaries. At the beginning of this month we were low on cash flow, so the finance committee voted to transfer \$60,000 from the endowment to the operating account. The good news in all this is the endowment, as of 6/30/2023 was \$5.9 million, thanks to an increase in capital as well as substantial gifts. Pledging is at 86% of goal. We are short \$20,000 of our goal of \$155,000. We do generally take in more than what has been pledged.

The finance committee has started taking the collection again in the Sunday service. Tim asked that board members sign up to help with that starting in August. He will send around a list of available dates and asked that board members respond via email.

Al then added that our lease with IRIS is expiring and we will need a new one. Our mission is to rent to IRIS at cost, but our expenses have gone up. Even so, our offer will still be well below market rates, and we don't anticipate any difficulties.

Al then shared that we will be receiving a portion of John David Weinland's estate, as we are a 5% beneficiary. Walter Carson's estate is still a plaintiff in a mass tort litigation lawsuit going on up in Hartford that should have settled by now, except for the fact that the Social Security Administration - Medicare has decided that they want more reimbursement than they ever have received historically, and so it is taking longer to settle than anticipated.

5. Building Committee. John reported that work is being done to finish the front floor in the Meetinghouse. It will cost \$24,000 to refinish the unfinished wood. A motion was made by Colleen O'Connor, seconded by Julie Peterman to fund this project, which passed unanimously.

Tim then explained that even though we have a huge endowment, we do have a spending rule. There are limits to what we can take out of the endowment. Al added that the endowment over the years goes up and down with the stock market. Our two biggest expenses are our two buildings. Back in 2001 we had major work done on the steeple. Unfortunately, it may not last a long as it was supposed to. The interior of the Meetinghouse will also need to be repainted at some point. Basically, when the market is

up we can do work like that. John added that it may sound like we are throwing around money, but there is a great deal of formality; there are rules as to how much the finance committee may spend, and what amounts have to come before the Board. For the past 10 years we have had complete transparency with the congregation as to what is going on. We also post minutes on the member portion of our website as another method of transparency.

6. Pastor's Report. Stephen began by thanking everyone for their continued work supporting this tremendous congregation. He then shared some of his thoughts on our shift to the Bradley Room. Stephen feels it has been a boon to our Live Stream, in that we can control the quality of the sound as well as being able to focus on what's happening in the front as well as focusing on the congregation in a more intimate way – seeing them engaged with the service. He then asked how it has felt to us. Some responses were – it feels much more intimate in the smaller space where we are closer together. The consensus seems to be that people like the chairs set up in rows, like pews, although some preferred sitting around the round tables like we have in summers past. The smaller space also makes it more likely you will be sitting beside someone you haven't sat with before. One suggestion from those viewing online is to put the speaking parts up on the screen during the service. We then discussed that as we grow we may well have to use the side rooms for coffee hour, concluding with the idea that we are very happy to have to start worrying about space.

Stephen then shared a concern raised by some in the congregation who feel that the Parish House doesn't belong to us. We don't have much of a presence. The staff is all part time. Stephen plans to start keeping office hours at the Parish House from Tuesday through Thursday, for about 4 hours each day. Jack is planning on being in the office on Thursdays. Nancy will be coming in for at least an hour. In addition, we will be putting up some new signage. The three offices upstairs comprise "our footprint". We will put a sign – United Church on the Green Administrative Offices - on the wall up there. We will be getting additional signage for the office downstairs. Something explaining how we can be contacted would be helpful. We will also be exploring a "ring system" to replace the current buzzer, which doesn't work if we don't have anyone in the downstairs office to go to the door and engage the person. A ring system would connect the person to one of us, and if we are in the building, we could come down and open the door. We need to give people options for engaging with us in our Post-COVID world. Al suggested we also work on our signage at the Meetinghouse. Several people asked about when Nicole is in the office. Currently she comes in on Saturdays to do most of the work that she needs to do on site.

Stephen is still engaged with the Tech Committee regarding the best way to do the technical work that needs to be done -- our Live Stream, website, etc. We want to have a unified quality across all our platforms. Stephen is still reconfiguring the position for a Digital Media manager and hopes to post the position in the next few weeks. He suggested that we all look for examples of other church websites that are attractive and appealing to communities that would be open and available to us. If anyone finds anything, please reach out to Stephen, Jack, John, or Kathryn. There is also the question of whether we want to hire someone new, or to train someone who is currently doing some of the work for the new position.

Stephen brought back news from the General Synod. The UCC has elected our first woman; indeed, our first black woman President and General Minister, Karen Georgia Thompson. The General Synod also voted to move from meeting every two years to every three. Stephen also attended The Fellowship of Affirming Ministries (TFAM), the organization headed by Bishop Yvette Flunder. It is affiliated with

the UCC. It is the largest group of churches whose mission is to affirm all of God's children across the spectrum. He feels exploring an affiliation with them may be an appropriate thing for us as we continue to live into what it is that being an open and affirming church means when we take the next step to what that means in the world in which we live today.

Stephen then shared his thoughts on his upcoming Installation. He would like to leverage this – in terms of our church's profile – by bringing in a big name speaker, which will gather national attention. He is thinking about an event on Saturday, the day before, perhaps a panel discussion (a symposium) on the future of the progressive church. Stephen has been thinking about a date of October 22, 2023. Colleen moved that we set that date for Stephen's installation, seconded by Tim and voted unanimously. Stephen will email our Area Conference Minister to make sure that date is clear.

7. Group Discussion: Where Are We Going? Al feels, and this is one of the reasons we changed our governance structure, that we as a Board should think about bigger things than our the day-to-day management of the church, our building, our finances, and even our worship service. Where is the church going? What kind of church do we want to be? He then asked for comments, now or at a later time. Tim would like to see us turn the relationship with IRIS from landlord/tenant to one of partners, in terms of volunteer opportunities, and encouraged us to think of ways to do this. Cher shared that we invited IRIS to join us for a service last summer when we were worshiping in the Great Hall. Chris George gave the message that day and they joined us following the service for a potluck lunch. We invited everyone from IRIS. Many staff members (some who were former clients) attended, and it was a good time to get to know each other. Engaging our members in taking the next step and volunteering has been more difficult.

The next idea came from Chris, who suggested that now that we can use the Bradley Room, we open our space to the Oasis Youth Group for events; maybe a Lock-In for the kids. Abram had an idea about commissioning some students to write a play. A common theme through all this is exposing the wider community to us through the kinds of groups, organizations, and issues that we support.

7. Active/Inactive Member Project. June and Al have determined we have 106 active and 45 inactive members. Al will draft a letter to the inactive members advising them of their status and letting them know that they can be made active again. He plans to be encouraging and tell them how they can become more active.

8. Safe Church Procedures Status Update. Al expressed his gratitude to Julie and Roger Adams for the work they have been doing to update our procedures. Julie explained that they took a 45 page document left to us by Jocelyn and whittled it down to 12 pages. It is still a work in process. It will go on the Agenda for our November meeting.

9. Other business. John Sawyer shared that he is planning on putting our Zoom Coffee Hour on the large screen TV in the Bradley Room. He plans to work on this project when he is back from his vacation in August.

10. Next Board Meeting. Our next meeting will be on Wednesday, September 13 at 7p.m. on Zoom.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:40p.m.