

# Minutes for the Board Meeting of the Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church, August 15, 2023

**approved**

## 1. Introduction / Chalice Lighting / Covenant

President Eddie Chin convened the meeting with a chalice lighting and invocation to listening so that we can change ourselves and serve our world. [00:50]

Present (in alphabetical order): Rob Bray, Chris Buice, Bill Cherry, Eddie Chin, AB Coleman, Denise Coleman, Steve Drevik, Lynn Hixson, Mebbie Jackson, Ted Jones, Heather Kistner, Maddie Kulpa, Barb Lamm, Jeff Mellor, Claudia Pressley, Mary Rogge, Ken Stephenson, Bella Thomas-Wilson.

## 2. Continuation of Board Retreat [1:35]

Eddie turned the meeting over to AB Coleman to continue the discussions from the Board Retreat. AB began with an analysis and summary of responses on the questionnaire previously distributed to the Board asking for the Goals we should focus on for 2023/2024. Five major points of agreement emerged in the Board responses:

First, **TVUUC needs to grow, attract and cultivate new stakeholders, friends, donors, and volunteers.**  
 Second, **TVUUC must be financially stable and increase sources in funding.**  
 Third, **TVUUC must be recognized and exert a larger voice in the community.**  
 Fourth, **TVUUC must connect and consolidate interactions across generations.**  
 Fifth, **TVUUC must fulfill its Mission.** [3:53]

From these five points of agreement, AB derived three central Goals.

1. **Create a structure that can quickly and effectively focus our resources to accomplish the church's mission and shared vision.** [7:45- 9:09]
2. **Identify, develop and increase the necessary human resources essential to the growth and expanded influence of TVUUC and its mission.** [9:44]
3. **Organize financial resources so as to provide secure, predictable support at a reasonable cost structure.** [10:08]

Realizing these goals may be a prerequisite to our ability as a Board to drive the mission of TVUUC. [10:40]

In the following extensive discussion, it emerged that having these concrete clearly stated goals in mind will help us to focus our energies and to gain confidence in the achievability of long-term ends that might otherwise seem intimidating. **Number 3** is meant both to assure, stabilize and increase revenue, but also to provide cost oversight. Consideration of other, perhaps more efficient, ways to achieve the same goals would be considered in this process. Some structures which are envisioned or in development could be assigned to specific tasks in this process. Two examples would a **Funding Task Force** and a **Tech Support Task Force** charged with specific areas items of interest. [15:45]

The matter of immediate vs long term goals was addressed. Where do items such as a) video in the sanctuary, b) completion of the amphitheater, c) repave parking lot fit in? UUA organizers emphasized in a recent leadership meeting that a healthy congregation culture with clear chains of authority is essential for tasks and responsibilities to be assigned and brought to fruition. [20:28]

An important factor in making progress on these issues is identifying stakeholders in the church and assuring communication to keep everyone informed on goals, tasks and results. Policies and by-laws drive and govern our actions. We need to identify our core programs and examine the needs in personnel (church leaders, committee chairs and team members) and also identify requisite funding for these programs to fulfill their mission. The more stakeholders are convinced that we do what we say, the more stakeholders we attract. We recognize that we can't do everything we wish. So, we must identify critical areas on which to concentrate. [26:02]

The Board will set **Medium Term Goals** to concentrate focus and resources. A good way to make progress is to institute a **Two-Week Sprint** for individual teams, which acknowledge the time limitations we have in a volunteer organization. Ken reinforced the distinction between teams and committees in that teams can better function in the two-week sprint structure and provide a way to get more people involved in the work of the church. [28:05] Team members do not have to be members of the church, especially if they bring special capabilities, e. g. graphic design, to the task. The term Teams also implies short-term commitment. Barbara noted that she had provided definitions for the concepts — team, committee, task force, group — in the Program Guide. [30:43]

It was agreed to add these definitions in our charters and bylaws so that there would be widespread agreed-upon understanding of the terms to encourage participation in our efforts. Chris noted that *outside members* of a team might be especially subject to criticism from *members of the congregation* and we should guard against such exposing outside helpers to criticism lest it discourage their willingness to contribute. [32:15] Roy emphasized the need for ways to oversee and evaluate the work and commitments of all these entities. [35:50] AB responded that a way to do this was envisioned in what he termed OKR (Objectives Key Results) measurements. There is a low-cost option to do this via a Microsoft Teams add-on (called VIVA). [38:35] He suggested illustrating this by looking at the TVUUC RE program. Ken gave a concrete example along the following lines would be useful in further discussion: “This team will work on playground enhancement, list of committed team members, timetable, markers for progress, etc.” AB agreed saying that the reason for beginning with RE is that they had started implementation of this process, noting that Microsoft Teams provided a method for integrating this into church affairs. [57:18] Maddie offered to show how Teams had helped RE produce a template and example of OKR in action for that program, showing status, progress reports toward identified goals. [61:03]

Expressing a perceived consensus, Roy agreed that the low-cost option to track OKR would be acceptable to him and AB indicated he intended to approach the Endowment Committee for funds to cover these costs, which are significantly lower for us as a non-profit entity. The preponderance of Board members agreed with Ken that using Teams is the way to go, noting that adoption of Teams software with appropriate training will take some time, but is important to start on this process with a couple of projects. [66:53] Maddie and AB expressed readiness to help people needing orientation for the software. Ken observed that Teams provides a way to forward. Teams centralizes emails, but also internally forwards messages to the account one normally uses, obviating the necessity of constantly checking more than one email account. Maddie added that communications can even be forwarded to one's phone. Some discussion reviewed the decision to use Google Workspace or Microsoft Teams. The Microsoft platform was chosen. [76:00]

Barbara highlighted the advantage of having identifiable **institutional** email links (not personal email addresses) to programs, e. g. the Flower Program, on the website as this can serve to awaken interest in

prospective members. [81:10]

At the conclusion of his presentation, AB highlighted the issue of Mission/Vision/Covenant and the need for the Board to update, consolidate and endorse a statement of Shared Vision. He and Chris had assembled and merged many available statements to begin this process using AI in this process. Three documents, statements or compilations are in circulation and shown here;

#### =====Document 1=====

##### **AI Vision**

This "Shared Vision" was AI generated using all the personal mission statements turned in during our "Personal Mission." exercise.

##### **TVUUC Shared Vision**

We envision a vibrant and caring community where unity and shared values form the foundation of our collective journey. We aspire to be a haven where connections are actively nurtured, and every individual, especially our youth, are empowered to contribute, celebrate, and find their unique place in the world through music, meals, and other acts of love. Our vision centers around establishing thriving, small groups dedicated to co-creating a future anchored in justice, equality, and compassion.

We see ourselves as a dynamic hub of continuous learning and growth, facilitating opportunities that inspire acts of justice and love. We aim to keep our community informed, connected, and engaged in the ongoing challenges and possibilities of our world. We commit to the holistic well-being of our members, nourishing their spiritual, emotional, and psychological growth through counseling and mentorship, while leveraging the rich wisdom and experiences of our senior members.

Our vision is to extend a hand of healing, compassion, kindness, and love to all, providing support and care to the aging and chronically ill, aiding individuals in their quest for meaning and purpose, and promoting healthy lifestyles. We pledge to stand with our members in their times of grief and recovery, fostering a supportive environment that encourages resilience and strength. We are dedicated to transforming our community through our shared values, mission, and covenant, prioritizing the overall well-being of our members.

We are deeply committed to acting as agents of positive change, fostering a legacy of love, equality, justice, compassion, and mercy. We champion the cause of environmental stewardship, cherishing and protecting our earth and all its creatures. Our vision propels us to actively dismantle the structures of hate, fear, racism, and prejudice, standing firm in our commitment to recognizing and celebrating diversity and the rights of all.

Our overarching vision is to ensure we leave a legacy that transforms the world into a more just, compassionate, and loving place - a world that embodies life, liberty, and happiness for all, ensuring a brighter, more inclusive future for generations to come.

#### =====Document 2=====

This is an AI compilation of our Mission Canvas, our current website, and various other TVUUC documents.

Our mission is to serve as a welcoming sanctuary for spiritual growth, where everyone, irrespective of their faith, can find common ground and be empowered to make a difference in the world through acts of love and justice. We aim to nurture an atmosphere of authenticity, creativity, and tolerance that embraces diversity and encourages the expression of individuality.

As a dynamic community center, we strive to foster connectivity, cooperation, and collaboration, providing a

space where spirituality and shared values converge to inspire transformational change. We strongly uphold our commitment to inclusivity, welcoming and supporting the LGBTQ+/TGQNB communities, people of color, women, and all those who have been systemically oppressed.

Our mission is not merely to exist, but to persist in our endeavors, challenging each individual to contribute to the common good. Through our collective efforts, we strive to reshape the world into a place of greater love, justice, and understanding, promoting the values we hold dear within our community and beyond.

### =====Document 3=====

#### Three Currently Used Covenants

TVUUC has three versions on its Covenant that are used at different times:

1. The official version currently on its website
2. The affirmation repeated in church services that ends with “This is our great covenant.”
3. The version created by RE that includes the Eighth Principle

It is time to update the official version, so the Worship Committee has taken on the challenge.

Here is Bard’s (Google AI) “concise” interpretation of our current Covenant, as stated on our website and in our Governance documentation.

#### 1. We covenant with each other to:

- o Welcome all with acceptance and respect.
- o Listen with sincerity and love.
- o Foster trust, practice patience, and speak our truth directly and with compassion.
- o Reflect carefully before we speak or act.
- o Assume the positive intent of others and keep our discussions on topics and issues rather than personalities.
- o Support and participate in collaborative and democratic decision-making processes, even when we disagree.
- o Pursue mutually satisfying resolution when there is disagreement.
- o Speak directly to those with whom we have disagreements and encourage others to do the same.
- o Speak out with loving kindness when we witness disrespectful interactions.
- o Act with loving kindness, seeking to promote justice, equity, and compassion.
- o Understand that building our beloved community requires ongoing learning and practice of courageous acts of love and reconciliation.

#### 2. Here is the version developed by the TVUUC RE Team.

Our agreement for ways we will act on our principles, so we can make this space as safe, welcoming and fun as possible for all:

1. Show Respect for All
2. Be Kind and Fair
3. Participate and Encourage Each Other
4. Share, Listen & Take Turns
5. Include Everyone
6. Settle Disagreements in Peaceful, Caring Ways
7. Take Care of Each Other, Our Space and Our World
8. Challenge Racism and Oppression Wherever We Find Them

#### 3. Affirmation stated in church

Love is the spirit of this church,  
 And service is its law. To dwell together in peace,  
 To seek the truth in love, and to help one another,  
 This is our great covenant.

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AB identified the most important document among these is the Covenant document (**Document 3**), which incorporates three variants in circulation and use. He indicated that the Worship Committee will be working to consolidate and harmonize these statements. [85:09]

### 3. Stewardship (Ted Jones)

Ted Jones presented a report with suggestions for innovations for stewardship and fundraising for TVUUC. He reviewed the recent relatively uniform fundraising process as follows: “raise pledge money in the early spring for the general budget and then use the pledge money to create a specific budget for the upcoming year,” noting that this has typically resulted in only “slight increases in the average pledge over time.”

Special budgetary initiatives have yielded few successes. In an innovative step, he suggested a new campaign that would ask for funds for the general budget **and** ask for an increase in giving so as to do something specific and new. He identified these factors that could offer profitably figure in this extra ask and attract extra support among our pledge units.

1. An **increased visibility to the UTK community** has been consistently suggested at the traditional large donor events held annually, and is often mentioned among congregants at large at TVUUC as something we should do more of.
2. More than one past TVUUC minister have opined that UTK would be a good place to focus outreach efforts, including Rev. John Buehrens and Rev. Duncan Teague.
3. Many of our current congregants are current or former UTK faculty. Our denomination is well-known to have long-standing ties with academic communities across the country. Academic communities have historically been fertile ground especially for the Unitarian part of our religion.
4. Our congregation, like most religious communities in the US, are in need of **more members and particularly younger members and families with children**. The UTK community would fit this bill. Not only would a UTK ministry / outreach program be aimed at **attracting young adults**, this program would also work to increase visibility among UTK faculty and staff: often liberal-minded families who are looking for a place to bring their children. This proposed program would focus on both UTK students as well as faculty and staff.
5. Unlike some other TVUUC growth ideas, A UTK Ministry / Outreach program **would not require capital or equipment investment, making it a flexible investment** and a program that can be shaped as it goes along.

Ted proposed that the Board approve / appoint / commission a study group or task force to study this idea, with a goal of completing its work by the time the 2024-2025 stewardship materials need to be prepared, which is January of 2024 (in five months).

He outlined the following points for study by the group the Board would commission.

The tasks assigned to this study group would be:

1. Draft a first-year annual budget for the program, estimating
  - a. A (young) minister’s salary and benefits at a 33% FTE and a 50% FTE (two program choices)

- b. Funds for events (food and such for group events)
  - c. Funds for possible rental of space
  - d. Funds for advertising (internet, paper, radio and other mediums deemed worthy)
  - e. Funds for consultation with any expert who knows about seeding ministries / similar programs
2. Sketch some beginning goals for the first year of the program
    - a. Obtain a UTK faculty sponsor
    - b. Develop a process / group to decide the direction of the program. Rather than outlining what a UTK program would look like now, flexibility should be given to the program coordinator to shape the program as more is learned about how it might work best. So it should be outlined who, in consultation with whom, should decide how this program operates and unfolds.
  3. Obtain preliminary feedback on the proposed program from TVUUC givers
    - a. Ask at least five large TVUUC donors if they would have interest in increasing their pledge to support such a new initiative.
  4. Examine the feasibility of evaluation of the impact of the new program with data.
    - a. One idea is to count the number of requests that are made monthly (via the grey “interest” cards) and see if these increase in number over the course of this program.
  5. Make a recommendation to the Board by December of 2023 on whether to include this as a spotlighted program in the next (2024-2025) Stewardship campaign.

Subsequent discussion was generally supportive of engaging younger families and UT affiliated persons to join. A number of additional issues were raised, including the current and longstanding underfunding of current staff positions, the desirability of identifying more modest goals should the proposal for a 33% or 50% young minister position not be realizable. Claudia added that members of the Personnel Committee are well informed on UUA Guidelines, job descriptions, and constitute a ‘well-oiled’ machine on personnel and compensation matters. They should be included as a subgroup in any proposed study group on this issue. She has seen churches successfully launch a youth ministry with a limited three year ‘capital campaign’ to fund a campus minister for a three-year time commitment, where the candidate is clearly aware that the appointment may terminate after three years. The UUA job list includes positions of limited duration, for example. [111:42] Bella recounted her experience that very few students at UT are aware of our congregation and what we offer, including UUs who come to UT from elsewhere. [114:38] Ken reiterated his suggestion that the Stewardship committee also explore more modest project suggestions as fundraising goals in the stewardship campaign beyond this very ambitious goal of recruiting a campus minister. [166:24] The special goal of renewing advertising on WUOT is one example of such a more modest project.

**Mary moved we establish a study group as Ted presented in his proposal. When no second was offered, the motion was tabled and Maddie said she would set up a Chat Group on Teams to continue discussion on the matter of additional Stewardship opportunities and UT outreach. [124:11]**

Chris noted that the Fall is a time of increased visitation and newcomers exploring TVUUC as a possible church home. He encouraged Board Members to be proactive in welcoming newcomers and integrating them into the goings-on at TVUUC. New membership events are organized in the Fall to help in this process. Some initiatives under discussion are ‘Bring a Friend Sunday,’ First Sunday Potlucks, Chris’s Columns in the NEWS-SENTINEL, Greet Your Neighbor at the conclusion of the service. This is the season for getting the word out and promoting our brand.

#### **4. General Assembly (Chris Buice)**

Chris expressed his gratitude at representing TVUUC at General Assembly and giving the keynote sermon in

the Service of the Living Tradition: “Toward Our Metamorphosis into Who Knows What”. As Chaplain of the UUA Board, he took note of the dynamic UU culture of diverse and strong opinions, a feature that we need to be mindful of as we strive to integrate new members. The need to negotiate clashes of differing agendas and opinions was one reason he was appointed as Chaplain. He highlighted the prominent center stage representation of TVUUC at GA, featuring Jon Coffee, Elnora Williams, who read selections from Elandria’s writings, Duncan Teague, and Juniper Meadows. A new president was elected at GA, Rev. Sofia Betancourt, Ph.D. and a fresh statement of our principles under the heading of Article II was presented for further study, revision and discussion. The final statement is slated for adoption next year. He called attention to a lecture at GA on creeping fascism, noting that our state Tennessee has frequently cropped up in this discussion.

Jeff reported that many convention goers frequently told him how lucky we are at TVUUC to have representatives who can articulate and demonstrate our faith so effectively. He expressed the hope that if we can project this image nationally, that we can also do so in the Knoxville area.

#### **5. Closing (Eddie Chin)**

Eddie closed the meeting with a fitting invocation. [142:03]

**Respectfully submitted,  
Jeff Mellor  
Secretary**