

Minutes for the Mid-Year Congregational Meeting of the Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church, February 25, 2024

APPROVED

1. Call to Order - Eddie Chin [05:15]

Recognizing both those physically present and members participating on-line, President Eddie Chin declared a quorum to general assent and called the meeting to order. He expressed the sentiment that we meet in covenant as expressed in the Religious Exploration Handbook:

- SHOW RESPECT FOR ALL,
- BE KIND AND FAIR,
- PARTICIPATE AND ENCOURAGE EACH OTHER,
- SHARE AND TAKE TURNS,
- INCLUDE EVERYONE,
- SETTLE DISAGREEMENTS IN PEACEFUL AND CARING WAYS,
- TAKE CARE OF EACH OTHER, OUR SPACE AND OUR WORLD,
- CHALLENGE RACISM AND OPPRESSION WHERE WE FIND IT.

The chalice was then lit.

2. Introduction and Board Goals - Eddie Chin [06:53]

Eddie outlined these procedures for the meeting: Following a presentation of the bylaws to be voted on, there will be a question-and-answer period giving each person an opportunity to speak for an allotted time to be monitored by the Secretary. After all speakers have had the first opportunity to speak, anybody wishing a second and final opportunity to speak will be recognized. Speakers are asked to address only their own views, rather than those perceived to be of others. [07:54]

Eddie then reminded participants of the decision approved unanimously at the Congregational Meeting of June 11, 2023 on votes by in-person and virtual participants. This motion was to be included in future church bylaws, but since the bylaws now in effect are the old bylaws, he asked they be approved by unanimous consent for this meeting:

"We, the members of the Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church, vote to henceforth hold all called congregational meetings simultaneously, in-person and virtually. All votes by members in such meetings will be valid, just as if we were all meeting in-person in the Church space. Our Church is not the building itself, but the people of which it is made."

Motion passed unanimously, without dissent or abstention. [09:45]

Eddie summarized the years-long history and background of the bylaws changes about to be considered. The process had begun about a decade ago and had been the subject of numerous meetings with the staff and board[s] and group of congregation presidents in the Southeast region, but had also been hindered and

interrupted by external crises, COVID chiefly among them. He stressed the cooperative and inclusive nature of the discussions in *change*, which is inevitably a stressful, if necessary, process for future growth and vitality. He emphasized the enthusiastic and positive role of the Board in first formulating goals and objectives, a process that ultimately required slimming down that list to the most important and immediate items since we can't do everything we would like to do all at once. The four-fold purpose in the proposed changes was to

- 1) "Create a fast, focused, flexible structure to optimize and focus TVUUC's resources on accomplishing its mission and shared vision," [15:08]
- 2) "Identify, develop and grow the necessary human resources essential to TVUUC's growth and influence as driven by its mission," [15:47]
- 3) "Grow TVUUC's financial resources to provide secure and predictable sources of funds and a reasonable cost structure," [15:56]
- 4) "Improve TVUUC's ability and focus to connect generations through common goals and visions." [16:07]

To do this, we consulted with professionals to develop specific language to move toward system improvement. The Personnel Committee, the Leadership Development Committee, the Strategic Planning Committee, Strategic Status Team, the Technology Support Team and the Program Council were engaged in the process to identify processes, responsibilities, and timelines in the church organization. He praised the incredible talents, dedication and hard work of the church members doing this work in the last several years. He asked all those who had participated in this work to stand, which was met with applause of acclaim. [18:28]

3. Rationale of Bylaws Changes - Heather Kistner

Eddie called on President-Elect Heather Kistner to provide an overview of the rationale for the bylaws changes. [18:48] She began by reflecting on the experience people have upon entering the church — the panoply of activities, all the people involved in them, and how we experience the interconnectedness of people, tasks and responsibilities and the possible disorientation that engenders. Persons joining us on Sunday need a way to easily and immediately identify who to go to if they want to get something done or join in to help carry out a task or achieve a goal. She took note of the many disparate ways of communication in the church — newsletters, bulletin boards, flyers, word of mouth, emails, and so on. This disparateness responds to individual preferences, but can result in fragmentary awareness of important items within the congregation as a whole. What is needed is a '**SINGLE SOURCE OF TRUTH**,' which informs everybody and to which anybody can refer. Another rationale for the proposed changes is to inform and educate younger members or newcomers to the church on the tasks and roles available in congregation. Broad awareness of this sort aids leadership development and recruitment when we seek fresh leadership in the church. [27:01]

4. Bylaws Change Summary and Questions- Denise and A.B. Coleman

To begin the Question-and-Answer session, Denise Coleman assumed the floor and introduced her husband, A.B. Coleman. [32:56] They jointly chair the Strategic Planning Committee. In this shared role and as a Past President, she reiterated that the central pillar of their work is the Love that is the spirit of this church. A.B. continued the presentation with an analogy between the functioning of the church and a restaurant. The 'front end' of the church is its Sunday service for adults and children and outreach to the community, just as the 'front end' of a restaurant is the menu and service provided. The 'back end' of the church is all the activity and effort keeping the institution functioning — maintenance, heat and light, repairs, financial organization, etc., whereas the 'back end' of a restaurant is the management, cooks, waitstaff, food supply, dishwashing, cleanup, etc. What attracts parishioners and restaurant customers is the 'front,' the spiritual or physical nourishment, but the 'back end' makes all that possible. The purpose of bylaws is to organize the 'back end' of the church to enable the 'front end' to serve the congregation and the community. [35:29]

From their experience as management consultants, A.B. and Denise recommended a 'flat' managerial structure in place of the current 'hierarchical' one. What this means, is that responsibilities and authority for tasks be distributed as much as possible in accordance with policy mandated by the Board to the individual assigned

those tasks. If some maintenance (or fiscal) task is required, the assigned person is empowered to perform it without further consultation up the chain of command, seeking approval that initiates a directive or approval back down the chain of command, as is characteristic of ‘hierarchical’ structures. Surveys of other churches of similar size and configuration revealed that many share the experience that their bylaws establish a ‘hierarchical’ structure and that, as a consequence, they are hindered from timely and efficient completion of needed tasks. [38:36]

In close consultation with UUA regional and national leaders, they developed a proposal to initiate a shift toward a ‘flatter’ managerial structure consonant with the mission and vision of the church. From these talks, it became clear that changing **wording of** the bylaws is merely the necessary first step in a process of **behavioral, i. e. cultural**, change toward a new organizational structure. The spirit follows from the letter as we enter into a possibly messy and prolonged period of transformation.

In the managerial terms used by UUA leadership we are moving from a ‘policy board’ that is suitable for a much larger church to a ‘strategy board’ more appropriate for a church of our size as it allows for greater flexibility in operation permitting delegation of authority and responsibility for more tasks while exercising overall policy guidance in accordance with our mission and vision. [47:22]

At this point, A.B. and Denise opened floor to comments and questions. In response to one question, A.B. outlined a central feature of the reorganization, in Article V of the bylaws where the fourfold collaborative Management Team is defined, consisting of 1) Director of Finance and Operations, who chairs the team, 2) the Senior Minister, 3) the Director of Religious Exploration, and 4) the Director of Music. Their respective roles are 1) Managerial, Financial, and Operational Affairs, 2) Pastoral Care and Outreach, 3) Lifespan Religious Education, and 4) organization of the Music Program.

As one example for advantages of these changes, Eddie noted that this redefinition of the role of Senior Minister conforms with his desire to shed administrative duties in order to more effectively provide pastoral care and community outreach. [56:53] A.B. also noted that the new bylaws enable a President to run for more than one successive term. This should promote consistency, continuity and stability of leadership where, by contrast, a one-year Presidential term can introduce uncertainty resulting from frequent transition. [62:20] From his participation in the council of regional congregational presidents in the Southeast Region, Eddie noted that the most of his colleagues operate under a system where terms can be extended over more than one year.

The question was called by Susan Kovac.

The debate was closed by a 2/3 majority of show of hands. [68:34]

Eddie reminded those voting that a 2/3 majority is required for the new bylaws to be adopted and turned the floor over to TVUUC Board Secretary Jeff Mellor to manage the voting process and reporting of the results. (The text of the Bylaws is appended <[Bylaws February 2024 FINAL.doc](#)>)

5. Bylaws Vote (initiation) – Jeff Mellor

Jeff announced that ten minutes would be allotted for the collection and counting of the votes of those present and those online. [69:49]

6. Technology Update – Maddie Kulpa

In the interim, Board Member and Technology Support Team Member Maddie Kulpa provided an overview of the technology requirements and solutions that accompany the changes induced in the bylaws. [73:41] Two parallel systems are involved, one for internal church administrative functioning, the other for interaction with

members of the congregation generally and the public at large.

To provide the ‘**SINGLE SOURCE OF TRUTH**’ referenced earlier in the meeting, the approach adopted makes information easier to access, eliminates redundant sources of information and reduces the overlapping role of apps used. Our system 1) connects existing platforms, 2) provides accurate, accessible and timely information, 3) enables communication, coordination and collaboration among numerous participants. REALM, already in general use, has been identified as the best way to achieve these goals. It addresses many of the administrative needs we have, including such diverse matters as marriage and memorial services, new hires, fundraising initiatives, accounting and stewardship processes, membership interest group formations, and membership status. It provides targeted communication to specific persons or committees charged with certain tasks, e. g. Buildings and Grounds or the RE Program. She also highlighted the role our website plays in communication and outreach to the broader community and described briefly how the website would be managed. She opened the floor to questions while votes were being counted. [81:20] She invited those interested to participate in her periodic techno-sessions on the first Thursday of every month.

Gordon Gibson suggested this terminology change: For ‘**SINGLE SOURCE OF TRUTH**’ he recommended ‘**SINGLE SOURCE OF INFORMATION**’ which met with approving laughter and applause. [83:50]

7. Vote Results

Jeff reported the following tally: 113 votes cast, 105 YES, 4 NO, 4 ABSTAIN Motion Passed.

8. Next Steps - Doug Cox

Doug Cox acknowledged that adjustments to the just approved bylaws may be identified prior to the June Congregational Meeting to assure smoother operation of church affairs and announced that discussions on further improvements will continue.

9. Program Council - Barbara Lamm

Barbara Lamm called attention to the organizational charts of the Program Council Programs posted in the hallway.

10. Closing - Eddie Chin

Eddie adjourned the meeting with words of praise and thanks.

**Respectfully submitted,
Jeff Mellor, Secretary**