

# TVUUC BOARD ZOOM MEETING of 12/15/20

## MINUTES

President Matthew Blondell called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm.

Members and Guests Present (alphabetically):

Matthew Blondell, Chris Buice, Eddie Chin, Denise Coleman, Justina Hyfantis, Heather Kistner, Viren Lalka, David Massey, Ryan McBee, Jeff Mellor, Mark Mohundro, Claudia Pressley, Linda Randolph, Taylor Thomas, Jamie Watts, Erven Williams, Alice Woody.

## CONSENT AGENDA

1. Minutes of 10-20-2020 meeting.

**Denise moved, Erven seconded approval as distributed. Unanimous.**

2. Conflict of Interest Policy.

The Board discussed the draft as submitted. One addition was approved to Article III, Section c. as follows: "If the the President of the Board of Directors is the party with a potential conflict of interest, the Incoming President shall be responsible to perform the duties of the President in section b. of these Procedures." The complete amended policy statement is attached.

**Alice moved, Jamie seconded approval of the Conflict of Interest Policy as amended. Unanimous.**

## DISCUSSION AGENDA

1. Commission on Institutional Change

Mark Mohundro reported on the Commission of Institutional Change and emphasized that this was part of a long-term initiative in the UUA to address issues of race, class, and age as they may arise or be evident in traditional practices and policies needful of re-examination and change. The work of the commission relates to the adoption of the 8th Principle but is more far-reaching and comprehensive. Mark had distributed these links to background information to the Board and basis for discussion:

- The Commission's website <https://www.uua.org/uuagovernance/committees/cic>

- The Report <https://www.uua.org/uuagovernance/committees/cic/widening>
- Congregational Resources <https://www.uua.org/uuagovernance/committees/cic/institutional-change-congregation-resources>
- Study Action Guide <https://www.uua.org/widening/guide>

He noted that Westside had already developed a plan for proceeding on some of these issues.

Heather asked if some committee, task force or some sub-group of the church leadership should be principally involved in further work on this matter. Erven suggested conferring with the UUA President. Board consensus was that the Leadership Committee would continue work on this matter, given the long timeline and broad scope of the issues. Mark expressed clear interest in an ongoing involvement in this issue.

## 2. Endowment Fund update

David Massey reported on an offer from Haresh Mirani (via the Mirani Foundation) of \$50k in matching funds to benefit the church Endowment Fund. The broadly felt sense in the Board and leadership was both gratitude for this generous offer and second an interest in assuring that monies donated to the Endowment to be matched not detract from the regular money raising activities of the church for operating expenses. It became clear in the discussion that a Memorandum of Understanding between Haresh and TVUUC would need to be worked out, which would then be put to the Leadership Council and then to the Board. Linda observed that a transient inability of TVUUC to meet its financial obligations to UUA in the past had brought Larry Wheeler in for consultation and recommendations on ways to assure smooth functioning of the church's financial affairs in both arenas, which should be considered. Heather stressed that it would be important for potential donors to have a clear idea of the purposes for which the endowment funds would be used. David noted that, even if fully realized, the \$100k principal would remain untouched and only the proceeds would be used. Taylor reinforced the idea that some clear articulation of the ways in which the match would benefit the church is needed. He suggested one way of avoiding conflicts between seeking funding of operating budget and of the endowment might be to approach potential major donors personally, confidentially and individually to consider to a repeated donation (e.g. \$1000 each year for three years) to realize the match. Board consensus was that David continue working on a proposal for discussion with Haresh with a goal of having a further basis for discussion in the first quarter of next year.

### 3. Stewardship Committee update

Taylor reported that \$499k of pledges had been raised in the last campaign before the COVID pandemic hit. This was more than anticipated. Given this success, he suggested a goal of at least \$500k be envisioned for next year's campaign. The beginning of this campaign would likely be around mid-February, with a possible kick-off date of February 21. A reception for major donors this past year had gone well and discussions centered on how to repeat something similar under strictures imposed by the pandemic. More generally, considerable discussion focused on ways to ensure that ALL donors be assured of the gratitude of the church for their contributions and on ways to make pledging and contributing fun, enjoyable and fulfilling. Several Board members expressed praise for last year's success. Taylor noted that changed financial circumstances of smaller donors in the pandemic might foreshadow a lessening of their ability to contribute as much as in the past. Chris noted that the advent of virtual ZOOM-mediated services could offer an opportunity to integrate 'distance 'members into the giving community. An update of these matters is expected in January with the likelihood that Taylor will be invited to that meeting.

### 4. Financials

Viren reported that the overall financial picture of the church is good.

Viren had distributed in advance suggestions for reformatting the categories used in the budget: 'Pledge Contributions', 'Non-Pledge Contributions', 'Prior Year Pledges', 'Anticipated New Pledges 'could all be subsumed under 'Pledge Contributions'. Claudia reviewed some of the history of these categories, specifically that 'Anticipated New Pledges 'had been used by past to account for pledges promised but not yet realized by the budget deadline. Consensus was that these various pledge accounts be designated as sub-accounts under an account with a general title resembling 'Pledge Contributions'.

Viren said it appeared that some loans of less than \$150k might be forgiven, but further paperwork would be required and he would report further as that became clear.

The first installment on the SBA loan would be due in September 2021. He indicated that all the church Endowment account and regular accounts, which share the same Tax ID, should be consolidated starting January 2021 under the single Tax ID number. The Endowment Committee endorses this.

Viren and Claudia clarified that the unusually large amount for 'utilities' in this report reflected a total billing for solar panels and associated work over the period June through November, but which had all been submitted as a group this month because the firm had suspended operations for an extended period in response to the pandemic.

The proceeds from the Auction totaled more than \$13k, which drew great appreciation from the Board, and Claudia noted that the uncertainty regarding how the auction and the rummage sale might or might not take place meant that the anticipated proceeds from these events had not been included in budget calculations and that, in short, this \$13k was freely available to supplement church finances.

Brief discussion concerning the handling of non-cash items, e.g. cars, pianos, indicated that this category should be added to the overall budget. In the past, such donations had either been handled by an outside non-profit party, who remitted the proceeds of sale to TVUUC, or by an acknowledgment to the donor of the donated item with the notation that the donor should consult a tax professional on how to deal with the transaction on his/her tax return.

Viren noted that church members using the standard deduction on their Federal taxes can by the provisions in the CARES Act donate an additional \$300 to the church in a so-called 'above the line' deduction on their taxes. This must be done by December 31 and, at Claudia's request, he will be preparing detailed directions on how to accomplish this for Claudia and Michael to put in the Newsletter. The twofold effect of this is: a) the taxpayer gets an additional deduction, b) the Church gets increased revenue.

Viren brought up the matter of Pandemic Relief Bonuses in consideration of burdens falling on church employees in pandemic conditions. This was discussed in some detail, as it involved matters such as utilization of personal equipment, e.g. personal computers and personal cellphones off church premises to fulfill church duties, including also establishing a home office for these duties.

As a result of these discussions, **Jeff moved, Erven seconded that Chris and Claudia be empowered to craft pandemic bonuses for the employees of the Church according to their best judgment. Unanimous approval with an express wish of "Merry Christmas" to the staff.**

## 5. COVID Policy Feedback

Matthew reported on the productive and well-received discussion in the coffee hour following the Sunday service of December 13. Going forward, the Task Force will look into the sanitation measures necessary for the church to resume in-church

activities according to the guidelines and threat levels identified by the Knox County Health Department.

#### 6. Ruth Martin Chili Cookoff Update

Matthew reported that only 37 people had bought 'places' for the event, which made it considerably easier to organize. The number of households involved would considerably reduce the complication of carrying off the event, scheduled for some time in February, which was a relief to Board Members. Further discussion and planning will be taken up in the January Board meeting. Matthew will clarify the number of households bidding before then.

#### 7. Music Committee Liaison Replacement

Discussion on this matter was postponed.

#### 8. Ministerial Evaluation

Discussion turned to the Ministerial Evaluation. Linda, Denise, Elnora and Ryan were principally responsible as committee members and Linda took the lead in the discussion. The recommendations and Chris' point by point response to them had been distributed to the Board.

The positive nature of the responses of lay members of the church and praise of the ways in which Chris and the staff had responded to the COVID situation was greatly appreciated. Substantial discussion involved the evaluation and supervision of staff by Chris. It was widely agreed that information of this sort would be useful to Chris, the staff and the Evaluation Committee. The question was how to achieve this best.

One method was for the staff to fill out a brief questionnaire on a range of topics by checking one of three options: START, STOP, CONTINUE whatever action was involved. The results of this survey would be shared as feedback to Chris at his evaluation meeting. The merits of such a process were discussed by several persons on the Board, and Chris himself, since these people had been in the situation both of providing feedback to a superior and of being the superior receiving feedback.

Discussion focused on the evaluation instrument rather than on the current evaluation of the minister himself. While it was generally acknowledged that the views and feelings of staff about supervision were important, the way in which useful information could be gathered was unclear, especially given the power dynamic between minister and staff members. Erven raised the value of whether Chris himself should present these questions to the staff, rather than having the

evaluation committee do so. The value of anonymity was also raised. Opinion was divided on the value or even workability of anonymity in such matters, since in many cases the nature of a staff response almost certainly revealed the identity of the person responding. Chris noted that the UUA was disinclined to utilize anonymous feedback, but this reluctance was counter-balanced by the need and value of candid responses. Where the feedback involved events publicly known or observed, he was not concerned with the source of the response, but he noted where a matter might arise involving just him and another party, this could be fraught with greater concern.

**The results of the START/STOP/CONTINUE evaluation, it was generally decided, should go directly to Chris and not to the Board and should be anonymous.**

It was suggested this could be compiled through a Google document of some sort sent out by the President to be returned to Chris in a way that preserves anonymity and confidentiality. One concern with anonymous responses is that an account or story which is false might come through in this process. Jeff asked if the committee was aware of how other churches and congregations had tackled this matter. Claudia responded that she had served in churches where, in the normal course of annual evaluation, staff had been asked how they gave feedback on supervision and how that worked. Heather asked for some background on why this issue had arisen. Linda noted that the question of staff supervision on the survey had brought it to the fore and that it had been discussed in earlier years. Much of this information, Ryan noted, must arise in the normal course of staff meetings and discussions. Chris confirmed this, observing that, since so much of interactions between minister and staff involved teamwork, many of these issues frequently occurred in the normal course of events. Chris offered that he could include in his responses statements about work with the staff. Ryan observed that the usefulness of these discussions would be more important in the case of a new, perhaps less-seasoned minister years in the future where such questions required resolution.

**Linda proposed to the general consensus of Board members that a piloting of the START/STOP/CONTINUE evaluation be undertaken.**

It was agreed that the evaluation of staff in this process required further refinement to yield the useful information desired and that SMEC will continue exploring ways to do this, including checking into what other congregations do in this regard.

In discussing Chris' responses to the Evaluation, the East Tennessee cluster took a prominent place. The cluster can provide good and readily accessible training for congregations in our area, he pointed out. This was especially helpful for small group ministry and stewardship, for example. Chris would like to encourage the UUA to assign and fund personnel to encourage and support the organization and work of clusters to develop synergy in the regions. This could be done on a part-time basis, possibly allowing a part-time minister to augment income. In past years, Chris had been encouraged to devote less energy to the ET cluster and more to TVUUC congregational affairs, prompting him to retreat somewhat from cluster activities. **Chris responded positively to Board proposal of a 1 to 2 year goal of trying to resurrect the ET cluster.** He believes that the advent of ZOOM technology could be of great help in this work. To help in providing a sense of purpose to the cluster and aid its resurrection, the Board should develop a set of priorities the cluster can provide. Since the population density of Unitarians in our community is relatively high compared even to that of Boston, we can be quite influential. In response to some members not knowing what all Chris does, such as advising people considering running for office or conferring about labor issues or racial justice initiatives, Denise said the Board could do a better job of "marketing" all of Chris' activities and roles. Chris observes that he frequently refers calls to his office to experts in the congregation on specific matters, such as David Massey on LGBTQ issues or hate crimes. It not only showcases the wide range of expertise and leadership in our congregation, it appears to have a secondary effect of increasing the calls that come in asking for information.

A final point briefly discussed was the job description of the minister was postponed until the resumption of in-church activities helps clarify new and different needs. The desire to retain the good points of virtual church, for example, — the ability to have more senior members of the congregation 'come' to evening meetings and to maintain closer ties with members in senior living settings — was emphasized. How this can be integrated into the existing job description in a sane way will be a matter of great importance in the coming year. Integrating on-line and in-person services will be very important. The goal of beginning work on this was set for next fall. Provisionally, SMEC will work on this in the meantime.

## ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned in a spirit of conviviality at 8:22 pm.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,  
Jeff Mellor, Secretary-Clerk