

	<p>Minutes for the Annual Congregational Meeting of Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church</p>	<p>Sunday, February 23, 2025 <b>APPROVED</b></p>
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**Meeting chaired by Board President Heather Kistner**

**Minutes recorded and submitted by Board Secretary Maddie Kulpa**

- I. Welcome
  - a. A quorum of over 50 registered members was confirmed. The meeting was called to order at 12:50 pm by Board President Heather Kistner who provided words of welcome, notice of slight changes to the agenda and explained the opportunity to ask questions at the end.
  - b. Opening words read by: Spiritual Care Team member Carolyn Rogers
- II. Approval of Previous Congregational Meeting Minutes & Leadership Development Nominations/Voting
  - a. Board Secretary Maddie Kulpa requested questions or corrections for the minutes from the Congregational Meeting in June 2024, which had been provided in advance; none were made.
  - b. Maddie then presented the nominations from the Leadership Development Committee, for candidates to complete terms through the end of the current fiscal year.
    - i. Eddie Chin to complete the term of Vice President, nominated based on his role as previous Board President.
    - ii. AB Coleman to complete the term of Chair of Leadership Development, nominated based on his role as previous Chair.
  - c. Maddie asked for nominations from the floor; none were made.
- III. 15 minute break was taken to cast ballots.
- IV. Communication Assessment Update - Noël Arring
  - a. Noël explained that the Communication Volunteer Team was charged with assessing the communication strategy of the congregation; this was completed with Leadership assessment, Congregation assessment, structural assessment, and benchmarking of other congregations. The full report will be provided to the congregation in the newsletter and on the website; the presentation at this meeting was a high level overview.

- b. Key Findings from Structural Assessment: there is no clear way to communicate through all the channels available; Microsoft Teams is only available to few and has a steep learning curve; Realm Connect is not always accurate and has functions we are not currently using; Newsletter is often long and is not mobile friendly; Announcements receive complaints about length and topic.
- c. Leadership Assessment: the majority of respondents stated there is no clearly articulated vision; different tools were identified as successful, but we may not be staying current with the needs of the congregation or coordinating communication effectively.
- d. Congregation Assessment: the majority of respondents stated they were getting the information they needed, but there are opportunities for clearer and more consistent communication; recommendations were made to update the newsletter and to integrate text messaging.
- e. Key Recommendations: Develop a Mission & Vision; Create a Communications Standing Team; increase Communication from Board and other Committees; Increase our Social Media Presence; Enhance our Use of Realm; Rework Sunday Morning Announcements using Screens/Monitors; Create Community Event Bulletin Board; Enhance our Newsletter with both longer pieces quarterly and briefer snippets weekly; Increase Use of Texting; Accessibility for all of our congregants
- f. Roy Kersey thanked Noël for her work on this project. Jim Golden commented about the brightness coming in from the windows.

V. Standing Teams – Heather Kistner

- a. Heather defined “standing teams” as a group of folks who will volunteer and work on a project, for as long as that project is needed. Members can rotate off the team as needed.
- b. Heather has asked the Strategic Planning Committee to help form two new Standing Teams: The Communications Team and a Church Security Team.
- c. The Security Team will work with the Management Team to implement and monitor policies and practices consistent with UUA building security and congregation guidelines.
- d. The hope is to have that Team up and running with a couple of months; members are being recruited from the congregation.
- e. A question was asked about where to find a written explanation of types of teams and how they operate; Heather advised those definitions are available in our bylaws.
- f. Miriam Davis asked about the timeline for the Security Team; Heather confirmed that since there are a lot of things that need to be put in place, it will take a

couple months to work through the phases of putting the Team together but early meetings might take place in the next few weeks. There will be a certain amount of congregational input to this process.

VI. Mid-Year Finance Report – Steve Drevik, Board Treasurer

- a. Fiscal year runs from July to June; as of this midway point in the year, contributions and fundraising is well ahead of expected (roughly 18%) and that is a decent indicator for our year's overall budget.
- b. Last year, some funds had been moved from a reserve fund to cover a gap in our operating budget; it seems likely that those funds will be able to be replaced.
- c. Next year, we are expecting new expenses relating to a new DFO and potential changes to employee health care.
- d. This year's expenses have been as expected. Thinking about long term reserves, the Finance Committee is planning to do a long-term capital reserve study and are expecting to need growth of \$250,000 or more. Updates will be provided at the next congregational meeting.
- e. A question was asked regarding the status of funds set aside when the solar array was installed, to pay for replacements of panels and other parts; Steve confirmed that there is indeed a reserve fund for the solar array.
- f. David Massey of the Endowment Fund Committee reported that funding requests have been submitted that would be better served by funding from the primary budget. They have been asking those submitters to check with the Finance Committee about those needs, and David asks Steve to request funding needs from the entire church, not just committees, during the budget building process. Steve agreed, and advised that the FC is in the early stages of budgeting right now.
- g. Steve also overviewed the RaiseRight fundraising program that has recently been promoted in the newsletter and asked for broader participation to bolster the church's budget.
- h. Heather also advised that the Finance Committee is available to speak with groups and to help with budgeting.

VII. Voting results – reported by Maddie Kulpa

- a. Minutes passed with 93.5% (87 yes, 0 no, 6 abstain)
- b. Eddie Chin as VP passed with 90.3% (84 yes, 9 no, 0 abstain)
- c. AB Coleman as LDC Chair passed with 76.3% (71 yes, 17 no, 5 abstain)

VIII. Bylaws Reboot and Current Culture – Heather Kistner / Maddie Kulpa

- a. Maddie began by stating that she intends to read a factual statement about what has been going on in Church Leadership, with the hopes of addressing concerns and rumors.

- i. “In November, members of the Personnel Committee brought concerns to the Board regarding confidentiality issues and discussions being held about Rev Chris Buice's employment with the church. A small group of Board members including myself, volunteered to interview members of the committee about these concerns.

We quickly agreed to reach out to the UUA for guidance and were connected with Natalie Briscoe, the lead of the Southern Region. Since then, she has been working with the Board to address these concerns and to help us rebuild trust within the Leadership of the Church. She has been receiving confidential statements regarding this conflict, and we have an action plan to process the emotions and facts of this incident together, with focus on self-accountability and rebuilding trust. We will then continue working with Natalie to rebuild our relationships and complete our governance transition.

The Board members present at the November meeting agreed that we have full confidence in our current Management Team: Rev Chris Buice, Catherine Farmer-Loya, and David Asbury. We also recognize the work of Claudia Pressley, and celebrate her many accomplishments, and will continue to do so until her retirement later this year. We are also committed to following best practices of the UUA and our own bylaws in the evaluation, hiring, and dismissal of personnel, called ministers, and staff.”

- b. Heather followed by reading a statement of her own.
  - i. “At our 2024 congregational meeting, we voted for a change in organizational structure to update the operation of the church business. As with any organizational changes, there have been adjustments to our familiar way of operating. Our job as your elected church leaders on the Board, Management Team, and Personnel committee is to help us all adapt to those changes. After consulting WITH the UUA, we, your church leaders, look forward to an in-person workshop on March 23 with the guidance of trained UUA professionals. By doing this work together - our work will strengthen our love, and promote our commitment to THE WORK OF THIS CHURCH.”
- c. Heather thanked the congregation present at the meeting and everyone who participated in the success of the meeting. She welcomed questions, and suggested the potential for a town hall-type meeting to be scheduled later if the need for prolonged discussion arises.

- d. Miriam Davis asked for a copy of what Maddie presented, and it was agreed that it would be distributed.
- e. Bill Fields asked for more details about what happened, and why this conversation is needed. Trevor Palmer stated his desire for transparency and truth. Heather responded that as a democratic organization, there is no movement within the Board to dismiss the senior minister as that decision has to be made by 2/3 vote of the congregation.
- f. Jim Golden expressed his admiration for Chris Buice as senior minister.
- g. Heather circled back to Bill's question and referenced the many types of leadership required to do the business of the church. She stated that she was not at liberty to discuss certain things regarding leadership conversations. She deferred the question to someone other than herself.
- h. Maddie stated that she would ensure her statement was distributed and reiterated that concerns were brought to the Board's attention and that the Board is working with the UUA to resolve the conflict.
- i. Walter Davis expressed his opinion that vagueness about the conflict without further explanation is fueling further rumors. He stated that the Board has an obligation to put rumors to rest with clarity quickly, and that he does not have full confidence in the Board.
- j. Betty Bumgarner expressed her desire for reconciliation and her love for the church community. Maddie reiterated that conflict resolution has begun with the UUA's support, and that this process can take some time and is an ongoing process. Maddie then suggested that a separate session be scheduled for the congregation to discuss and process this situation.
- k. Angela Hoffman asked what the plan is following the reconciliation process to share the results with the congregation. Heather responded that this is the first time this congregation has worked with the UUA in this context. Heather also stated that rumors had gotten out of hand and she believes there have been "untruths" spread, which is why a statement was made to the congregation. She continued that the Board is not speaking of the conflict internally until the UUA representative is present in March to provide professional guidance. She stated that the Board is not avoiding or dismissing the situation but is instead respecting the process.
- l. Miriam Davis shared her concern that Maddie's statement could be interpreted as a problem with the senior minister's behavior or performance. She asked to clarify that the concern was related to governance, and not the personnel on staff. Heather agreed that the statement made would stand. She also advised

that the Board is hoping to have a better understanding from Natalie Briscoe with the UUA of the next steps in the process.

- m. Heather stated that she believes her job as Board President, along with the rest of the Board, is to be able to have “eyes and ears” in all areas of the church and asked for agreement from the congregation. Agreement was not voiced. Heather restated her belief in that aspect of her role.
- n. Jim Golden reminded the congregation of the affirmation we speak on Sunday mornings, “love is the spirit of this church...”
- o. Elnora Williams stated that she finds it appropriate for the Board to wait until after the meet with the UUA to share more details, that Maddie’s statement is also appropriate, and that she believes Heather is doing the right thing.
- p. Carolyn Rogers stated that she does not believe that details cannot be provided right now as the listening stage is still in progress. She believes this to be a reorganization issue, based in miscommunication and misunderstanding.
- q. Natalie Kurylo asked for clarification regarding the Personnel Committee’s involvement in the conflict. Heather answered that she would not be able to provide details about that Committee’s involvement.
- r. Mark Mohundro advised that Leadership take caution, due to a number of people who are currently very upset about the current situation.
- s. Roy Kersey expressed his opinion that disfunction and stress is a normal part of everyday life, in family and in transition. He expressed further opinion about looking back over our membership numbers and finding them stagnant, and his belief in the need for us to work together to make our church better instead of blaming others.
- t. Maddie Kulpa answered Natalie’s previous question about the Personnel Committee by clarifying that the concerns brought to the Board were presented by members of that committee, and therefore that committee will be involved in reconciliation.
- u. Heather confirmed that Maddie’s statement included a vote of confidence in the Senior Minister and the entire Management Team.
- v. Rev Chris Buice concluded the discussion by expressing his love for TVUUC over the last 25 years. He listed many ways that he feels unity and strength within the congregation. He stated that we have many things in common with each other even in conflict. And he expressed his commitment to the democratic process of this church.

#### IX. Closing

- a. Carolyn read closing words, and the meeting was adjourned at 2:15 pm.