

Board of Directors' Meeting

UNITARIAN SOCIETY OF HARTFORD

Wednesday, August 3, 2016

Members present: John Brancato, Chris Wilt, Phil Gardner, Hank Murray, Margaret Leicach, Rev. Cathy Rion Starr, Rev. Heather Rion Starr, Gloria Francesca Mengual, Martha Bradley

Members absent: Katharine Ann Buck Anderson

Guests present: David Newton, Janice Newton, Erica Richmond, Jeff Howard

Call to Order: John Brancato, President called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM, following the potluck dinner which began at 6:00 PM.

Chalice Lighting and Opening words

The chalice was lit and Reverend Heather Rion Starr offered as opening words a selection entitled "What we love, we empower" from Bless the Imperfect by Patrick O'Neil.

Board Covenant and Mission Statement

Members read and reflected on the Board Covenant and USH Mission statement in silence.

Comments from guests

None

Approve minutes of June meeting

Discussion: Margaret thanked Board members for feedback provided via email on the July minutes and provided copies with two minor edits shown in red. The spelling of Hank Murray's name was corrected.

Decision: The minutes of the July meeting were approved as revised.

Actions: None needed.

Affiliated Community Minister

Discussion: Rev. Heather introduced Erica Richmond, who has asked our congregation to agree to have her as an affiliated minister; having this relationship with a UU congregation is one of the requirements for her progression toward full fellowship. Erica will be ordained on September 24th at 2:00 PM in the Brookline MA congregation, where she was first introduced to Unitarian Universalism as a child, and where Rebecca Bryan, daughter of our own Bill LaPorte-Bryan, is now the [interim?] minister. Erica is employed full time at Hartford Hospital as a Palliative Care Chaplain and lives in West Hartford. Rev. Heather provided the Board with (a) a letter from Erica introducing herself and requesting affiliation with our congregation, (b) a draft agreement between Erica and our congregation, and (c) some FAQs about community ministry and affiliation.

Decision:

- The Board will vote on a final version of the agreement at the September meeting.

Actions:

- The Revs. Rion Starr will provide a final version of the agreement prior to the September Board Meeting.
- Board members are encouraged to attend Erica's ordination in Brookline on September 24th at 2:00 PM.

Ministers' Report

Discussion:

- The Revs. Rion Starr announced that they are expecting a baby around Valentine's Day; Rev. Cathy is pregnant and feeling good and happy. It was noted that this will be the first time a settled minister at USH has given birth. In the coming months plans will be developed to provide for coverage of church functions during family leave time. Martha noted that just such an eventuality had been anticipated by the Search Committee when the Revs. Rion Starr were called.
- The ministers and daughter Robin have spent the last month plus at General Assembly, visiting family in Oregon, celebrating Robin's 4th birthday and settling in for the summer.
- The ministers complimented Sue Smolski for her excellent service in coordinating the summer services, led by guest ministers and lay leaders, and reported hearing that the services have been well-received and well-attended.
- Rev. Heather showed the design of the labyrinth that is in development in the USH plot in the Knox Foundation Community Garden at the base of our lower parking lot. Volunteers, including Susan Hope and Esther McKone, have been hard at work over the summer planting and engaging with our neighbours in the Garden.
- On August 11th the Knox Foundation will again hold its fundraiser under a tent in our lower lot beginning about 6:00 PM. Anyone who is available is encouraged to sign up and support this event which, in addition to supporting a very worthy cause, brings new people and new interest to our Meeting House.
- Rev. Heather, Linda and Margaret have been working on putting together Board manuals containing, among other things, the USH Constitution, minutes from the past year, organization charts, and much more. They are expected to be ready by September. This will be the first time we have had such manuals available for the Board in many years.

Decision: None needed

Actions: None needed

21st Century Sanctuary Project

Discussion:

- Margaret reported that a few people attended the Board-Under-the-Stairs discussion on this topic on July 24th which Margaret and Virginia deLima facilitated. Bill LaPorte-Bryan stated afterwards that (a) he felt more clear and comfortable about the relationship between the role and position of the Board and the role and position of the AIM Task Force regarding this project, and (b) was clear that it would be counter-productive for the AIM Task Force to be the primary driving force in a capital campaign for this project.
- Margaret distributed a draft of the survey that the AIM Task Force plans to put out to the congregation in early fall. Conducting the survey is an integral part of the process of working toward congregational accreditation as an AIM congregation. With that goal in mind, it is clearly focused on accessibility and inclusion, as it should be. It will likely also provide some but not all of the information needed to launch the 21st Sanctuary Project.
- The 21st Sanctuary Project Task Force appointed by the Board has not met again, no clear leadership for the Task Force has emerged (although Virginia indicated to John that she would consider that role), and the detailed budget for the project that would be needed to initiate a capital campaign has not yet been provided.
- The Strategic Planning Task Force is moving forward and will put out its own survey by next week. Ideally, the 21st Century Sanctuary Project could well become part of a larger Strategic Planning process and perhaps a more comprehensive capital campaign in the near-but-not-immediate future.

Decision: We are not ready to begin a fund-raising campaign for the 21st Century Sanctuary this fall as previously discussed and hoped. It would be premature to try it now, both because (a) we lack the broader Strategic Plan of which it should be a part, and (b) the upcoming parental leave of our ministers would be a less-than-auspicious time to approach the congregation with something this extensive.

Actions: None needed.

Congregational Community Viewing of the Movie "Defying the Nazis"

Discussion: This is the story of Unitarian Universalists Waitstill and Marth Sharp's heroic efforts.

John saw a preview at General Assembly and was sufficiently moved to suggest that we make viewing and discussing it a congregational event. It will air on PBS on the evening of September 20th. Janice Newton has ordered the DVD which is expected to be delivered about two days after the initial airing, late September. Various ideas about arranging a congregational event around this movie were expressed and Board members identified that they were starting to do the work of the Councils and SubCouncils rather than supporting and encouraging them in their work.

Decision: The Board will encourage and support the Councils on Community Within and Social Justice to collaborate on a plan to build a congregational event around a shared viewing of this movie.

Actions: Gloria, Chris and Janice will bring this back to those Councils for further action.

Executive Session

Discussion: The Board excused guests and then reviewed the position description for the job of accompanist for our congregation, as well as the resume of the final candidate recommended to the Board for hiring, and a draft of the hiring letter.

Decision: Martha moved, Gloria seconded, and the Board voted unanimously to support the hiring of Isaac Reguera to be our accompanist with a start date of September 11, 2016.

Actions: The Ministers and other staff as assigned by the ministers will take the actions necessary to begin Isaac's employment with USH and to introduce him to the congregation.

Notes: This discussion highlighted that both our Human Resources SubCouncil and our Employment policies need work and the Ministers reported that both of these are a work in progress.

Semi-Annual Congregational Meeting – January 8, 2017

Discussion: Rev. Cathy confirmed that Rayla is able to move the semi-monthly staffing for extended childcare to that Sunday. It is not yet clear whether John Bengston can move the Youth Group's soup-making to that Sunday, as that depends upon the soup kitchen's schedule of donations from various groups.

Decision: None needed

Actions: John will ensure that there will be time on the agenda of the September meeting to flesh out the agenda, format, events etc. for this meeting and will follow up with John Bengston.

Year End Financial Report 2015-16

Discussion: Phil presented a succinct summary of the year-end financials, with the following highlights:

- We budgeted to use \$11,000 of the carryover money but only needed to use \$2,710 of that to balance the budget by year end.
- Pledge income was under budget by only \$107.
- Combined income from fundraising, Festival of the Season, Performing Arts and Green Sanctuary was \$1,135 more than budgeted.
- Administration expenses overall were \$13,186 over budget.
 - We had an unbudgeted cost of \$6,500 for heating system repairs and an additional \$1,000 extra in B & G expenses.
 - Expenses for electricity, gas and snow removal were lower than budgeted.
 - Expenses for telephone, office supplies and printing ran over budget.
- Costs for staff compensation came in \$7,974 under budget. Reductions in Brian's hours and in building staff costs totalled more than the cost of increases the hours of the RE Director and Administrative Assistant.
- What appear to be budget deficits in Community Within, Spiritual Life and Social Justice are largely artefacts of pass-through monies for specific activities that flow through those Councils' budgets.
 - *Note:* Reorganizing the way the budget is structured so that those pass-through amounts are accounted for separately from the actual operating budget has been a goal since early last fiscal year and is still a work in progress.

Decisions: None needed

Actions: Phil will make some minor edits and will email the report to Board members after the meeting.

Solarize Connecticut Campaign

Discussion: Jeff Howard distributed: (a) the draft Memorandum of Understanding between UUSE and Solarize Connecticut; and (b) Project 2 from the Green Sanctuary re-accreditation application. He then provided an overview of the proposed project that the Green Sanctuary SubCouncil is asking the Board to endorse.

- The goal is to encourage more households to convert to solar energy, focusing on households within USH and the immediate neighbourhood of the Meeting House.
- Solarize Connecticut is vetting potential vendors and will select one for this project with faith communities. The company who installed our solar panels is one of the bidders.
- There is no cost to the USH budget for this project.
- John asked Jeff to have the Green Sanctuary SubCouncil come up with outcome measures for the success of the project. Jeff suggested something like "10 households signed up".
- Hank suggested that having estimates of the cost per household would be helpful in coming up with an estimate of the number of households that might be expected to sign on.
- Rev. Heather noted that this is only one of the recent proposals highlighting a lack of clarity in our policies about when, how and by whom congregants should be solicited within the Meeting House (e.g. during coffee hour) to purchase goods or services. We *do* have written policies which have not been referred to, have been followed inconsistently, and which need review, clarification, and probably updating.

Decisions: None needed

Actions:

1. Jeff and the Green Sanctuary SubCouncil will draft a Memorandum of Understanding for USH relative to this project and will email it to the Board within the next week.
2. Jeff and the Green Sanctuary SubCouncil will develop outcome measures for the success of the project before the September Board meeting.
3. The Board will study the materials that Jeff has provided and will provide and will vote at the September meeting on whether or not to endorse this project

Closing Items, Announcements:

- Rayla Mattson, RE Director, was not able to be at this meeting and the Board remains anxious to have her attend and catch us up on all the exciting developments in the Religious Education Program, including the Coming-of-Age program.

Decision: None needed

Actions: John and the Ministers will try to make this happen at the September meeting.

- The next Board-Under-the-Stairs (BUS) is scheduled for August 28th. John, Gloria and Hank expect to be there and others are encouraged to join as available.
- Scheduling Council Reports to the Board was postponed to the September meeting.
- Next Board meeting will be Tuesday September 6th at the Meeting House beginning at 7:00 PM

Closing Words

Rev. Cathy Rion Starr re-read the words from Bless the Imperfect with which we opened, with the thought that having completed our meeting, we might hear some things with a fresh perspective.

Adjournment: President John Brancato adjourned the meeting shortly before 9:00 PM.