

# First Unitarian Society Board of Trustees Minutes

Date and Time: March 21, 2018 6:30 – 8:30 pm

Location: FUS, Gaebler Living Room

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## Attendees:

### Trustees:

- Chip Quade, Secretary
- Maureen Friend (Personnel Committee)
- March Schweitzer (Finance Committee)
- Mike Lienau
- Dorit Bergen
- John McGevna

### Clergy and Staff:

- Michael Schuler
- Kelly Crocker
- Monica Nolan
- T. Kay Browning

### Guests:

- Rev. Dr. Thandeka

### Youth Advisors:

- Alison Cotter
- Henry Hill-Gorman

## Unable to attend:

- Trustees: Joe Kremer, President (Governance Committee)
  - Youth Advisors: Alison Cotter
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Materials: February Board meeting minutes

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## Current Vision of Ministry:

- Within us, enhance opportunities for spiritual, intellectual, and personal growth
  - Among us, nurture members in all stages of life and commit to build deeper connections
  - Beyond us, embody our UU principles in the larger community as we engage in outreach, service, advocacy, and activism
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## Six-month Board Focal Points:

- Governance during the interim period
  - Communication
  - Radical hospitality
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## Introductions

### Opening Reading

From March Schweitzer, an Ojibway prayer: “Grandfather, look at our brokenness...”

### Agenda Review and Correction

To accommodate a longer-than-previously-anticipated exercise with Thandeka, we eliminated the staff compensation item from the agenda and set an intention to be economical regarding our Communication topics.

### Consent Agenda

By consent, the Board approved the minutes from the February 21, 2018 Board meeting and gratefully accepted Kelly’s staff update.

## Communication

This month's agenda featured five communication topics. Because the topics were related, the Board's discussion at times spanned several topics at once.

### ***Communicating with the Parish about the Interim process***

Board members expressed an interest in taking a more direct, more active role in disseminating information about the Interim process. Kelly reminded the Board that the charter for the Interim Ministry Search Task Force charges the Task Force with disseminating information about Interim-related issues. If the Board has concerns about communication deficits, Kelly suggested that the Board direct the Task Force to increase its efforts.

Nevertheless, some Board members envision something other than the Task Force pushing information out. Concerns include the following:

- Members of the congregation don't know where to go with their questions.
- Members of the congregation don't recognize the Board as a resource.
- The best way to stimulate curiosity is to empower people to ask questions.
- Some members might be shy about asking questions in the Commons, and might appreciate a different kind of channel.
- We need to encourage people to get their questions answered *as they think of them*.
- People may feel marginalized in the discussion.

Several Board members advocated for a very visible mechanism on the FUS web site for submitting questions, with submissions going to an email in-box. At this point, the discussion broadened into the next agenda topic, such that two topics were open simultaneously.

### ***Urgency about providing updates on many topics to the congregation***

Several Board members asked whether FUS, as an organization, might need to step up its dissemination of information on many topics – especially given the number of changes that are underway. The question is not a criticism of any individual staff member, and the Board is grateful for the dedication and responsiveness of the staff. Rather, it's a question of whether we, as an organization, have a realistic view of the information needs of our many constituent groups, and a solid working knowledge of how to meet those information needs.

This is a difficult question because of the many constituent groups, the many things that are happening at FUS, the many pieces of information that might be shared on each topic, the many platforms for exchanging information, and the varied opinions about roles with respect to communication. As a Board, we are not highly skilled at disagreeing, and there is disagreement on this topic.

Two high-level discussion topics:

- What are our communication deficits, how much are they hurting us, and how urgently does FUS need to address them? Some Board members view this as an important and urgent need.
- What should FUS do? Several perspectives were articulated:
  - This is not the time to redesign the web site. The current site has been up for about six months. Its streamlined design resulted from much frustration that was expressed about our old, overly cumbersome site.
  - A new standing committee is probably not a good idea. A committee should not direct the work of the staff. Also, to create a new standing committee we'd need to change our by-laws – and that probably is not an appropriate response to the current situation.

- As a Board, we have a responsibility to create policy. Especially over the next couple of years, someone must be responsible for ensuring that the things that are being communicated are the things that we feel are most important. A Board-charged temporary task force could be helpful. This would not be a group that writes things, but instead says, “This is what the focus of our efforts needs to be over the next period of time.” Monica asks the Board: Is the strategic plan sufficient for providing guidance to the staff and ministers about what you want communicated over the next 12 months? Probably not – the strategic plan articulated goals at a much higher level than this.

Three second-level discussion topics:

- We publish information on various platforms (Red Floors, newsletter, web site, Facebook). When publishing info, what should we be doing differently?
- We field questions in various ways (in the Commons, via email, on-line). With respect to fielding questions, what should we be doing differently?
- What do we know about where our constituents are looking for information, and what obstacles they are encountering? (Sources of info about this: The survey of 600 members from several years ago, and anecdotes. And when people say that they can’t find info, are we probing deeply enough to obtain actionable information about what they mean and why this is true?)

A suggestion about a specific implementation detail:

- It might be good to have an “Ask the Board” mechanism on the web site, and Board members could take turns fielding questions.

The Board did not generate any specific plans or action items from this discussion.

### ***Staff communications plan and the communications team***

Board members expressed very positive comments about the draft of the communication plan that was circulated in February. The plan is very comprehensive about addressing external communications.

As FUS enters a time of major upheaval and reflection, members of the congregation will be seeking information about ongoing reflection and changes – and looking for ways to provide input. Board members expressed a desire for some supplemental information that speaks to our internal communication needs.

Monica noted that, typically, twelve months of themes for the newsletter are known in advance – and that, with our interim minister not being here yet, we’re unable to map this out right now for the next year. We acknowledge that, as an organization, we will address some internal communication topics when the interim minister comes.

Kelly noted that the Board can submit whatever it wants for its monthly page in the newsletter. Maybe Joe would welcome the chance to not write the newsletter article himself each month? Maybe four times a year we could publish something like “Here are the questions we received in the last month?”

### ***Toward better communication and greater trust between the Board and the staff***

We skipped this item for lack of time.

### ***How should we communicate among ourselves?***

As a medium for discussing Board business between meetings, email is not working very well. We are unclear about how to create room to attend to the many topics we are working on, while also

finding a way to raise potential new agenda items and check in about what we're hearing from the congregation.

Without a good idea about next steps, we recognize that we do have an intention to collaborate in good faith going forward.

## **Staff Compensation**

This topic was tabled to allow for more time for our discernment exercise with Thandeka.

## **Discernment Exercise with Rev. Dr. Thandeka**

### ***The question***

What can we do better *right now*? What are we aware of, capable of, individually and as a group?

Find something that's already present. Something we can draw upon so that we perform our services as members of the Board in a more adequate way.

In this exercise, we're not thinking about future planning. But we've been on the Board, and we've seen missed opportunities within ourselves, things that we could do now.

We call this the "inner game" because we're drawing on abilities we already have, not depending on externals that we need to bring into the game.

### ***T. Kay, Kelly, Monica, Michael***

- Focus on process as well as product.
- Honor the good work that we do.
  - To keep each other accountable
- Communicate the work of the Board to the staff in a more effective manner.
  - The specifics of what happens at Board meetings.
- Review policy governance for the staff, to reduce opportunities for misunderstanding.
  - With a focus on the Board's function in our community.
- Convene a board and staff retreat.
  - For trust-building and to foster better communication.

### ***Dorit, March, Chip***

- Work on communicating what we really mean more clearly—sometimes meanings get lost.
- Build a bridge to the staff – e.g., spend a half day listening to staff and attending a staff meeting to better understand the staff perspective.
- To reduce the mistakes we make as a Board when we drop topics without getting to a conclusion: Dig in on an issue, get into the meat and the messiness, follow the thread – despite the discomfort of disagreement, and get to real decisions and actionable conclusions. In short, getting to what's next.
- Really understand the org chart and the lines of communication.
- Move to two meetings a month

### ***Claire, Skyler, Jake***

- Right now, let go of holding back.
- Commit to actually doing things.
- Let go of the message, "Oh, it's just volunteer work."
- Let go of trying to figure out, "Is what I'm doing most valuable? And does it make a difference?"
- Honor our important internal values.
- Balance FUS service with life.

- Approach service work as spiritual work and an investment in self-care.
- Remember to be present.
- Honor our limitations.
- Forgive ourselves when we feel that we've not done our best.
- Never forget humor.

***Mike, Henry, John, Maureen***

- Do not judge the value of my voice to the board before I give it.
- Remember that we can be a calming force for this community during a difficult time of transition.
- Don't wait until opportunities conveniently come along, but make them for ourselves instead.
- Acknowledge the strengths that each of us bring, especially in this time of transition.
- Appreciate both the excitement and the anxiety that comes with this transition.
- Prepare more and farther in advance of meetings.
- Draw on past failures to avoid future ones.
- Don't worry if we choose someone who's not a good fit, because the process has built-in corrections.

*Now, come up with three tiny things we could do to achieve these goals – so tiny that we will feel shame if we don't do them.*

***Dorit, March, Chip***

- Ask for an agenda item about having two meetings per month.
- Put it on our calendars to attend a staff meeting.
- Start a file on our phone or buy a small notebook – to keep track of questions that come up. Either questions that we hear, or questions that occur to us.

***Mike, Henry, John, Maureen***

- Say something about at least one agenda item every meeting (speak up).
- Sign up to volunteer and table.
- Make sure we are looking at our email for board notifications every day.
- Look at the agenda in advance of the meeting.
- Form an opinion about at least one topic, to ensure we contribute.

***Claire, Skyler, Jake***

- Write a couple of emails related to service things that had been sitting there for weeks.
- Before doing service work, call up positive energy by stopping to say a gratitude prayer.
- Let go of beginning the day by checking emails.

***T. Kay, Kelly, Monica, Michael***

- Review Board meeting minutes immediately before staff meetings.
- Solicit staff inquiries for the Board – monthly.
- Two-minute reflection on our underlying values daily.
- One weekly thank-you letter to a staff or board member

Action items:

1. At the next board meeting – please report on our success at achieving these goals. Each of us reports on **OUR** success; this is the shaming process.

2. At the next board meeting, decide whether we want to continue the process.

### **Closing Reading**

From March Schweitzer, out of the back of our gray book of hymns and readings: “For the sun and the dawn which we did not create...”

### ***Assignments for next meeting***

Snack: Chip Quade

Readings: Henry Hill-Gorman and Alison Cotter