

Unitarian Society of New Haven
Minutes of the Fall Meeting of the Society
October 20, 2013

Approved June 1, 2014

Attendance: 75 Members

President Alison Cunningham called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. and Peggy Rae recorded the minutes. A quorum of Members was present, and the meeting proceeded with A. Cunningham presiding.

Approval of Minutes of Previous Meetings

Minutes of the Dec. 2, 2012 Regular and Special Meetings, the June 9, 2013 Annual Meeting, and the Sept. 8, 2013 Special Meeting were reviewed.

MOTION by Dick Platt, to approve the Dec. 2, 2012 Regular Meeting Minutes; **SECONDED; PASSED** unanimously.

MOTION by John Watson, to approve the Dec. 2, 2012 Special Meeting Minutes as corrected (typographic error corrected to indicate it was the office of Vice President that was vacant); **SECONDED** by Sarah Whitson; **PASSED** unanimously.

MOTION by John Watson, to approve the June 9, 2013 Meeting Minutes; **SECONDED** by Sarah Whitson; **PASSED** unanimously, after discussion.*

*Ellen McCarthy voiced concern that the Minutes did not accurately reflect the words of Sue Lagarde, who was not present. S. Lagarde appeared subsequently, and it was agreed that she have the opportunity to write a statement to be attached to the Minutes of today's meeting. The following is the relevant section of the Minutes, with her changes shown in italics.

"Sue Lagarde is a member of the finance committee and raised concern about the budget process this year. In the past, the budget process was that Board raised concerns about the budget draft and sent the budget back to the finance committee *for further consideration*. In this year, the final budget proposed by the finance committee was modified by the Board *and submitted directly to the congregation, ie re-evaluation by the Finance Committee was sidestepped.*"

MOTION by Bob Congdon, to approve the Sept. 8, 2013 Special Meeting Minutes; **SECONDED** by Thea Bourke-Martin; **PASSED** unanimously.

Message from the President and Statement of Board Goals for 2013-2014

President A. Cunningham reported on this past year's challenges and accomplishments. These include establishment of the Ministerial Search Committee, funding vital roof repairs, and hiring a new congregational administrator. The Board continued its work toward the goal of developing Policy Governance at USNH. Last spring it engaged the congregation in two

workshops to discern what members of the congregation value about USNH and what they hope to see at USNH in the next five years. The results have been compiled into a word cloud graphic (displayed at the Meeting) showing what people mentioned and indicating by word size their frequency, and hence, relative importance. Some words, like community, stood out as being especially important.

The Board's goals for the coming year are three-fold.

1. To work on constructing a Policy Governance model for USNH, using the values named at the workshops as a foundation. The Board chose Policy Governance after considerable research because it will help clarify roles, responsibilities, authority and accountability for members, committees, Board, and staff. In the coming year, the Board will examine the policy governance systems in place at other congregations across the country and build on its experience from two governance workshops facilitated by Laura Park of Unity Consulting in St. Paul. There will be more communication about policy governance from the Board over the year, and meetings with the congregation will be held, beginning in January, to engage the congregation more deeply in the work.

2. To establish Right Relations as an integral part of USNH. Concerns about right relations and conflict resolution were voiced many times during last spring's values workshops and at the Search Committee's cottage meetings this fall. A few years ago, much work was done by a Committee on Right Relations, culminating in recommendations that are very relevant today. The Board's goal is to revive this work and build on it so that the philosophy and practice of Right Relations is embedded throughout USNH.

3. To improve communication between the Board and the congregation. The Board will hold small group sessions on a variety of issues, like the cottage meetings held by the Search Committee. The Board will also be writing a monthly column for the newsletter. As always, the Board's regular monthly meetings are open to members of the congregation.

Message from the Minister

Interim Minister Emily Melcher read from the letter she prepared for the Search Committee, in which she shared her observations of USNH's strengths, challenges, and work in progress. The letter is to be included in the Ministerial Search Packet provided to prospective candidates. Among the strengths she notes are an active and caring congregation, strong programs, and committed lay leadership. The complete text of her letter as presented today is attached to these Minutes.

Treasurer's Report

The report was given by Sandy Frawley, Chair of the Finance Committee and former Treasurer, who presented a summary of budgeted vs. actual operating income and expenses for FY12-13. Details can be found in USNH 2012-2013 Budgeted and Actual Operating Income and Expenses (10/19/2013), attached to these Minutes. The actual income was \$622,414, two percent lower than the \$638,500 budgeted income. Actual expenses are estimated at \$636,810 to \$647,028 (Personnel expenses have not been finalized and are

estimates); the budgeted expenses were \$643,145. Thus, in FY12-13, expenses exceeded income by an estimated \$14,396 to \$24,614.

S. Frawley reported that USNH is upgrading to a new web-based database system for membership and pledge information. Known as ChurchDB, among its features is a membership directory that members can access via their own unique passwords. A member will be able to edit his/her directory information, choose what information is visible to others, and view his/her contribution record. Other features will facilitate communication within groups such as committees. The system will be installed this fall.

Approval of Compensation Package for Ministerial Search Negotiations

A proposed ministerial compensation package was presented for congregational approval by the three members of the Ministerial Search Negotiating Team (David Stagg of the Search Committee, Lisa Anderson of the membership at large, and Alison Cunningham of the Board of Trustees). L. Anderson explained that the Team based its proposal on the salary and benefits advocated by the UUA for fair compensation and on what USNH can afford to pay. In the proposal put before the congregation, three base salaries were shown, reflecting starting, mid-, and high range salaries. Benefit costs for each of these were also shown, as well as the total costs. L. Anderson noted the benefit costs are estimates; the cost of health insurance premiums will depend on the minister's age and family status and may be lower than the amount used in the proposal, which assumed an older person with family coverage.

After its presentation, the Team answered questions from members of the congregation, and members discussed the proposal. A member asked how the salary ranges compare with those recommended by UUA; Personnel Committee Chair Jean Rosenthal said they are consistent with UUA guidelines, but fall within the lower part of the UUA's range. Another question concerned how the total costs compare with those in the current USNH budget; A. Cunningham said the proposed costs are higher than in this year's budget, but the actual negotiated costs may not be as high as in the proposal (for example, health insurance premiums could be lower if the candidate is single). Some members expressed concern about the need to stretch our finances, while others were concerned that the relatively low salary range would limit the pool of prospective candidates.

After lengthy discussion, the proposal was brought to a vote and approved.

MOTION by Greg Feeley, to adopt the compensation package proposed by the Negotiating Team; **SECONDED** by Gwen Heuss-Severance; **PASSED** 68 for, 4 opposed, 3 abstentions.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 2:35 pm.

Attachments

1. Letter written by Interim Minister Emily Melcher for the Ministerial Search Packet, read aloud at the Congregational Meeting
2. USNH 2012-2013 Budgeted and Actual Operating Income and Expenses (10/19/2013)

[Text of letter written by Interim Minister Emily Melcher for the Ministerial Search Packet, as she presented it at the Oct. 20, 2013 Congregational Meeting]

Oct. 17, 2013

Dear Colleague,

When members of the Ministerial Search Committee asked me recently what I see as the “glowing coal” at the center of USNH, I answered that I don’t believe there is one. USNH is an active, vibrant and caring congregation with several strong programs and areas of deep commitment: Excellent worship; Religious Education for children and youth; multigenerational community fostered through theatrical productions and a Labor Day family retreat; a large number of social justice initiatives that include education, service, witness and advocacy, often in partnership with other organizations; and strong small group ministry and pastoral care programs, skillfully overseen by Associate Minister Marion Visel.

My interim ministry with USNH follows the 21-year ministry of Kathleen McTigue, whose particular strengths were knock-your-socks-off preaching and serving as a prophetic voice in the larger community. As you would expect in a situation like this, where a settled minister and congregation have grown together - and grown comfortable together - over the course of many years, there were several areas in need of attention during the interim period. USNH has many skillful lay leaders, and the Board has been extraordinary in its commitment to making the most of the interim time to address long-standing issues. Truly, I could not have wished for more dedicated, skillful and caring partners with whom to share this challenging work.

Recognizing at the outset of the interim period the necessity of clarifying roles, responsibility, accountability and authority, the Board elected to move toward Policy Governance. They are aware that the congregation’s conflicted relationship with authority will need to be addressed as part of the transition to Policy Governance, and are planning to lead a series of discussions of the Commission on Appraisal’s Who’s In Charge Here? this year. They have also commissioned a Right Relations Task force to work with the congregation to develop more skillful means of addressing conflict in the congregation.

The transition to Policy Governance will take several years, as it normally does. The Board’s current work is articulating the values, mission and ends of the congregation. Once articulated, the ends will prioritize the congregation’s sometimes competing commitments and guide the allocation of its finite physical, financial and human resources. If the congregation embraces a shared sense of mission, it may in turn see the growth in membership and the strengthening of stewardship that have for years eluded it.

The Board and Personnel Committee have also undertaken the very challenging work of making needed staffing changes during the interim period. The next called minister will enjoy the benefits of a well-run administration, and will work with a Personnel Committee that understands the necessity of aligning staff positions and work with the goals of the Society. Conversations about whether and how the portfolio of the Associate Minister might change in relation to the new settled minister are just beginning.

As you know, adaptive change takes time. The leadership of USNH have embraced the challenges of thoroughgoing, adaptive work during this interim period, and I am confident that USNH will be well-poised to work with the next settled minister to complete these transitions.

I wish you well in your discernment, and will be happy to make myself available to respond to any questions you may have about USNH.

Warmly,
Emily Melcher, Interim Minister

