

Minutes of a Special Congregational Meeting
of the Unitarian Society of New Haven
Sunday, May 10 at 12:00 noon, via Zoom
Approved by the Board, May 14, 2020
Accepted by the Congregation, May 31, 2020

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the meeting was held via Zoom webinar.

President Al Bosch called the meeting to order at 12:03 pm

Robyn Genzano, co-chair of the Ministerial Search Committee (MSC), lit the chalice and offered a reading attributed to the Talmud.

Vice President and co-chair of the Covenantal Relations Committee Nancy Apfel read our Congregational Covenant.

Al Bosch discussed the necessity of using Zoom for the meeting, the ramifications for the flow of the meeting, and how people may participate. His remarks are appended to these minutes.

Clerk Becky Friedkin noted that the meeting invitation had been sent only to USNH members and that there were more than 130 participant log-ins, some of which represented two or more people. The required 10% **quorum** of 35 is more than exceeded. (Note, the final participant log shows at least 148 USNH members participated in the meeting.)

MSC co-chair Bob Congdon presented the candidate for settled ministry at USNH, Rev. Lindasusan V. Ulrich. His remarks are appended to these minutes.

MOTION: Bob Congdon moved and Robyn Genzano seconded, that the congregation call Rev. Lindasusan Ulrich as our settled minister.

Clerk Becky Friedkin explained the voting process, the deliberations that led to adoption of this process, and the steps taken to inform and educate the congregation. Her remarks are appended to these minutes.

There was brief discussion of the candidate and voting process.

Becky opened the voting by sending an email with a link to a Google Form to all members. Voting was open until 7:00 pm that evening.

At 12:25 pm Al continued the meeting until 8:00 pm, when the vote results would be announced.

At 8:03 pm, Al re-opened the congregational meeting, this time with a Zoom meeting (not webinar). He announced that the vote was 98% in favor of calling Rev. Lindasusan as our settled minister: 244 in favor, four opposed, and one abstaining by submitting a form but not voting.

Linda Barrett reported that Rev. Lindasusan enthusiastically accepts our call, and invited her and her family to join the Zoom meeting.

Al adjourned the meeting at 8:13 pm. Many participants remained on the meeting to chat with Rev. Lindasusan and celebrate.

Respectfully submitted by Becky Friedkin, Clerk

Al Bosch's remarks about the structure of the Zoom webinar:

These are exceedingly difficult times, requiring us to depend upon Zoom to hold this meeting. We all regret that we have not been able to meet in person over the Candidating Fortnight and that we cannot gather in the sanctuary for this Congregational Meeting and vote. We want to hear from people, but we cannot replicate an in-person meeting, no matter how hard we try. Of necessity, everyone will be muted at all times, except when recognized to speak. In order to carry out the important business at hand, we ask that comments and questions be short, to the point and not repeating what others have said.

If you have either a question or a comment that must be voiced, use the Q&A function in Zoom. You should see a Q&A icon at the bottom of your Zoom window. The hosts will read the questions and direct them to the appropriate person to respond.

We know that this is not a perfect situation, but we have done the best we can to achieve our overall goal, which is the calling of a new minister under incredibly challenging circumstances. To that end, we provided two weeks for people to get to know Reverend Lindasusan, and we developed an easy, inclusive, and effective voting process. The Board appreciates your patience and flexibility with these modifications to our meeting and voting processes.

Bob Congdon's presentation of the candidate:

Today represents the culmination of a year-long process. It began last May when we were chosen to represent you as your Ministerial Search Committee. Through a series of cottage meetings and focus groups, and an extensive congregational survey, we gathered input as to your hopes for our next minister. We created a profile of USNH that highlighted our many strengths. We learned that about 30 congregations in the United States were seeking a settled minister. Our UUA consultants at UUA told us that we would be an attractive congregation, and this was confirmed when we received applications from more than 20 UU ministers around the country.

We want to thank Carol Cheney for making her office available for our weekly meetings (back in the days when it was possible to meet in person!). We studied ministerial records and websites, and watched sermons. After careful deliberations guided by your input, we chose seven of the candidates for Zoom conversations, and then invited three to spend the weekend with us. Over the course of shared meals, interviews and observing the candidates lead worship, the Rev. Lindasusan Ulrich stood out.

We could see that her intelligence encompasses a wide range of interests, including a degree in nuclear engineering from MIT, a Master's in English from UC Berkeley, and a Master's in Divinity from Starr King School for the Ministry. We liked the fact that before feeling the call to ministry, Lindasusan had worked as a professional writer, and performed as a singer. When we met her, we were delighted by her warmth, humility and sense of humor. We witnessed her inspirational abilities in the pulpit. We liked her ideas for providing pastoral care and stewardship, her commitment to collaboration, and her passion for social justice and anti-oppression work. We could see that she had shown leadership at the national level, participating in two White House forums on bisexuality, and serving as liturgist for the 2019 UUA General Assembly.

Many of you took the opportunity to meet with Reverend Lindasusan during candidating fortnight, and we appreciate all your comments about your positive experiences.

So it is with pride in our work as a search committee, and joy in the results, that I move to call the Rev. Lindasusan Ulrich as the next settled minister of USNH!

Becky Friedkin's remarks about the voting process:

For the record, I want to briefly describe how we are voting and how we arrived at this process.

Due to the COVID19 pandemic, USNH activities moved online beginning in mid-March and the Board and Ministerial Search Committee began exploring options, with the help of the UUA, for a virtual candidating period and a primarily-electronic vote. Our priorities were the following:

- To be consistent with our by-laws

- To be as inclusive as possible, especially for members without internet access or ease of use

- To be as easy as possible for the most members to vote on the call

The Board carefully considered all voting options identified by the UUA. To achieve our overall goal, which is to call a minister with the greatest participation possible, we decided to vote primarily electronically, emailing members to vote using a simple Google Form. Members were also offered the opportunity to drive their votes to USNH this afternoon between 2 and 3 or to call their votes to the Clerk.

To ensure broad participation, I identified members with no email and couples with only one email in Constant Contact, our communications software. Members of the Board made calls to more than 50 households to update email addresses and, as appropriate, describe alternate means of voting. Some households also received packets of information about Rev. Lindasusan and the voting process.

Clerk Becky Friedkin and Treasurer Linda Mehta will serve as Election Inspectors for the electronic voting. We will independently verify voting eligibility, i.e., USNH membership, and tabulate the votes. We have procedures to avoid seeing votes with names attached and will keep confidential any votes we might accidentally see.

Members have received multiple communications about the voting rationale and process, and more than 200 members participated in a dry run of the e-voting process on April 26.

Voting will continue until 7 pm tonight, and we will reconvene at 8 pm to share the results. Note that the 8 pm meeting will be a Zoom meeting (not Webinar) using the same link as for this morning's service.

We are confident that will have broad participation in this important vote and look forward to announcing the vote results Sunday evening at 8 pm.