FirstU Board Meeting Minutes

Our mission is to “Kindle the light within and inspire courage
to nurture the web of life and to create a just and compassionate world.”

Wednesday 2025/02/19 7pm-9pm

Main Goals: To discuss next steps regarding Rev. Eric’s departure and receive updates regarding campus-related topics
.
Attendees: Rev Eric Meter, Michelle Jackson (Finance Manager), Chuck Shields (President), Mary Ella Keblusek (Vice President), Phil Nagy (Treasurer), Brent Nicolle (Past President), Guy Belleperche, Amy Berube, Carmen Contreras, Carl Sonnen (Secretary), Jen Brennan (Operations Manager)

FirstU Board Covenant (summary)

- Be considerate towards one another
- Be open, honest and respectful
- Serve our role to the best of our ability
- Foster a spirit of patience and courage
- Speak with one voice
- Develop and promote genuine relationships
- Honour our faith

FirstU Strategic Plan (2022-26) Key Goals:

- An energized spirituality
- A renewed, growing and diverse congregation
- A firm commitment to social and climate justice
- A responsible, mission-oriented campus development
- Reliable structures and resources to support congregational priorities and growth

Minutes

Item
1. Call to Order ○ Check-in ○ Opening Reading [Carmen] ○ Assignment of Timekeeper [Phil] and Process Monitor [Mary Ella]
2. Consent Agenda: ○ Approval of this Agenda ○ Approval of Board Minutes 2025/01/15 [Att. 1] ○ Confirmation of email approval of memberships of Alexis McKenzie

and Ken Denison [Att. 2]
- Motion: that Brent Nichol serve as the chair of the 2026 Pledge Campaign
- Ajashki grant proposals submitted [Att. 3]
- FP 15 (Phil's notes will be removed once the policy is approved as part of this consent agenda.) [Att. 4]
- Listing of board vacancies after the AGM – Carl Sonnen, Phil Nagy, Nancy Clouthier, Amy (to be confirmed)
- Amy has confirmed to stay on for at least one more year
- Need to recruit 2 new Board members to fill upcoming vacancies

Moved by Carmen, Seconded by Carl to approve the consent agenda. Unanimous

3. Discussion of any items from Consent Agenda

4. Minister's Report [Rev Eric] [Att. 5]
   - Meeting with Jodi. Eric had 2 candidates recommended who he approached to recruit for RE
   - Ongoing technical issues but still had hundreds of viewers on several videos
   - Eric wants to schedule another meeting regarding his leaving FirstU
   - Ongoing major issues have been noticed by several members and visitors to our youtube channel.
   - Technical issues regarding both live and recorded virtual/streaming inaccessibility and/or failures are a bad reflection and poor representation of our community
   - Eric is working with Julia to address this issue
   - Last Sunday was still a solid pivot technically and organizationally on such short notice
   - Jodi has someone in mind to replace Susan in RE

5. President's Report [Note 1]

5. Financial issues
   - Review financial statement through Dec. 31, 2024 [Att. 6]
     - No concerns regarding the format
     - D. Jelly estate donation full amount now received. $120k received since 2023. Ongoing process as estate transfers are approved
     - E. Bowen $5k memorial fund. Ongoing from her foundation each year
     - Custodial positions were not FT. Ajashki salaries and finance manager wages were saved
     - Michelle wants a finance mgmt. team put in place for Ajashki going forward
   - Review investment report through Dec. 31, 2024 [Att. 7]
     - Doherty investment report shows us that we're 4.x% and 6.x% below benchmark returns over 2023 and 2024
     - Would like some follow-up from Doherty on underperforming investments. Michelle to contact them.
   - Budget review schedule

Commented [LC1]: I don't think the idea was one that would be in-person, following a service.

Commented [LC2]: I don't think we need to dwell on this. This item was more about how we moved forward.

- In the discussion, many points were made:
- Ideally the Board will make recommendations ***before*** fincomm finalizes its budget
- New 2024/25 Board will need to set budget priorities right after they're sworn in (i.e. May or June at the latest) to accommodate the fincomm deadlines. Michelle wants a budget team--needs to be put together asap following the AGM
- Board will need to review the budget in August, before fincomm finalizes the budget—Rainbow (ideal) budget projections including cuts and increases that will need to be made
- Summer months are low attention months as far as budget input from Board typically
- Q: How can the Board provide accurate review as the Committees only submit their budgets late in summer?
- A: SJAN and Committee budgets are generally separate from the drafting of the main budget each year.
- Board retreat should determine what to focus on in the year ahead as far as addressing our priorities from the 5-year strategic plan
- Board needs to have important say regarding what our budget will be and what priorities we will address going forward, in the current year. Need to be transparent in advising the congregation regarding what priorities and spending have been approved
- First Board retreat is about teambuilding and advising on Board process guidelines. But some part of the retreat should also focus on budget planning and priorities going forward
- Last year we had 10% salary cuts and changes to Ajashki that came late in the year.
- Board took over the budget process late last year, which was an anomaly. Going forward try to handle these issues
- Final decision: April meeting will decide new priorities which will then be discussed in detail and approved at the May Board meeting
- Might want to have the fincomm meeting earlier (first week of August) than the Board executive and regular Board meetings later in August

Commented [LC3]: I don't think we talked about moving the board retreat to May.

7. (*Goal: Reliable, Structures and Resources*)
   Rev. Eric's departure [Note 2]
   - Options for ministry
     - Preference towards 3-year contract with option to settle existing minister after their contract finishes, the 'contract-to-hire' approach
     - Excellent flexibility with no downside
     - Past ministers have all been from the US, so no need to exclude them from our search
     - All Board members are in favour of the contract-to-hire approach, while taking into account our prior experience.
   - Identification of a search committee and a contract, compensation and benefits team

○ Decision: Have staff inputs as advisory roles in search only. Staff to be consulted through a special group discussion. ○ Also recruit other members besides the 5 members, to take on individual search tasks, etc. but not be members of the committee ○ $5K budget would involve bringing the candidate minister to travel to and be accommodated in Ottawa along with their spouse to have a face-to-face interview. ● Approaches for keeping congregants informed ○ Small discussion sessions to be scheduled going forward—about 2 weeks from now after the service – plus other opportunities. Motion: That FirstU pursue engaging a minister for a three-year contract to begin August 1, 2025, with an option to call the person to become the settled minister. Moved: Carl. Seconded: Guy. Passed Unanimously Motion: That Mary Ella Keblusek, Guy Belleperche, Carmen Contreras, Sharmila Khare, Lee Rose be appointed to serve as the search committee to find and recommend to the board a candidate to serve on a three-year contract with the option to become FirstU's settled minister. Moved: Phil. Seconded: Brent. Passed Unanimously. Motion: That the Search Committee be approved to spend up to $5,000 in conducting their search. Moved: Carl. Seconded: Phil. Unanimously Passed Motion: That Chuck Shields, Phil Nagy and Jane Linday develop a contract for the minister, including compensation and benefits. Moved: Carmen Seconded: Carmen. Unanimously Passed
8. *(Goal: A firm commitment to social and climate justice)* Update regarding the Ajashki program – Guy and Mary Ella to provide a verbal report • Guy will act as Board Liaison. ME and Guy met with UHouse Indigenous resident Janet Bauvais who has agreed to act as Financial Manager and Coordinator going forward for Ajashki. Mary Ella will step away from Ajashki. Jan and Sharen will be stepping down from their involvement with Ajashki. Janet will start as a volunteer, but we may provide wages/stipend/etc for her work as appropriate
9. (*Goal: A Responsible, Mission-Oriented Campus Development*) Campus-related topics [Note 3] ● Update regarding the Odayanhaway Project ○ Key meeting with OAHS next week. Hope to have a final approved land agreement next week ● Theia is still working with city staff to address planning questions ● Discussion regarding 797 Richmond ○ Dentech agreement has been largely concluded between FirstU and Dentech, but UHouse has still not finalized their agreement with Dentech, which is ongoing

○ Dentech may require a quick agreement and therefore FirstU may need to bypass UHouse and enter into a bilateral agreement, excluding UHouse
10. (Goal: A Responsible, Mission-Oriented Campus Development) Relations with Unitarian House [Note 4] Update regarding the next Listening and Question and Answer sessions at UH on Feb. 26 • We have a Q&A session scheduled for next Wednesday. Haven't had a UH meeting since October • Have bi-monthly meetings going forward • Provide FirstU CPC update to UHouse and follow with open Q&A • Mary Ella can still stay on as liaison to UHouse Board for another year • Ongoing House services are being provided by Rev. Eric in recent weeks, which were well attended (approx.. 20 attendees)
12. Closing ○ Feedback from Process monitor [Mary Ella] • In the future decide who will be sharing screen items. Should not be done by the chair • Make sure everyone gets a say ○ Closing reading [Phil] ○ Adjournment