First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa
Special Congregational Meeting
Worship Hall
October 18, 2026
Minutes

A. CALL TO ORDER

Mary Ella Keblusek, President of the Board, called the meeting to order at 12:30pm.

• Land Acknowledgement
Erin Keene provided a land acknowledgement.

• Lighting of Chalice and Opening Reading
Alex Campbell, a member of the Discernment Task Force, provided background regarding the Task Force's work to gather comments as to the congregation's willingness to call Rev. Lara Cowtan as its settled minister. He noted that there had been a loud response that, yes, the congregation was ready to extend that offer.

He then provided a reading regarding shared ministry and lit the chalice.

B. PRELIMINARY MOTIONS
• Report of the Head Scrutineer
Lisa Boulay, the Head Scrutineer, announced that quorum had been achieved with participation of 146 members, 127 being present in Worship Hall and 19 participating online.

• Motion to Approve the Amended Agenda
It was moved by Andrew Drake , seconded by Chuck Shields, and unanimously passed to approve the amended agenda.

C. RECOGNITION OF SETTLED MINISTER DISCERNMENT TASK FORCE
M. E. Keblusek thanked the members of the Settled Minister Discernment Task Force, L. Boulay, A. Campbell, Ally Hobson, E. Keene and Lee Rose, for their diligent work conducting the discernment process. She noted that they had been selected by the congregation at the 2026 Annual General Meeting in April, and reviewed their responsibilities.

On behalf of the congregation, she extended to the members of the Task Force thanks for their devotion to their task and for providing a clear motion. She then presented the following motion, which had been moved by L. Rose and seconded by Guy Belleperche:

WHEREAS the Settled Minister Discernment Task Force was appointed at the 2026 Annual General Meeting to develop a recommendation on whether to call Rev. Lara Cowtan as FirstU's settled, long-term minister; and

WHEREAS the Task Force presented a recommendation to the Board to call Rev. Lara Cowtan, and the Board has convened a Special Congregational Meeting for a congregational vote; and

WHEREAS the work of the Settled Minister Discernment Task Force is now complete;

BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Settled Minister Discernment Task Force is now officially dissolved, with gratitude from the Board and the Congregation.

The motion passed unanimously.

In a follow-up question, Mike Fletcher asked why the motion dissolving the Task Force had been taken before the vote. M. E. Keblusek explained that whatever the result of the vote, the Task Force had completed its assignment.

D. MOTION TO CALL A SETTLED MINISTER

M. E. Keblusek then presented the motion to the congregation:
Moved by A. Campbell and seconded by A. Hobson that the First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa call Rev. Lara Cowtan as its Settled Minister.

She then opened the floor to comments or questions. David Gero explained that he was the successful bidder in the recent Time and Talent Auction to identify a topic for a reflection to be provided by Rev. Lara as part of a service. He said this had led to having a meeting with her about the topic he had selected and that he had been very impressed with how excellent a listener Rev. Lara is. Keith Shackleton, who identified himself as a long-time member, commented that he felt Rev. Lara had breathed new life into the congregation and that he thought calling her was a 'no brainer'.

E. VOTE

M. E. Keblusek explained the voting process. All in attendance in Worship Hall were asked to mark the ballots they had been given upon registering. She explained that those voting on-line would be directed to use the Zoom polling option to mark their votes. She invited the on-line participants to begin casting their votes and then asked A. Drake to guide those present to come forward, row by row, to cast their votes in the ballot box, which was the 'urn of discernment'.

When the in-person voting had finished, Carmen Contreras and A. Drake, the scrutineers, accompanied by G. Belleperche, who was serving as an observer, took the urn to the Lounge to count the ballots.

During the counting process Pat McDonald played a selection of tunes at the piano and led the congregation in a sing-along.

F. ANNOUNCEMENT OF RESULTS

M. E. Keblusek returned to the podium and announced the ballot result, which was 98% in favour of calling Rev. Lara Cowtan as FirstU's settled minister. There was extended applause.
The percentage was based on the following ballot count:
Yes – 148

No- 1
Abstain - 2
Total ballots - 151

G. MINISTER'S RESPONSE

Rev. Lara Cowtan returned to Worship Hall and expressed her thanks for the support expressed by the congregation and accepted the congregation's call for her to serve as its settled minister. There were, again, during her comments, several moments of applause.

H. ADJOURNMENT OF MEETING

L. Boulay provided a reading from Richard Wagamese which made the point that relationships never end, they just change. She then extinguished the chalice and meeting was adjourned.