

## **Board Meeting Minutes - Wednesday, January 19, 2022**

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.”

Participants: Brent Nicolle, Lisa Sharp, Phil Nagy, Amy Berube, Rev Eric Meter, Carl Sonnen, David Chernushenko, Andrew Drake, Caycee Price, Michelle Jackson, Jen Brennan, Sherri Watson (item 5:A,B)

### **1. Call to Order**

- Opening words, song and check-in
- Assignment of Timekeeper (David) and Process Monitor (Carl)

### **2. Consent Agenda**

Motion to:

- *Accept Agenda*
- *Approve BOD Minutes for November 17, 2021*
- *Approve BOD Minutes for December 2, 2021*
- *Approve membership of Caroline Meyer, Jill Swan, Suzanne Groleau*

#### **Appendix 1**

*Moved by: Brent Secoded by: Amy Carried*

### **3. Minister's Report**

- Rev Eric gave the board an update for Dec and Jan

#### **Appendix 2**

### **4. COVID Task Force**

Motion to:

*A -Accept the recommendations of the COVID Task Force of Dec. 16th and Jan. 4th*

#### **Appendix 3**

*Moved by: Brent Secoded by: Amy Carried*

*B -Whereas the COVID Task Force often requires rushed approval from the Board before implementing its recommendations,*

- Motion that the COVID Task Force report to the Executive Committee directly. Their minutes will be included in board minutes as an appendix and approved in the consent agenda.*

*Moved by: Brent Secoded by: Amy Carried*

### **5. Social Justice Action Network**

#### **A. Refugee Sponsorship Agreements**

- *Whereas there is a requirement to have a written agreement in place for managing the refugee funds from different sources; Motion to approve the financial management agreements between:*

*1. FirstU and Or Haneshemah*

*2. FirstU and Mohammad Almasalmeh*

*Moved by: Lisa secoded by: Andrew Carried*

## **B. Environmental Action Group**

Sherri Watson gave the BOD some information on their past and current projects. EAG is planning a climate roll out around the end of Feb consisting of the survey, Eric's sermon, announcement of expected Green Sanctuary 2030 Accreditation by UUA, and a call to action.

Motion :

*-Whereas the EAG did a survey at the beginning of the congregational focus; they would like to hold another survey now that 2 years have passed for data collection purposes.*

*-Motion to approve a Climate Emergency survey (proposed text attached) to be delivered to the congregation.*

*Moved by Lisa seconded by: Carl Carried*

## **6. Information items**

- A. **Rent negotiations with Unitarian House and RPCC** are currently being looked at. In light of the changes that may come to the First U campus, these groups want to have long term agreements in place.
  1. Unitarian House: Terry Kimmel and David Chernushenko (from Campus Planning Committee); as well as Brent Nicolle and Lisa Sharp of the Board, met with the president and other board members of Unitarian House before Christmas to discuss the possibility of renegotiation of their long term lease in the next year or two.
  2. River Parkway Preschool centre: Terry Kimmel (CPC) and Lisa Sharp (board) met with the Executive Director and Staff rep from the River Parkway Preschool Centre to discuss the renewal of their long term lease which expires in the next 4-5 years; and how our upcoming affordable housing project might affect their building on our campus.
- B. **New signage for / with Or Hanashamah** (our Jewish synagogue tenants) have shown interest about being able to put up three new signs on our property, including one on Cleary where our large sign is; one on the front of our building (outside the double doors on the lower level); and one inside on the lower level by the room that they rent. We discussed whether First U might want to consider updating their sign on Cleary and the one in front of our building; and possibly do a joint sign together.
- C. **Committee Reports before AGM** Can all Board members please check in with their respective board committees to find out if any of them wish to bring any requests to the board before or at the AGM? They would need to be submitted by the March meeting.
- D. **Finance audit document acquisition** please note that deadlines have now been missed for the audit. There may need to be adjustments to timelines and dates for the board meetings before our next AGM on May 1st to finalize materials for the meeting.

## **7. Closing**

- A. **Next meeting:** Wed Feb 16, 2022 7pm
- B. **Board announcements:**

Jan 23	David
Jan 30	Lisa
Feb 6	Phil

Feb 13 Amy  
Feb 20 Andrew

**C. Readings and songs:**

	February	March	April
Opening reading	David	Phil	Brent
Opening song	Caycee	Andrew	Amy
Closing reading	Carl	Rev Eric	Lisa

#### Appendix 1- Membership applications

Caroline Meyer has attended services in person and is also a member of the group studying indigenous actions and she mentioned that she has talked with Jane Lindsay. She is recently retired from the government and has some free time. She likes action-based activities and enjoys groups. Caroline seems quite connected with the church and she is interested in knowing more about the history of the church

Jill Swan and her daughter, Sylviana (now 7), have been attending FirstU for about four years. Sylviana is enjoying the RE program. Jill was looking to be part of a community that works to help people but does not have evangelical views. She feels that FirstU has “all the good stuff” without the dogma.

Suzanne Groleau is not new to the congregation and is now wishing to become a member. Raised as a Catholic, she wants to be part of a community where she can be herself. She likes the fact that the congregation is open and inclusive, and she believes strongly in human rights and the environment. She believes that the more love we send out, the more we get back.

## Appendix 2- Minister's report

### Minister's Report to the Board of Directors of the First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa January 2022

The biggest news on the church front is no longer news. In response to the dramatic spread of the Omicron Covid-19 variant, we, along with the institutions everywhere, have gone back to virtual-only offerings. Our volunteers and staff have stepped up in every way to make this as smooth a transition as possible. They deserve our heartfelt gratitude.

As I wrote for the eUU announcing the change to virtual only worship, I've never worked with a group of staff and volunteers whose default response is "Okay, Rev. Eric, we'll get it done." In other congregations I've served I'd hear concerns about how this or that would make doing anything other than the status quo a challenge in any number of ways. Here, even if how to best make a given change isn't clear, the staff and volunteers here find ways to make what needs to be done happen. Frankly, I keep counting my lucky stars, and say *Thank you* like it's a mantra that's about to go out of style.

Moving on, as this is January all those things that were put off as the holidays approached are now needing attention again. I'll be reaching out to Rev. Linda Thomson at the CUC shortly to work out the best way to follow up on the New Minister Startup Workshop she facilitated for us early in December.

I also want to let you know that I reached out to counterparts in other Canadian Unitarian congregations asking about their recent pledge drives. My guess was that the decrease we saw in the number of those who recently pledged is similar to what is happening elsewhere. Turns out it is. Our sibling faith communities across Canada are, almost to a one, experiencing the same thing. In uncertain times folks tend to pull back. So it is not that we are doing anything wrong. It's just that we are in the midst of a time of anxiety, or as I've learned these last months, VUCA: volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity.

What was even more interesting to me was a shared response to a question I didn't ask. Many colleagues who responded stated that they see pledge-based church budgets being increasingly untenable. In short, my colleagues here feel that their communities will need to secure lasting income from other sources.

Friends, because of your foresight I think we are in an enviable position.

Which leads me to what I thought was a great conversation at Sunday's Town Hall on expanding our campus. I doubt I have much more to add at this point that hasn't or won't be said by others. So I'll simply offer my thanks to everyone involved for such a well organized conversation. I was impressed with the clarity of what was presented, and how well folks listened to one another.

The only thing I'd add is my hope that we remember that we already have both the Unitarian House and River Parkway. In retrospect, the only thing I didn't hear on Sunday afternoon was that we have begun conversation with Unitarian House on a new lease agreement. Any new housing project(s) does not need to meet all of our needs. (Personally, I hope we don't need to build as high as 16 stories. Might 12 be sufficient? But that's just me. And yes, I know about the housing shortage in Ottawa. My wife and I entered the rental market at, or near, its peak.)

I also want to highlight what I heard Terry Kimmel saying, namely that any funds from this project does not absolve us of having to maintain the ongoing health and vitality of our faith community. I know several New England (US) congregations that have such large endowments, that the members and friends take the welfare of their faith community for granted. These are not what any outsider would consider healthy communities.

Changing gears now, though also looking ahead: Neo and I are sponsoring a Zoom workshop for parents on Saturday morning, Feb 26th by Heather Shumaker, author of *It's Okay Not to Share*. I met Ms. Shumaker several years ago. While she may look like a typical suburban parent, and she has some radical things to say about raising healthy, spirited children. I'd love to see you at the workshop.

All the best, Rev. Eric Meter

## Appendix 3 - COVID Task Force Recommendations

2021/12/16

Due to increasing urgency from Public Health , the COVID Task Force held a hastily arranged meeting late this afternoon.

COVID infections are growing exponentially (doubling in the last 6 days), so it is clear the Omicron variant is among us, and infecting those with vaccines too. So far, good news: hospitals have not been slammed with serious cases but when we see thousands of infections, some percentage will be severe, and hospitals may get overwhelmed.

Our immediate worry is that FirstU events do not jeopardize congregants having a safe and healthy Christmas with their families (or small group of friends). We also wish to lead by example in our community in an effort to generally reduce infections and perhaps prevent an extended closure of schools. This is a season for crowds in many places and each adds some risk: shopping malls, concerts, restaurants, ... and churches. If we can offer a similar service via a significantly safer alternative, then we should do so.

We make the following recommendations:

- FirstU should cancel all in-person worship services effective immediately until further notice. This includes this Sunday (live-streamed) and our Christmas Eve service (reduced to one online service). Dec 26th will be by Zoom. January 2nd and onward will be livestreamed only, until we can restart in-person services.
- This Sunday was supposed to include a visit-with-Santa for children's RE. This will either continue outdoors or canceled outright, depending on logistics.
- other group use of building is canceled until further notice (including Saturday's Messiah/Complex viewing, a choir event on Monday, upcoming team meetings)
- one signed contract for sanctuary rental (50 attendees, likely distanced) January 2nd shall proceed, unless the province intervenes before then.

To the board: you will likely read about this in the e-UU. There is no need for a vote at present: these are effectively an executive decision (Lisa and Rev Eric agree) due to their immediacy. We shall officially add these to the minutes of the January Board meeting.

2022/01/04

There remains a risk of transmission within the Sunday service team. The Ontario government is mandating working from home if possible, and Zoom services would be safer for our staff and volunteers. The audio playback on Zoom has improved since last year, and we can continue publishing our services to YouTube. We recommend moving to Zoom services from now until February 6th National CUC service.

Jen has recommended postponement to wedding rental January 29th, accepted by clients.

January 2nd rental for instalment ceremony was postponed as well.

Children's RE will continue on site outdoors with masks (January 16th onward).