

USR Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes

February 3, 2020

7:00 - 9:00 p.m.

Reeb Conference Room

Present: Lewis, Castillo-Leon, Dunnigan, Bluemel, Rev. Sarah, Walter, Markowitz

Also: Nametz, Seals

State of the RE Program:

Presentation by Jeanne Nametz, DRE, regarding her January and February reports

RE is not just about Sunday school but a faith formation process

At the auction, she noticed that there were only a handful of RE families in attendance despite a concerted effort to invite them, even by snail mail. Few of them seem integrated into the congregation at large. This seems to be universal among other UU congregations, according to her colleagues.

Young families now are more consumers than stewards. Some come as a result of interfaith marriages, liberal beliefs, or even because they seek a place for their special needs children.

Our parents and teachers are mostly the same group, as many parents volunteer. When asked why they teach, many say they want to give back and contribute. They are more able to give time than increased money.

She thinks the only solution to integrating and keeping families is by building relationships between the children, parents, and with the greater congregation. She would like to create a culture of appreciation for the teachers to acknowledge their service and make them feel valuable.

She noted that our families come from 13 different towns which makes it harder for them to get to know each other casually.

Lewis commented that we want it to become one community but it is really two and maybe Reeb isn't even a community. Kids need to get to know each other, and there should be more cross over between the two congregations. Perhaps one way would be for some non-teaching parents to help with coffee hour. They need new people to get involved and to work with the more experienced volunteers who would be welcoming.

Nametz wonders if we should automatically place parents into congregational dinner parties and allow them to opt out.

Lewis noted that for the Fellowship Feast on March 21st all will get an invitation.

Nametz reported a 50% open rate for the eBlast which was higher than expected and said that Lewis is good about getting announcements included that speak to parents.

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She will include a note about the Feast and thinks that since it's free to attend, there might be a higher attendance rate.

Walter wondered if we should make it more festive and feast-like for the children. Rev. Sarah concurred.

Nametz said that she would be on board with that as long as there were enough volunteers to support the event. It would help if children were brought to Reeb to eat in the conference room while volunteers prepared food in the kitchen.

Lewis said that can be accommodated and that Nametz should coordinate with Samuels and Krag who are organizing the Feast to ensure invitations are sent to families.

Walter asked if Nametz might in the future use a template for her reports to the Board that might be more akin to a management summary of high-level successes and challenges as well as the strategy to be employed in working to achieve the program's goals.

Rev. Sarah suggested that the Board might draft such a template of items they would like her to include in future reports.

Walter mentioned that a program such as mystery pen pals which could be a way to connect the congregations.

Castillo-Leon said that more RE for parents might be a way to strengthen parental bonds and promote friendships which could lead to more connection and commitment to USR.

Nametz said that our attendance by percentage is above the average of other congregations.

The Board thanked Nametz for her work and presentation.

Concerns from the Nominating Committee: Discussion with Judd Seals (Executive Session)
Bluemel informed the Board that there is a possibility that she might be away as part of her sabbatical January-June 2021.

Announcements from the President

State of the Board Of Trustees: The last few months of the congregational year will bring difficult conversations and decisions, chiefly allocating the budget after the pledge drive,

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developing a strategic plan to increase membership, addressing the concerns of the nominating committee, implementing REALM, and working to set goals for the minister. She asked that board members show up for the following events:

Feb. 29th: Lead Donor Event—All BOT members should attend
March 2nd: Next Meeting
March 21st: Fellowship Feast—All BOT members should attend 7:00 p.m.

Lewis asked if members were receiving the program insert from Chandrika when it is their turn to make announcements. They are. If Sally has not received any announcements for Sunday by Friday at noon, members who ask to add them on Sunday should be reminded of the deadline. Rev. Sarah said that in the case there are no announcements, the Board member should check in with her on Sunday in order to choose some event to uplift.

Volunteers for Thank You Notes to

Bob Jones for donation in memory of Marion -- Castillo-Leon
Jeff Summerville for Auction -- Bluemel
Suzanne Samuels for Auction -- Walter

Board members should review the Announcement Schedule and note the dates to which they are assigned.

Board members should sign up to attend Circle Meetings and Dunnigan should specifically attend Asset Management Circle.

SCRT Committee Recommendations

After receiving the report from the safety trainer, the committee prioritized the proposed recommendations and will be taking their requests for equipment and facility enhancements to Rob Willis to see if the Capital Fund can fulfill them.

Walter noted that the trainer said not all recommendations are priorities and merely would be ideals.

Ways Rationale: As a result of declining numbers of members and pledge units over the past few years, less rental income, the loss of some significant lead donors, and the deficit budget we experienced as a result of less pledge income for this calendar year, the Board will continue to work on a strategic plan to increase membership.

Ideas from brainstorming:

More marketing within the building for visitors attending events here

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Attractive posters, flyers, brochures in the hallways, bathrooms, to pass out at events

Increase Christmas Eve to two services--earlier Pageant and later more contemplative since it is when we get the most visitors of the year

Holding LGBTQ+ safe space events

More advertising and publicity

Community OWL (could charge tuition)

Explore the book *The Growing Church: Keys to Congregational Vitality* by Tom Belote

Rev. Sarah asked colleagues who've experienced growth in their congregations how it happened. She was told that it related to congregational character and a feeling of aliveness/energy/vitality on Sunday that let those visiting see people were excited to be present. "Buzz!" Also when visitors could see and feel that the congregation loves and cares for each other. to Increase Membership

Lewis said that a warm reception for visitors is vital, as well providing parental support.

Rev. Sarah said that she is pitching a new idea for family religious education that has been tried in other congregations. It would be a series of discussions such as how to talk to your kids about death, sex, etc. Could be a potluck dinner then kids go downstairs for their own lessons/discussions.

Need to determine what strategies fall in each Circle

CIT Report to Board and question regarding "Oversight"

What happens if a facilitator resigns mid-year, if events overlap, and other such questions

Rev. Sarah said that the first facilitator training went well and that facilitators were thinking deeply about the new circles and possible questions/problems that could be encountered.

There will be no perfect answers. Good communication within the Circle and between facilitators is vital.

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If a circle is co-sponsoring an event with an outside group, under what name should they do it? Should Circles decide?

Where does the buck stop? Multi-step plan:

1. Resolve problem within the Circle membership (using REALM?)
2. Discuss with all facilitators. If unable to resolve, head facilitator can decide the issue.
3. If necessary, Governance & Well Being will decide where to take it--the Board, COSM, or SCRT.
4. The BOT will be the last (not first) resort in this process and will make a final decision if all previous groups remain undecided.

Until the membership gets used to the new structure, upper levels need to educate them on the appropriate steps to resolve issues and refer matters back down to the Circles. Such procedures will eventually be posted on Realm to encourage transparency.

Treasurer's Report: Chris Dunnigan

As Auction funds are coming in, balances are in good shape. The Auction brought in about \$30,000. We had budgeted for \$35,000. Luckily, this year our investment income has been significant and will probably cover most of the projected deficit. Dunnigan notes that this is not something we can rely on to solve deficits long-term.

The Board needs to decide what it will do if we continue to run a deficit. Lewis polled members on whether a balanced budget should be a priority in the coming year. Board members responded in the affirmative.

Rev. Sarah said that in terms of the upcoming pledge drive, the strategy should be to focus on middle range donors (\$1,000 to \$5,000) as they are the group most likely to have the ability to substantially increase their pledges.

Rev. Sarah said that she is in favor of developing a strategic plan for how to proceed long-term if deficits continue and membership keeps dropping. Ideas to consider: reducing staff hours, cutting staff, sharing staff with other congregations, merging with another congregation (Paramus or Englewood are struggling too). She feels it is better to start thinking early about these possibilities than to make last minute decisions.

Questions about Rev. Sarah's Report: All

A new sexton has been hired and is working out well.

Walter advised that Circle Facilitators will need realm training soon.

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Meeting adjourned.

Minutes taken by R. Castillo-Leon