

MidAmerica Region, UUA
Board Meeting Minutes
January 5, 2021
Approved February 2, 2021

Trustees Present: Rae Jane Araujo, Dorit Bergen, Hans Kelson, David Lauth, Tammy Lemmer, Autumn Mahoney, Jim Moir

Staff Present: David Pyle, Sharon Dittmar

Call to Order:

David L. called the meeting to order at 7:33 EST and shared opening words. Tammy presided for the rest of the meeting.

Approval of Meeting Minutes:

Rae Jane moved approval with second from Autumn. A misspelled name was corrected. The minutes were approved.

Discussion

Two chapters from ***Widening the Circle of Concern***
Congregations & Communities; Hospitality & Inclusion

David P. facilitated the discussion.

Our UU heritage honors individualism for people and a degree of autonomy for congregations. These concepts can get in the way of accomplishing large scale change. Autumn commented that younger people can grow frustrated with the inertia that hinders change.

Members expressed interest in finding out about “promising practices” that have been tried in UU congregations. There was also interest in the idea that congregations can have their hospitality practices audited.

Sharon appreciated the recommendation that caucusing could improve the health of congregations.

David L. surmises that the UUA really aspires to lead congregations forward rather than simply supporting them. He commented that this goes against the popular understanding about congregational freedom to “do whatever it darn well wants to.”

Senior ministers, especially at large churches are often not well connected to the UUA. And there is widespread resistance in congregations when it comes to taking instruction from the UUA.

David L. concluded that the aspiration that the UUA would lead and inspire congregations would likely be a “rocky road”.

We next had a conversation about how hospitality works for traditionally marginalized groups. David P. commented that the UUA is trying to be more consistent in the inclusion work with congregations—ensuring that all staff members have competency. Getting congregations to shift their relations with the UUA may also be important to this work.

Many of the recommendations for action in the Report depend upon UUA staff to carry out the work. There is skepticism regarding the actual influence that UUA people might be able to exert upon recalcitrant congregations. In addition, there is a tension between regional UUA staff who work with congregations, the larger UUA organization, and the congregations themselves. Where will the power be? Sharon referred to our system of governance as “thick, contaminated water”. (Contaminated with white supremacy.) We are in it and NOBODY will be an expert. And we can’t wait for people to become experts.

Other notable “consumers” of the Report could be congregations who are aware of a problem with inclusion—looking for a technical solution to the problem. (If this, do that!)

The Report urges both a rapid shift and making measured progress. There is a question of how to deal with the anxiety that will likely arise.

For many persons who come from historically marginalized groups, the experience at the congregation level is negative—so we see people who are active at regional and national experiences who may be only weakly connected to a congregation.

Jim shared his observations about how modernistic philosophy is ingrained in the way our churches operate, even though it is no longer influential in the larger world. Younger people and people from more diverse backgrounds do not relate well to this outmoded approach. Some examples of modernistic concepts that thrive in UU congregations: Robert’s Rules of Order, science and logic can help us find the one best solution, emotions and experiences are not part of decision-making, etc. Jim concludes that he agrees with the “rocky road” predictions.

Autumn shared an insight regarding the Eighth Principle initiative. She commented that at first, it seemed great that some congregations were jumping into adoption. But then she asked herself, “Are they first doing the necessary work?”

Tammy raised an issue regarding the work of the Regional Nominating Committee and how our difficulties with obtaining diversity in leadership might relate to the Report. We definitely have a need to identify and cultivate new leadership.

Next Chapters.

At the next meeting we will discuss *Living Our Values* from ***Widening the Circle***.

National Advisory Council.

Rae Jane reported on the Council’s meeting from December 23, when members reviewed a report being presented to UUA Trustees and discussed how it will be presented and if or how individuals will be identified. The next meeting is January 16, 2021.

No new questions were proposed for use in making congregational calls. Sharon shared the current questions in the chat.

Sharon sent the questions to trustees, and we chose targets from a list of congregations in our region. Sharon promised to make an initial contact with the congregations to introduce us. Each trustee committed to making one such call each month.

Regional Lead Report.

David P. said that the Annual Program Fund is healthy. Despite the pandemic, contributions from congregations appear to be increasing.

He discussed actions being taken to manage regional funds. He said that we can “park” our various endowments in the UUA Common Endowment Fund. The plan is to use any earnings as additional operating funds for the following year. However, in the event of need, any portion of these funds could be utilized. Should the region agree to a financial integration with the UUA, we would need to set up our own separate endowment so that the resources remain under regional control.

David P. also shared that we are dealing with some dollars that are in “restricted funds” categories, and he wants to gain permission to re-purpose the funds or return them to donors, especially if the intended purpose(s) is no longer feasible or relevant.

Closing:

Tammy reviewed the tentative agenda for February and secured volunteers to facilitate and offer opening and closing words at the meeting.

Tammy provided a closing quotation from the unitarian.org.uk

Adjourned at approximately 9:30 pm EST

Respectfully Submitted by
Jim Moir
Secretary