

Towson Unitarian Universalist Church
Annual Congregational Meeting
Sunday, June 11, 2017

- 11:50 am Paul Konka Call to order opening remarks and with 57 active members present, a quorum was met.
- 11:55 am Reverend Clare Petersberger lead the Chalice Lighting
- 11:56 am Rev. Clare gave the minister's report.

As a literal sign that our meaning making must not be at the expense of others, or to the exclusion of others, at our congregational meeting last June, we voted to install a banner reading "Black Lives Matter." We did so in October. The banner was vandalized five times in the past year. And each time it was brought down, it was put back up to demonstrate our commitment to its message.

The office has received e-mails and phone calls asking, "Do you know there's a Black Lives Matter sign on your church's property?" usually followed by the suggestion, to show that the author or caller is not racist, that the wording of the banner be changed to 'All Lives Matter.' Our staff and I have answered such calls and e-mails with the invitation to further dialogue on race. Sometimes the invitation has been accepted. More often it has not. But it is ongoing.

Our own denomination is struggling with what it means to intentionally create more racially and culturally diverse congregations. With the resignations of our UUA President, COO, and the Executive Director of the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association, this will be a focus at the UUA General Assembly in a couple of weeks.

For the record, our Black Lives Matter banner also attracted positive feedback. Visitors walked through our doors because of that sign, because of our progressive values and spiritual openness. It was a true joy to connect such a visitor who works with immigrant students with Delegate Steve Lafferty. As a result, Delegate Lafferty came to the school with some of his colleagues to speak to these students and their parents about how laws get made and changed.

With so much anxiety in the national news this was a local feel good story made possible by this congregation. At a Town Hall meeting this year, Monica Sweidel held up a piece of paper of the names of visitors just that morning. The list of names ran off the page. More people are coming to explore who we are, how we worship, and our vision for a world made whole.

This past week, I had the chance to see our congregation through the eyes of a visitor—a Unitarian Universalist who is moving to this area in the coming year. He asked, "Does this congregation truly welcome people with different spiritual perspectives and beliefs?" How would you answer his question?

In the coming year we will be engaging spiritual themes through a program called Soul Matters to which over 200 UU congregations subscribe. He asked if we offered religious education classes from pre-school through high school and I assured him that we do. And in the coming year, Joyce Duncan is exploring a campus ministry program with TUUC and Goucher.

This visitor asked about offerings for adult religious education and I was able to share how topics had ranged from a liberal religious investigation of evil to making friends with death. I also shared information about our Chalice Circles. His eyes lit up.

He asked our work for justice. I shared our focus on racial and environmental justice. He asked if our focus on environmental justice was in response to the President pulling us out of the Paris accords. I assured him that our congregation has been passionate about stewardship of the earth since BEFORE the Paris Climate accord. He left saying that he felt much better about his move after learning more about this congregation.

We Unitarian Universalists agree that our meaning making must not be at the expense of others, or to the exclusion of others. So my hope for the coming year is that we intentionally see ourselves and our congregation through the eyes of visitors who walks through our doors hoping to make connections. My hope for the coming year is that we will also see ourselves through the eyes of strangers who are curious if we know that we have a Black Lives Matter banner on our property and wonder what that's all about.

Our proposed vision and mission statements crafted from two years of dialogue reflect our individual and collective intent and hope to do both.

My heartfelt thanks to our hardworking TUUC staff and lay leaders.

It is an honor to minister with you.

12:02 pm

Jasmine Faelyn gave the President's report.

The work of the Board of Trustees started in August 2016 with a Leadership Workshop that was facilitated by Rev. David Pyle of the

UUA Central East Region. At the workshop, the following goals for the year were identified:

1. Continue the work toward revising our Mission and Vision;
2. Assess outreach to the greater community, including racial justice;
3. Assess stewardship and fiduciary responsibility;
4. Clarify relations within the Board; and
5. Clarify operational and governance roles.

With regard to our mission and vision statement revision, the Mission Task Force has completed its process after extensive work for two years, and I am pleased that the Mission Task Force will be presenting its final mission and vision statements for approval by this congregation today.

With regard to outreach, the congregation has made many strides this past year in terms of racial justice, including adoption of the Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism policy for building use by racial justice groups, the dedication of the Black Lives Matter banner, the numerous ADORE presentations held jointly with First Unitarian Church of Baltimore, the sponsoring of a trans-gender student from Iran, the work of the Green Sanctuary Committee in its partnership with Grace Lutheran in East Baltimore, and the many other projects of the Social Action Committee. I am proud to say that the congregation voted to sign the Declaration of Conscience drafted by the UUA and UUSC to commit to putting Unitarian Universalist values into action to resist hate, fear and bigotry.

With regard to assessing stewardship and fiduciary responsibility, our congregation perennially has a lot of anxiety around related to our finances. While there were a lot of successes with our stewardship campaign this year, there were also a lot of challenges. It is commendable that there were over 30 canvassers who initiated one on one correspondence with congregants. It is awesome that there were 7 more total pledging households this year than last year. Many households increased their pledge. This being said, the Stewardship Campaign was not able to make its goal, and actually initially received about \$30,000 less pledged income than previous years. How is that possible? About a dozen households who pledged generously in the past either significantly decreased their pledge or declined to pledge this year.

Thanks to an anonymous donor who backed a matching campaign for increased pledges, some of the gap has been filled. Additionally a contract for a long-term rental next year with a Bridge Club who will be meeting downstairs in the lobby and rooms 1 and 2 during week

days added about \$25,000 income to next year's budget. I have much appreciation for Kai Aiyetoro, Church Administrator, who was able to secure the rental for us! This allowed us to disregard the draconian cuts originally in consideration, including reduction in staff hours, which would have been proposed if we had not been able to increase revenue. With the additional pledges and the long-term rental we are not only able to sustain our current staffing levels, but we can give our staff a 2% two percent pay raise. Not only is this the first raise they will have had in over 5 five years, this action will help TUUC to remain competitive for future qualified employees.

As exciting as this is, there are admittedly some questions to its sustainability. It will certainly help if we are able to maintain a long-term rental. The proposed budget for this year is fairly dependent on the generosity of a single pledge unit (to which I am very grateful). Painful decisions regarding staff hours continue to come up in the budget discussions each year, and this year was no exception. This is frustrating to our leaders and our staff. It is not conducive to an amicable work environment. It is my hope TUUC will be able to become a better employer. Our ability to maintain the staffing levels in the future relies on keeping a long term rental and dividing the substantial pledge from one into the smaller pledges from many. This would go a long way toward stabilizing TUUC's revenue stream. I believe this is possible when I see the increase in the number of pledging households and the amount which they pledge. We will work together to ensure this trend continues by supporting the Membership and Stewardship Committees' efforts and developing a strategic plan.

There remains some lack of clarity regarding our processes for Stewardship and Budget development. Additionally there is lack of clarity regarding the financial management of the church, including within the roles of Treasurer, Finance Council Head, Bookkeeper, and Accounting Committee. There are many hands involved in the financial structure of the church. This may seem like a good thing as it may lessen the load on the variety of volunteer positions; however, it also creates a system that diffuses authority and responsibility, creates confusion and conflict, and is vulnerable to errors. Recognizing such, the Board requested an outside assessment of our financial processes from the UUA was requested. Rev. David Pyle will be providing the assessment to the Board of Trustees. There is much work to be done here to relieve some of the stress within the system and reduce the financial anxiety felt by the congregation. With the assessment, my hope is that the Board will have a better idea of how to move forward from here, which we can then verbalize within a rolling three-year strategic plan.

With regard to clarifying relations within the Board, the Board adopted a “consent agenda” this year, which allowed us to review written reports before the meeting. Reviewing written reports ahead of the meeting rather than verbalizing reports during the meeting freed up time to explore “open questions” regarding the future of TUUC without committing to a specific decision or action plan. A “process observation” report was also used at each meeting this year. This challenged trustees to evaluate the tasks and processes within the meeting in order to increase self-awareness of the relations and conduct demonstrated during the meetings. Finally, the Board also adopted a new board covenant this year. I’m grateful to Dan Alper, Tom Harris, George Harrison, and Rev. Clare Petersburger for their work on this.

With regard to clarifying operational and governance roles, the Board and the Operations Team identified during the leadership retreat in August 2016 a lack of clarity of roles between the leadership bodies of our church. Much of the confusion is based on the governance structure of our church. Accordingly, the Board requested a Governance Assessment and Bylaws Review from the UUA. Rev. Pyle completed the Governance Assessment in April 2017 and the Bylaws Review in December 2016. In summary, Rev. Pyle observed that the current governance structure consists of two competing boards and appears to be a compromise between several models. Our governance model worked because of the dedication of individuals.

The Board was in agreement with Rev. Pyle’s recommendations. However, actual structural revisions will take some time and further review. The congregation will be informed of and involved with the process of adopting changes. With that in mind the Board drafted a Vision for Governance and appointed a Governance Task Force (GTF) which are shared below. Dan Alper, Jason Braspennickx, and Karyn Marsh were appointed to the GTF. If you have questions or concerns about the Governance Assessment or the Task Force, please discuss them with me.

I would like to thank and recognize the outgoing board members for their service: Dan Alper, Tom Harris, and Anita Cox.

12:16 pm

Neil Porter delivered the Operations Team Report.

Neil acknowledged the leadership of Jasmine Faelyn as Board president and recognized the outgoing Operations Team members, Marie Razulis and Carol Watkins.

12:20 pm

Anita Cox delivered the Treasurer's Report.

With regard to income, Anita explained that as of today, the church has collected 95% of income from pledges and 100%+ of plate contributions, but only 60% of fundraising and 80% (\$19K) from projected rental income. The church received \$24,376 from the endowment, which has a current balance of \$850,941.

With regard to expenses, the church has incurred 89% of projected expenses, while 92% of the year has passed. She encouraged people to turn in any expense reimbursement requests by June 30.

Cash reserves have improved at \$40K, but TUUC is still below UUA recommended levels. We still have \$8,900 in capital campaign fund that can be used for small projects.

12:25 pm

Paul Konka explained the Parliamentary Rules.

Under Roberts Rules, every active member gets to speak twice, up to 10 minutes each time. A person may speak after being recognized by Moderator. He will hear pros and cons alternately.

12:30 pm

Claudia Sumler presented the slate of new leaders up for election.

The Nominating Committee consists of five members: Claudia Sumler, Alta Haywood, Joan Harrison, Karin Symonds, and Janet Kuperstein. Claudia expressed thanks to those members on the committee for their service.

The following members have agreed to run for office this year:

Jasmine Faelyn - President
Neil Porter - President -Elect
Carol Watkins - Board of Trustees Member at Large
Luke Williams - Board of Trustees Member at Large
Jeanette Anders – Inner Life Council Head
Jen Larson – Religious Education Council Head
Andrew Hager – Sunday Services Council Head
Patty Barry – Nominating Committee
Ben Gitelson – Nominating Committee
Jane Selewach – Endowment Committee
Paul Konka – Endowment Committee
Bill Ward – Endowment Committee

The Treasurer position could not be filled. Paul Konka asked if there were any nominations from the floor. There were none.

Paul explained that the treasurer position would be filled by appointment by the Board.

Hearing no further objections, Paul announced by acclamation that the slate was approved.

12:31 pm

Jen Larson and George Harrison presented the Mission Vision Task Force report.

Jen Larson presented an update on the work of the Mission Task Force (MTF). The MTF was charged by the TUUC Board to develop new vision and mission statements for TUUC. The MTF consisted of Jasmine Faelyn, Clare Flynn-Avallone, George Harrison, Jen Larson, Robin Sinn, and until September 2016, Barry Marsh. Rev. Clare Petersberger advised the group.

The process began in October 2015, when the Reverend David Pyle presented a sermon and workshop on mission at TUUC. Forty-two members and friends of our congregation participated in the workshop. Rev. Pyle coached the team throughout the process.

Starting with feedback from the congregation gathered at the 2015 workshop and from the Strengthening and Growing through Engagement sessions occurring in 2014-15, the MTF drafted a set of statements describing our aspirations and our actual behaviors. In March and April 2016, we presented the agreements and disagreements between those sets of statements to the Board, Operations Team, Committee on Ministries, and the TUUC Staff. With their feedback, we crafted a handful of sample statements which we presented and discussed with the Social Action Committee, Green Sanctuary Committee, Caring Committee, Lay Pastoral Associates, Religious Exploration Committees, and past presidents.

From there, the MTF again revised the draft mission and vision statements and held 13 cottage meetings in March and April 2017 to solicit feedback from the congregation. Further feedback was solicited at the April 23 congregational meeting. Using this feedback, the MTF revised the mission and vision statements to the following:

Mission Statement

Our mission is to deepen our ethical and spiritual lives together as we work for racial, social, and environmental justice.

Vision Statement

Our Vision is to be an intentionally inclusive community engaging with each other and the world in a heartfelt search for truth and meaning.

George explained some of the feedback and the changes made and then moved to adopt them as resented. Dan Alper seconded.

Mike Magrogan asked why “economic justice” was not included?

Jasmine answered that the word “social” was thought to be broad enough to include “economic”.

There were no further questions or statements either in favor or against. The vote was called. The motion unanimously carries by voice vote. The mission and vision statements will be adopted.

12:40 pm

Anita Cox presented the FY2017-18 Budget for approval by the Congregation.

She first thanked the canvassers and all who pledged. She further invited those who have not pledged to pledge.

She also acknowledged the work that our office administrator, Kai Aiyetoro, has done to get more rentals of the property, most recently the rental of the lower part of the building by a bridge club, which will yield approximately \$25,000 per year. If not for this rental, we would have been forced to make painful cuts to staff hours.

Because of the new rental, the supplemental pledge drive with match, and generosity of one anonymous member, however, we were able to achieve our aspirational budget and not cut staff hours.

With regard to expenses, we are still not a fair share congregation, but we will be giving 75% of our fair share dues this coming year. We also received loan forgiveness on one of the member loans because that member passed away and forgave the loan in her will. As for the remaining member loans, we still have another four years to pay those off.

The Caring Committee has a restricted budget; hence, it was removed from the budget. The Music Committee received an increase to cover the elevated costs of sheet music.

Regarding staff costs, health insurance costs have increased dramatically. (See attached chart.) We were able to give a very minimal cost of living raise to all staff of 2%. On the recommendation of the Committee on Ministries, professional expenses for the minister

were restored to \$4000 and professional development expenses for the rest of the staff were raised.

Anita moved to adopt the budget. It was seconded.

Catherine Morris noted that the auction proceeds will go into building fund, but the building fund is zeroed out; what consideration is being given to the building needs in the future?

Anita Cox responded that there was a decision to have a specific fundraiser for building projects.

Claudia Sumler expressed support for this budget, but also expressed concern that we are relying too much on a generous pledge from one person. This is not a healthy way to meet our budget every year.

Neil Porter rose to state that the budget has been a contentious issue every year for the last decade. This year we had an aspirational budget. It was hard but we did it. Let's celebrate that. The price of this church is eternal work. But why else are we here? We are here to work. We need to be more inspirational to each other. It's not impossible. We did it!

With no further comments, Paul closed debate and called for a vote.

Motion carried by voice vote with an estimated two nays.

1:04 pm

Having no further business before it, Paul moved to adjourn. The motion was seconded and adopted unanimously.