

**Unitarian Universalist Church of Berkeley Board of Trustees Meeting
Wednesday, January 8, 2025**

Meeting Conducted via Zoom Video Conference

Minutes – Approved

ATTENDEES

Voting members: Michael Armstrong, Michael DeWitt, Kay Fairwell, Beth Jerde, Beth Pollard, David Rosales, Pier Sun Ho, Helen Tinsley-Jones, Helen Toy,

Ex officio members: Rev. Marcus Liefert, Selene Fabiano (Secretary), Lisa Maynard (Treasurer)

Visitors: Karen Elliott, Cyndy Greenleaf, Anne Greenwood, Anita Mermel, Larry Nagel, Marta Tobey, Dave Wemmer

A quorum being present, the meeting was called to order by Helen Tinsley-Jones, co-president, at 7:19 p.m. David Rosales did the chalice lighting and reading, Kay Fairwell read the Board covenant, Beth Pollard read the land acknowledgement, and Lisa Maynard read the Widening the Circle Vision Statement.

CONSENT AGENDA

A motion for the following (M _Pier_/S_Beth Jerde_) passed unanimously:

- a. Approve agenda
- b. Approve December 2024 Board Meeting minutes
- c. Accept Treasurer's report
- d. Accept Freestone Oversight Committee report

MINISTER'S REPORT

Rev. Marcus reported that a Facilities Assistant has been brought on in a temporary position. After the probation period, a decision will be made whether to hire him permanently. Kathryn & Elizabeth Jay recently hosted a staff party at their home. There was high turnout and very good spirits. Rev. Marcus will meet with the Staff Structure Task Force next week. The Interim Executive Director will begin February 10th, just as budgeting and stewardship are beginning. The stewardship kick-off will begin on March 9th due to a change in Rev. Marcus schedule that resulted from the date change for the February Congregational meeting. We are experiencing robust attendance at Sunday services. On average about 175 people are attending service in contrast to an average of 150 people last year and 100 in previous years. The task for the whole congregation is to welcome new folks and help integrate them into the community.

Questions/Discussion:

Q: What can we do to find out what brought people to the church? What will help keep people interested?

A: Some people want to be engaged right away and some people want to sit in the back. It's good to try to read people. Most people are coming for connection – deeper connection with themselves, community, and something beyond. Our task: Be available for that connection. Some board members are intentionally talking to new people while waiting in the lunch line and sitting at a table with new people during lunch.

ANNOUNCEMENTS/LISTENING

Board or Staff Announcements:

- Helen Toy reported a successful campaign to provide staff with an end-of-year financial gift. Over \$2000 was donated, resulting in each staff receiving a \$125 bonus.
- A Special Congregational Meeting will be held on January 19, 2025 to vote on the ordination of Kathryn Jay. The meeting will be live-streamed but only in-person voting will be available. Although not required by our bylaws, it is a tradition at UUCB for the congregation to approve ordinations, as a way to show support for the new minister. Kathryn Jay's ordination will be held during Sunday service on 2/16/25.
- The Candidates' Forum will be held on January 26, 2025 to provide an opportunity for the congregation to get to know the prospective board candidates. After an extensive vetting process, the Nominating Committee is recommending Carla McCasland and Kristen Jensen as candidates for the board. Carla has been involved in RE and youth program for many years; Kristen Jensen has facilitated Chalice Circles and has been involved with Family Ministry and the Welcome Table. Voting begins right after the Candidates Forum ends; Voting ends when the February 23rd Congregational meeting begins.

Board listening presence: Big thanks to the youth and families who led the Food Drive. Many volunteers made their cars available to deliver the food donations so the church did not need to rent a truck. Photos of the Food Drive will be posted on the UUCB Facebook page and included in the Week Ahead. The theme of Christmas Eve service resonated with many people and there was lots of positive feedback.

Congregants who wish to speak to the Board: None

DISCUSSION/ACTION ITEMS:

- a. Approve Congregational Meeting Agenda for January 19, 2025.
Motion to approve the agenda for 1/19 special congregational meeting (M- Beth Pollard/ S- Helen Tinsley-Jones) **passed unanimously.**

- b. Approve Congregational Meeting Agenda for February 23, 2025

After a draft agenda for the 2/23/25 congregational meeting was drafted and sent to the board, the board learned that Karen Elliott declined to accept the Flaming Chalice Award. As a result, a small revision to this agenda is needed.

A **Motion** to approve the agenda for the 2/23/25 congregational meeting with the revision of striking Karen Elliott's name from the list of people who will be receiving the 2025 Flaming Chalice Award (M - Helen Toy/S- Michael DeWitt) **passed unanimously**.

- c. Sanctuary Church - Cynthia Greenleaf, Social Justice Council Co-Chair, raised the question as to whether UUCB might be interested in recommitting to being a Sanctuary Church. She shared that in 2018, the UUCB congregation voted to become a "Sanctuary Church" by passing the following motion:

"As a community of faith, we commit to walk alongside immigrants, mixed-status families, refugees and other targeted communities to uphold the dignity, due process, full acceptance, and participation of all people in our society through advocacy, support, and protection."

Since the passage of that motion in 2018, UUCB members had an accompaniment team that supported a specific family and worked with the Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity (IM4H) at the West County Detention Center.

Recently many UUCB members have been asking how they can support our immigrant communities. At their 1/12/25 meeting, the SJC will hear from people on this issue. Francie Liefert will share what she learned from a national webinar. Cyndy will share UUCB's 2018 Sanctuary Church statement with the group and solicit input regarding whether they would like to recommit to that statement or revise it. The goal would then be to add the statement as an agenda item at a congregational meeting so the congregation can vote on it. The SJC feels it's important for this to be something that the entire church community takes on.

Cyndy emphasized that it's important for UUCB to know what the law does and does not allow so that we know what risks we are taking on as a Sanctuary Church. It is okay to house immigrants but we can't evade law enforcement authorities. It is also important to know that as a sanctuary state that passed the CA Values Act in 2018, California disallows law enforcement from helping ICE (US Immigrations and Customs Enforcement). The UUA offers legal support and help for church communities considering what their options are and what risks they may be undertaking when supporting immigrant communities.

Discussion

- Some interest in ensuring the statement indicates it is a "non-binding agreement" so there wouldn't be legal repercussions by immigrants if they asked for help and we were not able to provide it.

- We need to know what risks we face from the federal government if we house immigrants in our church. We would want to mitigate that risk and protect UUCB from that.
 - This is the education stage. The board and the congregation need information and time to learn more about this. It would be helpful if SJC could put together some information including UUCB's history as a Sanctuary Church and possible steps forward to help us determine what actions we might take.
 - The board isn't ready to approve the agenda tonight to put on the 2/23/25 Congregational meeting. We could consider it for the May congregational meeting.
 - Making a commitment to hold up immigrant rights is different than taking action. This is a multi-step process. It would be helpful to know what specific actions we can take to live out our values.
- d. Budgeting Process - Lisa Maynard outlined the following budgeting process and schedule:
- January – Collect information. Consider requests from staff. Consult with lay group leaders. Talk with Stewardship re pledge goal
- Mid-February – Look at staffing costs. Provide an early draft for the finance committee.
- March – Provide draft budget to the board and finance committee for review & questions.
- April – Final draft to the board
- May board meeting – Board approves the budget and recommends the congregation approve it at the May congregational meeting.

When a draft budget is ready, information sessions for the congregation will be offered, so members have a chance to review the budget before voting on it. Janae, in close consultation with Rev. Marcus, is doing a lot of the work on the early budget work

- e. Automation of Endowment Draw - Lisa Maynard provided some background. For the Endowment that is managed by the UUA, 4-5% of the fund is drawn down annually to support building maintenance through the Ladd Griffith Fund. Currently, the draw-down only happens when someone from UUCB makes this request to the **UUCEF (Unitarian Universalist Common Endowment Fund)**. The Finance Committee decided that it would be better to have the UUA automate the 4% draw on a quarterly basis. This will work better with fluctuations in the market and will ensure the draw-down happens on a regular basis, rather than relying on someone to remember to do it. Anita Mermel, Chair of Endowment Committee, will continue to monitor the performance of the endowment fund investments. If the funds increase considerably, she will recommend to the board that the draw-down be temporarily increased to 5% and make a one-time adjustment to the automated withdrawal. Since this is a change in the process and not a change in policy, the Endowment Committee is informing the board and not asking the board to vote on this change.

- f. Change in Audit Schedule Recommendation for Bylaws - Lisa Maynard gave the Board some advanced notice about a future request for Bylaw changes related to the audit schedule and the reasons for this request. UUCB's current bylaws are very specific regarding audit requirements and state that the church will receive an outside financial review or a limited audit by a certified public accountant each year. This requirement is problematic for a number of reasons: 1. Providing the information an auditor needs takes an enormous amount of staff time; 2. Audits are very expensive (a full audit can cost \$20,000 or more); 3. It's unusual for small organizations like UUCB to require a full audit; 4. UUCB has switched from managing our own accounting to paying an accounting firm to do some of the high-level accounting processes. Paying for both accounting consultants and a full audit is expensive and seems unnecessary.

Requesting a financial review is an alternative to a full audit, but it is still expensive. When an accounting firm does a financial review, they look at our systems and processes to ensure there are checks and balances and provide advice at the end of the review. It's possible that the annual audit or review requirement was put into the bylaws at a time when there was some distrust about how the church's finances were being handled. Lisa hopes that as there is increased transparency regarding our systems, there will be more trust. The Finance Committee will work on drafting suggested alternative language for the bylaws and share this with the Board's Bylaws Committee which is having its first meeting next week.

Questions/Discussion

Q: Can we make sure that we are in compliance with any state reporting requirements?

A: (Lisa): Carolyn James who has experience with non-profits and is a CPA is a good resource. Lisa will look at materials that the UUA provides on its website regarding financial controls.

Q: Have we been paying \$20K each year for audits?

A: No. Audits haven't been done annually. The last audit was done 3 years ago in FY20-21 and Tess had to spend an enormous amount of time on it. One positive result of that audit was that UUCB decided to engage the services of an outside accounting firm for the more complicated accounting processes.

f. Beacon Article Recommendation

Beth P is writing her last Board Beacon article.

BOARD COMMITTEE MEMBER/LIAISON REPORTS

Family Ministry. The next "Parents Night Out" will be on 1/18. 16 kids came to RE the week of Christmas. YCC sung at the La Befana performance. OWL is starting on February 9th for 4-6th grade.

Social Justice Committee. This Sunday there will be a potluck and discussion about our status as a Sanctuary Church. On 1/20, UUCB congregants will be marching in the MLK Jr parade in El Cerrito. We hope for a large turnout from UUCB.

Nominating Committee. Kristen Jensen and Carla McCasland have agreed to run for the Board. Information about each candidate will go out in the Week Ahead.

Awards Committee. The 2025 Flaming Chalice and Albert Schweitzer awardees have been chosen and notified.

Bylaws Committee. The first in-person meeting will be held on 1/21/25.

Stewardship Committee. Lisa Maynard spoke with Stewardship Co-Chairs, Greg Lemieux and Ariel Smith-Iyer. The February Beacon will have an article about the stewardship campaign. Campaign Kick-off will be on March 9th; Celebration Sunday will be on April 6th.

CLOSING COMMENTS

Thanks to all attendees.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 8:59PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Selene Fabiano, Secretary