

**Unitarian Universalist Church of Berkeley Board of Trustees Meeting
Wednesday, January 7, 2026
Meeting Conducted via Zoom Video Conference**

Minutes – Approved

ATTENDEES

Voting members: Michael DeWitt, Kay Fairwell, Kristen Jensen, Beth Jerde, Carla McCasland, David Rosales, Helen Tinsley-Jones, Helen Toy

Absent: Pier Sun Ho

Ex officio members: Rev. Marcus Liefert, Selene Fabiano (Secretary), Lisa Maynard (Treasurer), Janae Heard (Operations Director), Liesl Dees (Intern Minister)

Visitors: Jean Gleason, Ann Harlow, Mary Muehlbach, Larry Nagel, Marta Tobey

A quorum being present, the meeting was called to order by Kay Fairwell, president, at 7:16 p.m. Carla McCasland did the chalice lighting and reading, Helen Tinsley-Jones read the Board covenant, Kay Fairwell read the land acknowledgement, and Lisa Maynard read the Widening the Circle Vision Statement.

CONSENT AGENDA

A motion for the following (M _HelenTinsley-Jones _/S_Beth Jerde) passed unanimously:

- Approve agenda
- Approve December 2025 Board Meeting minutes
- Accept monthly Operations Director report
- Accept monthly Treasurer's report

MINISTER'S REPORT

Rev. Marcus appreciated the staff and thanked the board for raising funds to show the staff our appreciation. The staff supervision structure has been reorganized; since the Facilities Director doesn't overlap with the AV team, Janae will supervise the AV team and Rev. Kathryn will oversee them on Sunday morning. Liesl Dees is now at UUCB full-time. Last Sunday, we had some heavy news re the death of Rev. Sue Magidson; her memorial will be held on 2/15.

ANNOUNCEMENTS/LISTENING

Board or Staff Announcements:

On behalf of the Stewardship Committee, Selene let the board know they will be receiving pledge letters next week. Stewardship is encouraging board members to be early pledgers, preferably by 2/1 or at least before the February congregational meeting on 2/22.

Report from Board listening presence: Helen Toy reported that 2 people asked for custodial help on Sunday mornings. Another expressed the need for more meeting space after church on Sundays. There was also a request for a table for newcomers which Rev. Kathryn is working on. And there was a request for more paid help in the kitchen.

Congregants who wish to speak to the Board: None

DISCUSSION/ACTION ITEMS:

a. February Congregational Meeting Planning

The February Congregation meeting will focus on the Flaming Chalice awardees, stewardship, and installing new board members. We'll also recognize our staff.

b. Freestone Moving Forward – (current status, task force, discernment circles)

Last month Rev. Marcus shared a proposed process for next steps regarding Freestone. Since then, he has recruited a task force to get the process moving. Task force members include Board members, Kristen and Pier; two Committee on Ministry members, Suzette Anderson-Duggan and Dave Belden; and two members with particular interest or expertise, Deborah Schmidt and Peter Boland. We scheduled the initial circle for the board to be held on 1/25 from 1:30-3PM. The focus of this initial circle will be to process the process during the last Freestone vote before we move into the 2nd phase of discernment in the spring.

c. Budget process

Lisa Maynard reviewed the budget process which begins with the Operations Director, in consultation with Rev. Marcus and senior staff, developing a basic budget based on the staffing plan and projections for fixed expenses. Lisa, as the liaison for church programs, will give Program Council their budget call in January so those groups that have a budget and want one for next year can submit their requests. She will bring a draft budget to the Board in April.

Lisa noted that there are program expenses for whom there are specific people who make a budget request as well as expenses that have had wider congregational support but for which no one person/group is responsible for making requests (e.g. GRIP and Sogorea Te'. Land Trust). Her concern is that the latter items can fall through the cracks because no one group is specifically responsible for overseeing budget requests for them, and it doesn't feel like it should be the treasurer who makes a decision as to keep or not keep funding something. She raised the question about how to determine the congregation's budget priorities as well as involve the congregation overall in developing priorities for discretionary expenses. One idea would be to bring back "dot voting", probably in February. As it has been done previously, dot voting involves developing a small list of priorities. Each priority is written on a large piece of paper that is hung in the atrium. Church members are given a certain number of dot labels (usually 1 dot for every 3-5 choices) which they can allocate based on their preferred priorities. It can be done over a number of Sundays. We will also need a way

for people to do “dot voting” online for those who don’t come to church. Lisa will talk with Janae about what things should be included in dot voting. She’s also open to ideas from anyone else.

Discussion/Questions:

Q: How was the decision to support GRIP made? We want to be sure that we’re not undoing a decision by the congregation.

A (Lisa): It wasn’t a congregational decision. GRIP was supported for years by being a regular Good Neighbor every November. Two years ago, when the voting for the Good Neighbor agencies was happening, there was discussion about the fact that if GRIP was automatically chosen as a Good Neighbor each year, only 11 agencies were chosen through the voting process. As a result, a suggestion was made that the church fund a donation to GRIP each year, but not as one of the Good Neighbor organizations.

There was understanding and agreement with Lisa’s point that decisions whether or not to continue funding something and/or to change the level of the donation shouldn’t fall on the people who are creating the budget.

Q: Would we be undoing a decision to fund Sogorea Te’ if it was not chosen through the Dot voting process?

A (Helen Tinsley-Jones): The board voted to put the Sogorea Te’ line item in the budget as part of the church’s commitment to be in right relations with indigenous people. This is an important donation. As a rep of HIP, Helen Tinsley-Jones connects with the treasurer every year to see if a check has been sent to Sogorea Te’. In the past there was a lot of publicity about this decision to include the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust in the budget. Now there are many new members who may not know what it, so it would be problematic to have people vote about it when they don’t know what it is.

Donations to GRIP and Sogorea Te’ don’t necessarily have to be included as items in dot voting; they were just examples of the kinds of budget items for which there is no specific group that oversees it.

Rev Marcus noted that dot voting wouldn’t be a binding vote but a way of getting information about what is important to the congregation. The goal is create a more participatory process for the discretionary items in the budget.

- d. Generous donation from a member in response to a targeted request for staff long-term disability and life insurance coverage

Last month, the board had given Rev. Marcus the greenlight to request a targeted donation to cover the cost of long-term disability and life insurance for the staff. In the past, these benefits had only been offered to our senior minister. Rev. Marcus reached out to a member and asked for a gift to allow UUCB to take advantage of this opportunity to provide these

benefits for staff. The donor very generously decided to donate \$50,000, which was much more than requested. Although the donor has not made any specific requests, this is not an unrestricted gift as the intention was for it to be used for staff benefits and needs. The proposed plan is to use this gift to cover these staff benefits both for this fiscal year (about \$12,000), as well as next year. In addition, some of this gift may also be used to help with health insurance costs that will likely be higher than was budgeted (almost \$300/month higher than anticipated). Exactly how the funds are used will be reported to the board.

Motion (M- Kristen/ S- Helen Tinsley-Jone). Board approves the acceptance and designation of a gift solicited by Rev Marcus to be used for staff benefits. The **Motion passed unanimously.**

e. Populating Committees (Endowment, Human Resources, Buildings and Grounds)

The need to get members for several committees was discussed again.

Endowment Committee. It might be good to revise the description/name of the Endowment Committee to make it less intimidating and to reflect the fact that committee members don't need to have expertise regarding investments. The work of the committee now needs to be more about educating the congregation and encouraging them to consider including UUCB in their will/estate plans. One idea would be to call it the Development Committee. It would be good to get input from people who have been on the Endowment Committee. Since many of the current Finance Committee members have served on the Endowment Committee in the past, Lisa will bring it to the Finance Committee for their input. Rev Marcus shared that the Rochester UU Church has a very successful "Legacy Society" that hosts an annual gathering/party for people who had named the church in their will/estate plan.

Human Resources Committee. Marcus has said that if we didn't have a committee, he and Janae would reach out to a church member to help them with the current issue of doing the annual staff salary review.

Maybe we can see what the interests/talents are of the new board members. Maybe we need a Committee on Committees – a small task force of people who would work on populating the committees. Could we pay a development professional who could start this up and mentor folks? As one strategy, Kristen is willing to talk with Charis and Victoria to get their ideas about people who might be good candidates for these committees.

Rev Marcus reminded the board that its responsibility is to populate the committees that report to the board. Most of the church's committees and teams are ministry teams that report to the staff, not to the board. The board needs to get clarity about which committees are specifically board committees.

- f. Beacon Article Ideas - February Beacon article – Helen Tinsley-Jones and Kay Fairwell. Where we've been and where we're going. Pleasures of being part of a committee. This is the Year of the Fire horse, a get things done sign. Reflection on the positive things you've seen over 3 years.

BOARD COMMITTEE MEMBER/LIAISON REPORTS

Social Justice Council. Every year a contingent from UUCB marches in the MLK Jr parade in El Cerrito. This year the parade is on 1/19 We'll meet at 9:30AM; the parade starts at 10AM. It's a wonderful event and a good opportunity to gather in solidarity.

Good Neighbor program. In December we chose 12 organizations. There is a potluck meeting this Sunday starting at 5:30PM. Theme: Do the Next Right Thing. There will be tables in which people can sign up to take action. We hope a lot of people will show up.

Appreciation. We raised enough to give each staff about \$120 apiece. Rev. Marcus will give the staff their financial gifts at their staff luncheon this week. Carla will send a thank you note to our recent large donor.

CLOSING COMMENTS

Kay shared that this has been the most collegial board she has worked on.

Rev. Marcus gave a blessing.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 8:32PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Selene Fabiano, Secretary