

Allegheny Unitarian Universalist Church Meeting of the Board of Trustees

The regular meeting of the Board of Trustees was held at Unitarian House with the following Trustees in attendance: Mark Tomlinson, President; Liz Dell, Vice President, Mac McMahon, Treasurer; Donald Zeilman, Clerk; Matt Merriman-Preston; Jane Schwarz; Gail Ward.

Ex officio: Rev. David McFarland. Invited guests: Betty Schwarz, Membership Chair; Jane Dirks, Connection Circle leader.

I Gathering

Mr. Tomlinson called the meeting to order at 7:03 pm, and the chalice was lit. A quorum was present at the call to order.

II Business

1. Connection Circles Review and Discussion. Mr. Tomlinson notes that at six months, all of the Connection/Covenant Circles have had the opportunity to participate in one of their month-long rotations. Hopes to discuss what adjustments and support might be needed to make the initiative more successful. Mr. Tomlinson thanks Jane Dirks and the other circle leaders for their efforts and for coming forward to lead. Ms. Dirks thanks Tim Nuttle for making the initiative an actuality and for serving as circle leader coordinator.

Mr. Zeilman notes that the overall mission of the program is to build relationships—to connect members, reconnect unengaged members, and to integrate new members and friends into the church community; that we should keep the mission in mind as we discuss the success of the individual tasks/strategies.

Discussion around “How it went”: Trustees and guests each have their own experience, ranging from highly functional to non-functional. It is generally agreed that Ms. Dirks’ circle was the most functional. Ms. Dirks notes that some circle leaders would have benefitted from greater support.

Trustees reported their experience was that the circles seemed more like work groups than relation-building small groups. Some circles never really achieved functionality.

Rev. McFarland notes on the positive side that the circles provided a structured way to participate in the life of the church, which is something that should not be lost.

There is general agreement that the initial proposal/document functioned well as a way to start the initiative and structure it, but should be subject to review and modification as the church gains more experience with the project.

Mr. Tomlinson notes that there is a perception that engagement only happens in the month that each circle is assigned. It is agreed that the second half of the cycle will continue until the one-year anniversary, and that the circles will be reconstituted as planned. Betty Schwarz has agreed to participate with Ms. Dirks in assigning members for each circle. Further, the current structure (number of circles and members in each) will remain the same.

Points for Moving Forward:

- Redefine the Circle Leader Coordinator position to help provide support for circle leaders and develop stronger relationships among the leaders using a small group model. Coordinator would not lead a circle. Ms. Dirks has agreed to assume the role of coordinator for next year's cycle, and will also support the leaders in the remaining months of this cycle.
- Leadership training and succession planning are vital to a healthy circles program. Board supports finding leadership training opportunities for circle leaders. Suggestion to promote having a primary and secondary leader for each circle to help distribute the work and provide succession for the leader position. New leaders will have to be identified for next year's cycle. Ms. Dirks has agreed to begin the process of identifying potential leaders, would like input from Board members.
- Board will continue to observe the development and functioning of the circles program without its direct involvement. It will continue to support the initiative without running it. Ms. Dirks will be the Board liaison and will stay in contact.
- Circles should promote and support relationships between and among circle members. Strategies (monthly tasks, projects, social events) should be appropriate to the size and interests of the circle. Circles will require internal cohesion in order to be successful in their efforts. Ms. Dell is available to discuss possible social justice projects with circle leaders.
- Board supports developing tools and documentation so that circles and circle leaders are not overwhelmed by the mechanics of completing tasks, and so that leadership succession occurs more efficiently. A start has been made and best practices should be reviewed. Mr. Tomlinson is a possible resource for developing on-line tools.
- Board and Coordinator will again review the program at the end of next year's cycle. Under consideration will be whether the one circle / one month model has been successful, or if a more diffused structure would be more beneficial (multi-circle participation per month).

2. Covenant Renewal Policy. Mr. Tomlinson notes that Jay Poliziani, chair of the Committee on Ministry has provided the Board with a more detailed proposal for guidelines to be followed by church members when a member or friend is not in covenant. The Board would set such a policy and it would be mandatory to follow the process should conflict arise.

The document suggests the formation of a conflict resolution team (that may include members of the CoM), and that such a team be identified and appropriately trained. Mr. Tomlinson suggests that three to six team members might be the most workable given our volunteer resources.

Board authorizes the creation of a task group to further develop the policy and details. Mr. Zeilman volunteers and will be joined by a member of the CoM and a member at large (Charlie Snowden is suggested). Mr. Zeilman will coordinate. The task group will propose a policy, begin to identify possible conflict team volunteers, and propose budget/direction for training.

3. Sabbatical Update. Rev. McFarland reports that the InReach Ministry team has been successfully organized and includes the new role for staff member, Brian Byers. The schedule of Sunday speakers during the sabbatical has been finalized.

Mr. McMahon and Mr. Tomlinson will meet to discuss possible staff compensation changes.

4. Nominating Update. Mrs. Ward reports that the committee, composed of Peggy Thompson, Andy Schwarz and herself, has begun to identify possible candidates and will be in communication with those members.

III Administration

1. Minutes of the November 18 meeting were distributed electronically for review. No comments or corrections.

2. Financial Report: Mr. McMahon, October report distributed electronically for review. YTD deficit \$11,700, the bulk of which is payment for work on the slate roofs. In the previous three months, expenses exceeded the budget, but there have also been lump sum payments that may account for the trend.

3. Minister's Report: Report distributed electronically. No discussion.

4. Report of the Clerk: Mr. Zeilman reports no change to number of members which stands at 81.

Reports accepted by assent.

IV Adjournment

Mr. Tomlinson adjourned the meeting and the chalice was extinguished. Rev. McFarland shared closing words.

The next regular meeting of the Board of Trustees will be January 2, 2013. Also note the Leadership Council meeting scheduled on December 19.

Respectfully submitted,



Donald G. Zeilman, Clerk 2013-14