

Vestry Minutes  
Unitarian Church in Charleston

August 19, 2017

Present: Sue Weller (chair), Jonathan Lamb, Gail Schiffer, John Hyatt, Tommy Hughston, Mark Madden, Zach Conover, Danny Reed, Sandra Selvitelli

Absent: Erica Hattings, Diane Narkunas

Sue opened the meeting at 9:15 AM with a welcome, explaining that our annual retreat is a time to get to know one another and to take stock of where we are and what we want to do.

Danny's opening words were a poem from Wendell Berry that ends "Were we arrive by work, we stay by grace". He reminded us that we are following in the footsteps of those who have worked here for 200 years.

Check-in followed along with an ice-breaker from Danny.

The Covenant was discussed and signed.

### **Vestry Role**

- Sue reminded us that the role of the Vestry is to investigate, delegate, provide leadership, empower, and collaborate
- Hot-button issues can be particularly hard, and sometimes we need to make unpopular decisions.

### **Resources**

- The Vestry notebook was provided for new members and updates were available for continuing members
- Former Vestry chairs and members often provide help such as chairing search committees or providing information if issues resurface
- Sign-up Genius is used to sign up for Sunday Announcements, and we are expected to hang around the Welcome Table after services to answer questions from members and meet visitors.
- UUA Website has a vast collection of resources
- The UUA provides, for \$30, Leadership Models
- Vestry members indicated a need to get a better picture of our financial situation, suggesting more easily understood financial reports, a better understanding of the relationship between the responsible bodies (Vestry, Treasurer, Finance Committee, EIB), and perhaps visits from responsible individuals (Treasurer, Finance Chair, Bookkeeper, EIB chair) and others we know who are or have been involved (Terry Walsh, Frank Hardie, Fred Himmelein).
- The Treasurer, while technically a member of the Vestry, never attends.

- Currently, financial reports are generated by the bookkeeper using Power Church and sent to the Treasurer. He then creates the report we see.
- The Finance Committee is our resource for where money comes from and where it goes. It generates a budget annually, then negotiates it with the Vestry. The Vestry has final approval before it goes to the Congregation.
- The Endowment Investment Board (EIB) manages the endowment. The Vestry receives a percent of the interest for its projects, as do other groups who have endowment funds specified for them.
- Zach asked for a list of committees and responsibilities. Sandra will send us all copies of the Committee Book for the year when it is ready.
- Danny reminded us that the Vestry often has an outside reading that we discuss, sometimes at the end of meetings. He and Sandra will look for something appropriate.

## **DRE**

- Megan Thornton has accepted our offer to be our new Director of Religious Education.
- She will have less responsibility for Adult RE, but will focus attention on attrition in our middle school classes.
- Priorities for her will be new teacher recruitment, registration, facilitating Susan Conant's intergenerational choir, and finding a new 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum. Upper classes will be reorganized into grades 5-6, 7-9, 10-12.
- We continue to have an opening for a second person to work with our youth.
- Tommy made a **motion that we approve the hiring of Megan Thornton, Sue seconded**, and the **motion passed**.
- A discussion followed on the process of hiring and when the Vestry should vote on that hiring. Danny explained that, for full-time staff and staff with benefits, the Vestry directs the committee on its task and there is always a Vestry member on the committee. We trust the hiring of part-time staff to the appropriate committee or individual. The Vestry realized that clarifying the process, looking at policies, and following process is important in this issue.
- Sue tasked Zach to create budget request forms.

## **Vestry Meetings**

- Meetings will be the third Thursday of every month from 5:30 – 7:30 PM.
- The Vestry Executive Committee will convene the second Tuesday of every month at 5:00 PM, often by telephone.

## **Business**

- Two issues were settled by email prior to the meeting.
  - Kris Rife requested permission to post on the Social Justice Facebook Page an announcement and request for help for a new group forming in Charleston called Charleston Alert Response for Equality (CARE). With six positive responses from Vestry members, permission was granted.
  - The Vestry was asked to request that the EIB release \$7000 to replace the AC system for lower Gage Hall. There were six votes in favor.

- The city names an annual historic building of the year and has chosen our Landmark for this year, which means Christmas ornaments of our sanctuary are available. The Bicentennial Committee is buying 200 of these ornaments at wholesale and selling them at the retail price with the profits going to the general operating fund of the church. In order to do so, the committee would like to borrow money from the EIB. **Mark moved that the Bicentennial Committee be allowed to borrow \$3,300 from the EIB to buy the ornaments and donate the profits to the general operating budget. Sue seconded the motion and it passed.**

### **Building Maintenance**

- Several items need attention and a major question is where the funds come from.
  - Sewer repair – 1<sup>st</sup> fix of \$975 can come from Building & Grounds budget, but there may be further work needed. Suggestions for further funding were to check insurance coverage or see if the city could repair it cheaper than a plumber.
  - Morgan Granger’s report listed a number of things to be done soon. The louver has been fixed but there are still a number of other items such as re-glazing the roof and a lime wash on the outside.
  - Danny’s ceiling needs repair and Gage Hall has duct problems.
- The second AC system for lower Gage Hall needs to be replaced.
- We will request that the Building and Grounds Committee provides us with a comprehensive list, cost estimates, and time frames for both repairs and maintenance.
- Sue will talk with Ron and with Judy Manning, who has also been working with B&G.
- Grants?
  - Lisa Hajjar or Megan might have some knowledge
  - Mark will ask the Historical Foundation about where to find some

### **Fiscal Year**

- Our current fiscal year is July 1 – June 30. The book keeper has urged us to change this to the calendar year. Gail will discuss this with the Program Council.

### **Finance Committee – Richard Hayes**

- Richard spoke at length with the Vestry and the discussion brought out the following points:
- There are three major units responsible for day-to-day church finances:
  - Vestry – does strategic planning and decision making within the limits of the Constitution
  - Treasurer – works with the bookkeeper to keep track of the budget
  - Finance Committee – oversees spending and budget and reports to the Vestry monthly.
- Our budget this year is \$520,000, but the budget is tight because we would like to pay pension money that we should have been providing for our Assistant Minister.

- Carry forward funds (those that remain from the previous year) are usually about \$18,000, but this year it is only about \$6,000.
- The reserve funds have \$49,000 and have been divided into packets for operating, maintenance, emergency, and auction. As they are all in one account, they are interchangeable in theory, but in actuality, the goal is to have 3-6 months of salary costs available. This means we should not spend most of the money in the reserve funds for any one item (such as building repair).
- The Endowment Investment Board (EIB) oversees the endowment funds and is responsible to the Congregation, not to the Vestry.
  - The Endowment is now over \$1 million, so there are no longer investment fees, and in an emergency, funds can be requested from the EIB.
  - This also means that new funds can be invested in “socially responsible” funds, and we can compare returns for these funds with those of the standard funds we have been using.
  - The 1990 base of the Endowment Fund will be maintained, but a percent (2-5%) of the funds can be used for specific projects each year but are not to go to the general operating fund.
  - This year, there is \$21,000 available for projects, of which 1/3 will go to a sabbatical fund for running the church when Danny takes his sabbatical. This will be the last year for this particular project
  - This leaves \$13,000 to \$14,000 for projects this year.
  - Richard and the Finance Committee requests that a Vestry member track the money spent on the individual projects we approve.
- With respect to funds for our building repair and maintenance, Richard advises not taking it out of the reserve fund. We could consider a Capital Campaign for a project (such as roof repair) but not for on-going maintenance.
  - Experts say we should do a Capital Campaign every 5 years, so we are due for one.
  - We could fund the roof repair and lime wash with a Capital Campaign.
  - The UUA has consultants who can come in and help us figure out how much money we can raise in a Capital Campaign.
- The increase in our budget is largely due to increases in staff numbers and efforts to bringing salaries and benefits up to UUA guidelines.
- Income is the issue more than costs.
  - Pledge income covers about 75% of our budget and the Stewardship Committee should be at work all year.
  - We should be able to raise the money generated by Sanctuary and Gage Hall rental.
    - Judy Manning is working on this. Sandra has ideas but needs time and resources to implement them.
    - Mark suggested bring in a professional PR person or company to sell certain dates and receive a percent of the profits. This person wouldn't be paid by us but rather by the renter.
    - Sandra suggested this person could be an Events Coordinator, responsible also for managing the event (similar to what Sue

Findlay does for weddings). It is important not to overburden our staff.

- Jonathan volunteered to talk with Judy Manning about this idea.

### **Items on the Table**

- Sue distributed a list of items generated last year for Vestry action, indicating which had been completed and which were on-going.
- One of these items is Improving the Web Site, Communications, and Social Media
  - Sandra has purchased the UUA Template and hired someone to do the web site. The new web site will go up soon.
  - We need to set up guidelines for Social Media
  - Judy Manning is coming up with PR ideas for increasing rentals and for growth.
  - Revenue is a higher priority just now.
- Maureen Porter is organizing congregational discussions on growth as well as if and how to go to two services next year.
- There is a search for a new Assistant Treasurer
- We continue to work on bringing salaries up to at least the mid-point of UUA Guidelines for our area. The Personnel Committee will make recommendations on this.

### **Brainstorming Vestry Priorities**

- Priorities were identified and Vestry members or staff assigned to each
  - Explore new revenue sources – Mark
  - Long range financial planning – Zach
  - Bringing salaries up to living wage – Sue
  - B&G projects and funding – Tommy, Erica, Jonathan
  - Growth (2 services and leadership development) – John
  - Clear Financial Reports – Gail, Diane
  - Organizational Chart – Sandra
  - Staffing planning - Sue

### **Take Away**

- Our new Vestry has a diversity of skills and interests
- We need to think long-term and put decisions and actions in writing so that it is institutionalized.
- Great work has been done in the past and we need to build on it.
- There is progress on building and grounds repair and maintenance and we have to build on that foundation.

### **Vestry Visions**

- We are taking turns writing this column in the Gateway.
  - September – Sue
  - October – Gail

- November – Zach
- December – Jonathan
- January – Tommy
- February – Mark
- March – John
- April – Erica
- May – Diane

**Committee Liaisons**

- Religious Education – John
- Membership – Sue
- Building and Grounds – Erica and Jonathan
- Finance – Gail
- EIB – Zach
- Social Justice – Diane
- COSM – Tommy
- Music – Mark
- Worship - ??

**Other Leadership**

- Diane Boyer is organizing the Pancake Breakfast
- Abby Himmelein is making Thanksgiving arrangements
- Easter Breakfast still needs someone
- Lisa Hajjar is organizing our part of the Gay Pride Parade on Sept. 23.

**Closing**

- Meeting was adjourned at 3:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Gail Schiffer