

Minutes – October 20, 2010
Operations Council
First Unitarian Society in Newton

Members attending: Pat Rohan (Ch), Alan Cody, Laurel Farnsworth, and Kim Shanks.

Also attending: Rev. Erin Splaine and Mr. Barb Greve. Lynn Holbein and Barbara Bates attended portions of the meeting.

1. Opening Words: Kim lit a candle and shared a reading to inform the meeting. The group read the covenant aloud together.

2. Approval of September Minutes:

Motion: Pat moved to approve the Minutes for 9/15/2010; Laurel seconded.

Vote: Approved 4-0.

3. Electronic votes noted for the Record: Pat noted three votes that took place via email between the September and October meetings:

- ✓ Signs for bank parking lot: Approval of purchase of signs at cost of \$350.
- ✓ Organ consultant: Approval to engage consultant at cost not to exceed \$1800 from funds already allocated to the organ in the major maintenance budget.
- ✓ Alternative Gift Fair: Approval of such an event for December 12, 2010.

4. Social Action Committee Presentation: Lynn Holbein explained that she is in her 3rd year as chair of the Social Action Committee, which she sees as now in transition to a new "Social Action Development Council." She described the current work of the committee, and provided a document showing the committee's budget, broken down by program, 17 in all. Noting the distinction between those programs that work as "advocacy" (\$1300 annually, or 15% of the budget) and those characterized as "service" (\$7480 or 85%), she also provided a breakdown into 7 larger categories – Hunger; Families and Children at Risk; Criminal Justice; Health; Environment; General Advocacy; Global Community.

There was a short discussion about the upcoming Alternative Gift Fair, including the use of QuickBooks software to track the breakdown of payments to various participating organizations, and the long-term possibilities of integrating such a fair with other annual events, such as Stand High/Stand United and Healthy Baby.

5. Committee Reports: Reports of current activity were reported:

Alan	Finance	Held tutorial with the Board last week; committee aims to get the annual budget process going on schedule
Pat	Annual Budget Drive	A meeting has taken place among Ch. Jud Leonard, Jonathan Lilienfeld, and Pat.
Laurel	Organ committee, as subset of the Music Committee	Recently took a field trip to see an organ; group came to understand they would need professional help evaluating various proposals (consultant vote noted above – see #3)

Laurel	Green Sanctuary Committee	Recently had kickoff meeting; they are seeking certification this year; also, now looking for leaders of “eco-teams.”
Laurel	Memorial Committee	Construction work is done and satisfactory; plaques have been installed; follow-up tasks involve updating the brochure and publicizing it to members
Kim	Religious Education Committee:	Josh Cohen has provided these statistics: 95 children are registered, with 89 families, 62 of which are pledging units; there are quite a few new families this year. Barb clarified that total enrollment for nursery through Youth Group is 132. Coming of Age has scheduled a visit to Ecclesia Ministries for March 4 & 5, 2011. It was noted that the date conflicts with Youth Coffeehouse. With regard to Youth Group, about ½ of the 2010 COA graduates are participating. Barb spoke about off-site youth activities, which take place once per month.
Pat	Ferry Beach	October retreat was a big success, both financially strong and well received
Pat	Welcoming Congreg.	Given ongoing inactivity, Pat would like to consider future of committee
Pat	Small Group Ministry	Meeting to take place soon
Pat	Membership Committee	Off to a big start with newcomer breakfasts and “Coffee with Erin;” new bulletin boards have been set up in hallway; “Dinners for 7” are being organized; Sunday visitors’ names are now noted in the newsletter; and the committee seeks participants with fresh voices and ideas
Pat	Communications Committee	Now re-organizing its internal sub-groups, and working with new social media, such as Facebook.
Pat	Denominational Affairs	Chair Naomi Olson’s current tasks put emphasis on educating the congregation about the role of the committee’s work
Pat	Service Auction	The first meeting is scheduled; Alan noted that he has offered financial assistance
Pat	Holiday Fair	Meetings have been held and planning is underway

6. Review Monthly Budget Report: Laurel pointed out that the Finance Comm. Reviews monthly reports for anomalies and other issues. Pat spoke of a projected deficit due to the decrease in revenue from Pine Village Preschool, and Laurel stated that funds in the conservative electric/gas budgets should be able to cover the shortfall. Alan mentioned that the Council has approved various expenditures that will affect the contingency, and urged caution. Alan also commented on the good cash position, including receipt pledge payments in September. He noted that FUSN currently has funds in the bank adequate to cover 2 months of expenses.

7. Insurance: Laurel announced that the new policy sets a blanket limit for the building at \$9,865,900, which increased the premium by only \$400. The deductible is \$10,000. She explained that the policy for several years has been to seek additional building coverage each year, in other words request the highest amount policy that the insurance company is willing to issue, in order to get in place adequate coverage. In response to a question, Laurel affirmed that FUSN has earthquake coverage, although it’s not as extensive as the blanket limit.

8. Copper Downspouts: Laurel stated that the downspouts have been stolen for the 3rd time within memory. Pat asked about replacing them with a different material. Laurel is looking into a plastic material.

9. Follow-up list: Pat indicated that he intends to incorporate the priorities established at the September 2010 retreat.

With regard to the item for creating a Safe Congregations policy, Pat expressed his intent to wait until other major pending items are wrapped up.

10. Proposal: Harvard Dispute Resolution process: Barbara Bates appeared to present a proposal for FUSN's participation in this project. She explained that it's part of Harvard Law School's advanced clinic in mediation. Student teams take on projects in response to proposals put forth by prospective clients.

Barbara explained that if a proposal by FUSN were selected, the Harvard students would gather facts by talking to multiple parties, that perhaps they would run a program such as listening circles. The students' goal would be to come up with a dispute resolution system. Ultimately it would be FUSN's decision whether to implement such a system. Barbara explained that the process would include a support committee at FUSN.

A discussion among council members considered various circumstances requiring dispute resolution, including staff issues and members disputes.

Motion: Alan moved to approve a) submission of the proposal; b) establishment of the committee charter; and c) naming Barbara Bates as the Primary Client Contact and chair of the support committee; and d) to authorize such chair to recruit members. Laurel seconded.

Vote: Approved 4-0.

11. Thank You: Pat noted that he will send a note to Vernon Ellis for his organizational work for the Ferry Beach retreat.

12. Fundraising proposal, Project Zambia: Pat presented a proposal to allow Project Zambia to sell Zambian crafts during coffee hour on 11/7.

Motion: Laurel moved to approve such proposal. Pat seconded.

Vote: Approved 4-0.

13. Proposal to eliminate Religious education fees: Kim presented the item to eliminate registration fees for children enrolled in the RE program. She noted that she wasn't always in favor by she has been persuaded by the philosophical view, i.e. why charge for this program when there is no charge for other programs? She noted that it's not welcoming, and that most churches don't charge such fees.

Erin commented that generally, she does not favor RE fees, noting that they can be burdensome.

A lengthy discussion considered the merits of the proposal, including the following:

Alan inquired about timing, wondering whether they could be gradually phased out. Laurel noted that while she is conflicted about the proposal, she has been deeply affected by personal experiences with families whose participation is only for RE, who leave as soon as their children graduate from COA. Pat's reply spoke to the future return that may come with planting seeds for a better world with those children. Alan mentioned the important role that the RE program plays for families with parents of mixed religions.

One line of discussion considered the effect on pledge income as a result of eliminating such fees. At least one council member believed that pledge income would not increase, but others expressed uncertainty. Alan suggested that such a change in policy be accompanied by the budget drive's emphasis on member responsibility to pledge.

Barb mentioned the use of tiered fees by some congregations; thus, there would be no fee for pledging members but full costs charged to families that have no other connection to the congregation. Barb also noted the absence of any program at FUSN that would encourage parents to become integrated into the congregation.

Pat explained that the Operation Council's role is to make a recommendation to the Board; and that the process requires at least four affirmative votes to make such a recommendation. Seeing no possibility of getting four votes, a straw poll was taken on the question of whether members would favor eliminating RE fees. The outcome was 3-1. Pat indicated that he would seek Jeannie Chaisson's input and incorporate it into a report to the Board.

14. Furniture for minister's office: Erin explained that she is trying to create a space where people can be comfortable, a place where they can come talk, or not talk. She needs not only a desk but also rugs and chairs. Laurel priced the furniture needs at about \$2,000. It was suggested that Erin go shopping and provide via email information about the necessary dollar amount.

15. Champagne glasses, proposal for purchase funds: Pat presented an item put forth by Jacki Rohan, co-chair of the Installation Committee. Jacki sought \$200 in funding to put toward purchase of 20 dozen champagne glasses. Laurel spoke against the item, emphasizing the difficulty of on-site storage. Discussion considered the merits of renting vs. buying.

Motion: Laurel moved to add the cost of renting glasses to the Installation budget. Alan seconded.

Vote: Approved 4-0.

16. Annual timeline: Pat announced that he intends to finalize the annual timeline document. Thus, in the spirit of "last call," Pat asked members to double-check whether it's complete and correct.

Respectfully submitted,

Gayle Smalley, Assistant Clerk