

Addendum to Report of Town Hall Meeting

12/18/2022

Convened 12:10 by Lynn Liston and Jim Ward. They introduced the meeting and said it would be recorded. The information gathered would go to the appropriate channels, so action can be taken. The format will be time for oral comments. Afterwards, if people want to add things in writing, they can use one of the many clipboards around the room, sorted by topic.

Your input is important, as things are different after COVID. Your thoughts will help us to move forward.

Brief meditation, with an excerpt from the Ingathering ceremony.

Lynn McDonald: People attending via Zoom can put their comments in the Chat box, or say them orally.

Peg Carmen: Years ago, we used to have interest inventories, in which committee chairs would describe what their committee does and people could sign up. We might try it again, Maybe an outside person from a nonprofit can help us learn how to recruit and retain volunteers..
[Volunteer recruitment]

Byrd Tetzlaff: Churches are hurting everywhere; many have closed in the wake of the pandemic. We all have gifts and needs and we are all part of the ministry of our church. I would like to see us work on how to be a beloved community, with community outreach. [Community outreach]

Barbara Williams: Many churches are thinking outside the box. Loneliness is widespread. We need more programming to complement Sunday services. All, including atheists, have spiritual needs and needs for intellectual stimulation. Volunteers are hard to find. Is administrative help possible (calling people to coordinate tasks, keep list of needed supplies, etc.)? [Adult programming; administrative help for activity groups]

Dustin (via Zoom): I was in evangelistic ministry in Texas a while back and have attended here via Zoom for a short while. In the 1990s, a South Bend church had punk bands come in and play on weekends and feed them. [Community outreach via music]

Anne Mannix: Announcements asking for volunteers are okay, but calling specific people works better. Think about who would be good, and ask them. We have many good people. My main focuses are integrating our church into the community, the role of the minister, and an overall plan with priorities. RE has been going great. Too many rules and focus on process may cause paralysis. Flexibility helps. We need to talk in smaller groups. [Volunteer recruitment (ask specific people rather than asking for volunteers); community outreach; role of minister; strategic plan (include priorities); process (be more flexible and less concerned with rules); small group discussions.]

Jerry Brooks (via Zoom): Some Zoom people aren't here anymore. I can't tell if they are in the sanctuary now, or if they have left. Can they be contacted to follow up with them? [membership; follow-up of former members]

Karen Heffernan: Outreach is important, especially people under 50. Can we share services with Elkhart or join with Chicago theologians? Youth outreach: focus on tolerance is very helpful. [Outreach, esp to younger people. Collaboration w/other churches. Welcoming congregation]

Eddie Forero: We have good will but not great logistics for linking people's needs with opportunities.. Physical bulletin boards with dates & events, including pictures after an event has happened, would be good. More social justice presence in community. Improve our social media presence, especially to diverse communities; support others organizations' events.

Ian Bunker: What are our goals? Loneliness is a factor. Our church can meet the needs of atheists and others outside the mainstream Christian community. Provide open space for coffee, etc. during the week. I would like to see more musicians on Sunday, as well as a dedicated cantor to help with the singing. Concerts are great.

Katie Robbins: I would like to have more, simpler music, (like singing the children out) to bring us together. Simple & repetitive, call & response, same every week.

Louise Cox: There seems to be a real need for visibility in the community, to catch younger folk, and convey needs we need to improve our online presence. It is hard to say what we need, but asking directly helps.

Jim Ward: There will be a concert on 3/18/23. We will need help! Help set up, feed the artists during sound checks, clean up, publicizing.

Alan Hamlet: There is a leadership gap between the top and the rest of the congregation, those who will do things. We need more intermediary leaders who can be assigned a project and recruit workers. We need to bring people into the pipeline to be potential leaders.

Eli Williams: We can bring back and expand the OWL (Our Whole Lives) program and this would help us be more visible to folks outside the congregation.

Lynn Liston: We can offer OWL leadership training.

Mary Alice Lundergan: We have lost membership of long-time members. We need more music (regular guest musicians like Alan Hamlet, Allen deSommer, Deb Carew), and more depth in sermons.

David Mayfield: One problem is not funding our committees enough. A balanced budget is important, but people try to get around this by directed giving. The budget should be an honest representation of what it costs to run our church. Having enough money in each line item would help attract those intermediate leaders.

Peg Carmen: I tried to give extra money to the Care Committee and was told I couldn't. Why not?

Alice Bentley: Because directed giving goes against the congregational democracy. It gives people with money more power. The Board represents the whole congregation's needs, and the budget reflects the congregation's priorities, not the priorities of individual members.

Bill Stevens: There is a procedure for special projects; one takes the proposal to the Board and the Board can authorize it if they agree it's needed.

Lynn Liston: This is a transparency issue.

Karen Heffernan: NPO.net (Nonprofit Opportunities) could be a resource for fiscal awareness. We are awfully close to a business school. They might help us with fundraising.

Barbara Williams: Yes, the budget needs to be honest. There are special projects but it isn't clear how to donate to them. We need to clarify how the budget works and how monies are collected.

Anne Mannix: You have to amend the budget to create an accounting category. Let's clarify how to make donations. Maybe if we voted on one big project per year, that would help.

Eddie Forero: I am working on getting the Center for Sustainable Future started up again. Maybe the church can take part in that. Networking with other organizations. Use coffee hour to announce events/opportunities and have sign-up sheets for events that are coming up. This will raise excitement about volunteering.

Lynn McDonald: A newer member suggested that every event has a followup report, maybe in the Chirp. Build a sense of ongoing opportunities for getting involved, especially new people.

Alan Hamlet: Due to the pandemic, we've incorporated a lot of technology. But we are limited to the people who will do it, so we can't do everything.

Mary Alice Lundergan: So we should recognize those volunteers. (Room: Yay!)

Jim Ward: As co-chair of the local PFLAG, I'm very busy during Pride Month. We desperately need our church to be represented next year, because it wasn't last year. Being at events like this as a church will let those communities know we support them. I organize concerts here to get other people into this building. Please invite your friends to music events here!

Katie Robbins: There should also be a rainbow flag or banner, or other exterior sign, to show we are welcoming from the outside.

Louise Cox: Intermediate leadership would help keep the overarching goal of a given project in the forefront. Stress this in asking for volunteers.

Katie Robbins: As UUs, we have different beliefs. Should there be an annual theme? Or one focused project? Ex: develop OWL for 3 different age groups, serve as a church in a local soup kitchen.

Alan Hamlet: The Board of Trustees is responsible for the forest, and its mission is to identify overarching needs. The intermediate leaders are ones who recruit volunteers to work on projects..

Anne Mannix: Maybe we can ask the Board to pick a project or theme?

Lynn Liston: This year it's Communication.

Gail deSomer: Just saying – sprinklers and extinguishers have been inspected. (laughter)

Anne Mannix: The goal needs to be blasted out, repeatedly.

Eddie Forero: Maybe we can host open mic events after Sunday service one Sunday a month? Poetry, music, etc. like at the Heritage Center does. This room has great acoustics. We have to get out of our comfort zone if we're going to welcome more diverse people.

Ian Bunker: Ditto.

Karen Chambers: RE has been great, especially adding D&D. How do we welcome and get to know new families?

Barbara Williams: There was a strategic plan 5 years ago. We were supposed to evaluate and update it last year, but it wasn't done. We need a marketing committee and Chair.

Ian Bunker: The Sunday service is performance art. The offertory music could be open mic. It could be a kid who plays an instrument, or an instrumental.

Dustin: I agree. UUism's strength and uniqueness is that it's free of doctrine. This appeals to musicians as a group and older millennials. The church should use this facility to attract them: art shows, poetry. There is a hunger for a church home that isn't Christian.

Louse: Cox: I like Chip's sermons. His sermons were what have allowed me to find a comfortable place

Florence: We are open to pretty much anyone who's willing to speak from the pulpit. We don't have to all agree. Every sermon is disliked by some people and liked by some people. Sermons you don't like can trigger an idea for a service that you'd like.

Karen Heffernan: I come from a group in Florida, which uses a media group. Tolerance work is useful. Focus group work might help. Iconic symbols & messages that can be worn in the community.

Eddie Forero: The tone of the services is sometimes depressing. Joys and Concerns seem mostly sad. As an atheist, I come for community and a sense of hope. Negativity is contagious; We need to bring out more positivity, hope and joy.

Lynn Liston: Okay, we appear to be running out of oral comments. You can put comments on the clipboards. We will do this Town Hall meeting again in a few months, unless people want it more often. I am struck by the depth of the thoughts expressed and how much everyone cares about this congregation. One of the functions of community is to support each other in trying times.

Rin Adams (via Zoom): The church is important to me. I am pagan. I love Chip as minister. This fall, the masking policy for the Green condition was set, and I appreciate that, even though we haven't been able to show up due to illness. The immunocompromised are here, even when you don't see us every week. I was hurt to hear that some in the congregation asked if there were "even people like that in our church?" We exist and it's not everyone's business to know all the details. Thank you for seeing us.

Jim Ward: The task force is working hard on the anniversary week in March. Thank you for coming! Write the weekend of March 18th on your calendar! There will be art, lecture, and music.

Adjourned at 1:34 p.m.

Clipboard comments

1. Mission and Vision of First Unitarian Church

- I would like the church to develop our reason for existing. For example: to help the wider community, to help ourselves, and to learn to grow together. This can then drive our programming. This would be a process to engage our membership.

2. Building and Grounds

- A camera to see the congregation for the folks on Zoom. It doesn't have to be included on the recording.
- A camera on Ian or other musician, so we can see the music being played. New members are ?? to attend ?? service on Zoom. We should promote our room.

3. Sunday Services

- Sermons need to be improved, though Chip is doing better
- I like when we deal with hard topics in a compassionate and direct way, even when it's not rainbows and butterflies.

4. First Unitarian Church's engagement with the local community

- Use social media better. Showing our awesomeness (while respecting people's ability to consent to participating) will naturally attract like-minded people

5. Strategic Plan document for our church

- I would be willing to be on a committee that does this. (Peg Carmen)

6. Volunteers at First Unitarian Church

- Learn how to treat volunteers
- Better clarity on: 1) what volunteer is being asked to do 2) Why it's important both logistically & on a deeper level (like the way this project supports our goals)

7. Children's Religious Education

- I would be willing to babysit on occasion at the church. (Peg Carmen)