**First Unitarian Church, South Bend**

**Special Congregational Meeting**

**January 21, 2024**

There were 53 members present, 5 via Zoom, and 3 assigned proxies.

I. **Call to Order** at 12:05 by Bill Stevens, who stressed that this meeting was meant to be a starting point for discussion, due to the number of agenda items.

II. **Name changes for church and religious education program**: Barbara Williams summarized a handout and encouraged the formation of a group to study the pros and cons of changing the church name to Unitarian Universalists of South Bend (or something else not including the word “church”), as well as removing the word “religious” from Religious Education, as “church” and “religious” sometimes have negative connotations. Discussion included:

* Cost and ease of changing the church name
* Importance of adding Universalist to name
* Whether these words are truly a barrier to visitors, rather than an annoyance
* Connotation of DBA (doing business as) as shady, vs. strengthening brand recognition
* Dictionary definition of “church” as a gathering place, with a pulpit, albeit with Christianity implied

III. **Ministerial Evaluation**: Bill Stevens summarized the evaluation process as follows: The Board sent the poll out to the congregation, summarized the results, sent a letter of interpretation and evaluation to Rev. Chip. Overall, the majority approved of his performance, while a noteworthy minority did not. Noted strengths included sermon quality; being active in national and regional groups, which brought more status to the church; some members praised the pastoral care. Noted areas for improvement included troubled interactions with some members, and better communication and coordination with the Care Committee.

Rev. Chip then thanked everyone for their input, whether via survey or in person, promised to work on those areas needed improvement, and asked for help in doing so.

Comments included:

* There is a perception that the minority is actually bigger than implied by the Board. On the other hand, is this a case of squeaky wheels?
* Need for both raw data from survey results being sent to everyone, as well as the charted/collated results. This will be done by the end of the month.
* The Board received 63 completed surveys.
* There is a feeling that those with complaints are demonized; we need a process for transparency in conflict resolution, and a safe place to bring concerns.
* The survey was very flawed, and contained irrelevant questions, implying that the minister’s duties are far more than would be reasonable to expect. This was because it was directly from the UUA, and was not edited sufficiently.
* All ministers, UU and otherwise, have suffered from the pandemic’s effects.
* Ministerial turnover is costly and painful, and to be avoided.
* To some extent, opinions on Rev. Chip tend to fall into demographic categories, such as age and length of time in the church.
* Conflict resolution is being planned. It may include a mediator, small groups, one-on-one, large groups. A policy would be very useful.

IV. **Stewardship Committee Report**: Chuck Leone summarized the handout (see attached, from the meeting announcement), and added that the official stewardship campaign will begin with a brunch on March 3. He also noted that those giving smaller contributions have reduced their giving even more. Discussion included:

* The perception by younger people that the Stewardship Committee does not consider them to be as important as older people, because of their lesser pledges.
* Chuck apologized for this perception, and offered to come to the next Gen XMZ meeting to discuss it.
* Planned giving would be helpful.
* Finishing the basement would also help with finances.
* Hiring a fundraising consultant could be very helpful and pay for itself.

V. **Defeat the Deficit Task Force Report**: Lynn Liston went over the November Defeat the Deficit Task Force Report (see attached, from Board packet). Comments included:

* A suggestion for online concerts
* Keeping Zoom-based members and friends in mind
* Thanks for the report, as it gives one hope for the future, even though goals have fallen far short of eliminating the budget deficit
* There is a need for long-term plans for raising the church’s income level.

VI. **Finance Committee Report**: David Mayfield reported that the total budgeted pledge amount has been reached, although not all pledges have been paid yet; this is a good sign. Also, our total assets, including the building, have risen considerably in the last ten years. The mortgage has been paid down to about $90,000 left. He showed a pie chart of the tentative 2024 expenses, including three items not currently included: janitorial pay, a paid DRE, and a Rainy Day Fund. (See attached slides.) Discussion included the following points:

* The Finance Committee suggests that future budgets have no deficits more than 2% of the total budget, or more than 25% of unrestricted savings.
* This past year has had the largest deficit in the church’s history.
* Ministerial expense has risen, partly because of the cost of insurance.
* Part-time ministry should be studied by a Board-appointed task force as an option.
* Again, finishing the basement might help in the long term.
* Committees need to coordinate efforts to act on these ideas before the May meeting.
* Consultants from Notre Dame (students) might help.
* It is still unknown whether we can break even by the end of June.
* Elena Wake explained why she resigned as Treasurer several months ago: There were problems with Rev. Chip’s record-keeping for the Ministerial Discretionary Fund, leading to conflict with Rev. Chip, and she felt she could no longer perform the auditing duties.
* Because of these concerns, new procedures have been written up for Rev. Chip to follow. David, Bill and others thanked Elena for bringing this to the Board’s attention.

XIII. Adjourned at 2:48 p.m.

Minutes respectfully submitted by:

Florence Klecka

Secretary, Board of Trustees

Attachments: What’s in a Name? handout; DTD TF report; Leone handout; Treasurer slides