

First Unitarian Society in Newton  
OPERATIONS COUNCIL MINUTES  
Wednesday, March 9, 2016  
Alliance Room, 7:00 P.M.

The meeting was called to order at 7 pm.

**Present:** Susan Bartlett, John Brennan, Jeannie Chaisson, Judy Curby, Laurel Farnsworth, Andrea Kelley, Rev. Erin Splaine, Dir. RE Rowan Van Ness. Guests: Ash Engel, Juliana Lakomski (Board of Trustees).

~ **Invocation / Chalice Lighting:** Judy

**Covenant**

As we, the members of this Council and staff, gather to serve this congregation in leadership, we commit to ourselves and to each other: to be present and prepared for the work of this meeting; to listen well and contribute respectfully; to balance both our short and long-term visions with fiscal responsibility; to support the decisions of the Council; to uphold the democratic process; and to lead with goodwill and faith in the work we can accomplish together.

~ **Approvals:** All

- February Minutes - Revisions are still coming in.
- Rabbi Toba - The FUSN staff has already sent a shiva plate to the rabbi, since her spouse passed away. Ops will send another plate on behalf of the FUSN congregation.

~ **Staff update:** Erin & Rowan

**Rowan** provided an Our Whole Lives rollout update. Also, they have been exploring how they will use the FUSN database for RE purposes. Devon Welles & Jennie Lerner will lead an initiative next year about “adult faith formation.”

Laurel said that a replacement has not yet been found for Carol Reichert to run the Youth Coffee House. Jeannie said Carol had wanted someone to work with her this year, who could take over next year. Rowan said Youth Coffee House attendance was beyond capacity. Dani and Rowan were discussing the larger picture and trying to define the goals of the YCH event, whether fundraising for Communities Without Borders, drawing new people to FUSN, etc. A couple of lights were broken in the Headstart Room; this was accidental, not vandalism. The perpetrators were apologetic. These lights must be custom made, because the cylinders are

unique to FUSN. Julian Bullitt has found a medical device company that can make them. Laurel will explore further.

There will be a training workshop on April 24 & May 1st for up to 30 adults who work with youth. The topic is adolescent mental health issues.

**Erin** reported that the staff continues working hard and well. They put together coffee and hot chocolate after the vigil commemorating the car accident last week at the Sweet Tomato pizza restaurant, in which 2 people were killed. About 20-30 people came in. One attendee was a girl who had been on the scene and helped at the time of the accident, who seemed grateful for the welcome. Erin felt the open house was important and poignant.

Erin noted that FUSN tends to be dark at night and not so welcoming. She also mentioned that, if you don't know where to enter, it's hard to figure it out. She wondered if there can be a way to make the building warm, engaging and more welcoming. Laurel mentioned that the plans for the memorial garden include lights.

Erin would like to have a review of all activities at FUSN and evaluate if they all adhere to FUSN's mission. Erin is concerned that we will use up our energy if there is too much going on. How can we find ways to be together around our core mission? Erin will evaluate her part during her sabbatical. She hopes the congregation will work on this at that time as well. A model approach could be, if you took everything out, what would be the first thing you bring back, the second, etc., without bringing them all back.

The discussion mentioned how some people are so attached to certain activities, it would be difficult to drop them. Erin says to focus on values rather than on cutting.

Pledge parties have begun. The first was for parents with young children. At the second party at Laurel's house, Erin valued the depth of the conversation about FUSN. Several Ops members were there and said it felt like a Small Group Ministry. Laurel said people were inspired by each other to "dig deep."

~ **Report on BOT meeting:** Laurel said the Board of Trustees had a busy night. Cathy Morocco reported for the Developing Leadership Team. The team has been organizing dinners among congregational leaders to discuss how to develop potential leaders.

A nominating committee has been chosen. They want nominations to be more open, more transparent. They will provide job descriptions and clarity on open positions. They plan to introduce potential nominees to current individuals in the roles.

Additional topics at the BoT meeting:

Tom Bean provided a pledge drive update.

Assuring a Safe Congregation at FUSN was discussed.

Welcoming Congregation - The first phase is over (the assessment team), but more people need to step up to carry on the next phase (implementation). People have not volunteered for this new committee. Some members of the assessment team are willing to continue, but more people are needed at this stage. The Board will keep trying to recruit volunteers.

The Board will continue moving forward to develop an online pledging system. Laurel said our insurance does not cover computer security, but we can add a rider to our policy to cover that. The issue is whether someone could infiltrate the account and take funds.

Sabbatical plans were discussed.

Regarding whether FUSN needs to change its Bylaws, Tom Bean said someone under 18 cannot incorporate, but he will look into whether a person under 18 can be a voting Board member. This concerns youth members of the Board.

~ **FUSN Service Initiative:** Ash distributed a 3-page document on congregants volunteering their services. She said, some who are relatively new expressed surprise at being asked to volunteer at such an early stage. Others want to volunteer but don't know how to go about it or how FUSN works. Some people experience burnout. The Leadership Development Team would also like to be able to match people with opportunities.

Another congregation interviews its members about service to the community every two years, what would they like to do, etc. They created an online database, with service opportunity forms. The other congregation has set term limits for leaders, and the leaders were responsible for finding their own replacements when their terms were up. Page 3 of the document lists Ash's proposals for FUSN. *See Appendix.*

Jeannie asked about the interviews to acquire the data. Would they be individual or group discussion? Ash said people could sign up for either group or individual sessions. It's low pressure, since they are not asking for money. Laurel suggested starting this process with new people.

Ash said committee chairs and members have been going to her, saying they need new members. Others have asked how they can get involved. Since Ash is new herself, she doesn't yet know the best way to fill these needs.

Andrea suggested talking with the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization about these issues. Rowan, through her networks, has resources on how to implement this process, which she shared with the Leadership Development Team.

Susan asked if our current database can handle this. Ash said she had hoped it would work; it's good for some aspects of administration, but not so much for RE or Membership. She has been looking at other databases, since the staff has not been fully pleased with the one we have now. Research on this is ongoing.

**~ Status Safe Congregations work:** Erin, Rowan

Erin said the Board acknowledged needing additional assistance to develop a Safe Congregation policy. Erin reached out to a retired superior court judge and plans to have a discussion with her. Laurel said the Board offered to pay for such assistance out of their budget. Erin hopes there will be no cost.

Rowan invites Ops members to click on the links in the information about the Safe Congregation. She also said the idea of covenant is central, since one can't predict everything that could possibly happen in the life of a congregation.

**~ Financial - Review year-to-date spending:** Judy, All

Judy said things are looking okay as of February. Quarterly reminders are being sent out to those who still need to pay pledges. There is not anything at this time that needs special attention.

The current year budget is written such that we could be drawing up to \$70,000 from cash reserves for this year. Laurel said there have been a few minor building emergencies, but no major expenses.

Laurel said this year's services auction and rental income were lower than last year. Utilities, however, should be much less than last year, since there has been minimal snow and the weather has been relatively mild.

**~ FY17 Annual Budget RE request:** Rowan

Rowan distributed her budget request for FY 2017. All items are the same as this year, except Coming of Age is reduced. Funds are available from the nursery budget line, since supervision is provided by volunteers, who are doing it as service to FUSN and the children. She is keeping that line item the same, in case they need to pay for staff next year.

She also said that expenses in RE tend to be high early in the year (such as fees that need to be paid in advance for the Ecclesia Ministry project) but are made up for by fundraising activities later in the year.

Laurel asked if it's possible to figure out an average cost per child for COA, to help budget going forward, no matter what size class we have coming in. We would have a better idea of what our total costs would be. We could also keep track of how it changes from year to year. Judy asked if there are fixed costs, or if it varies depending on how many kids are involved. Rowan said costs of child care for mentors and OWL training are variable costs from year to year.

Susan asked if RE will come in under budget overall this year. Rowan said it is likely.

Laurel pointed out that we can't know for sure how many kids will be involved from year to year. Susan asked if the COA fee could be reduced. Rowan said the COA scholarship fund is well stocked at this time. The COA fee is \$485. Of that, \$400 goes to Thompson Island, and \$85 goes to the parent dinners fund.

Judy asked if the Youth Ministry program would benefit from a bigger budget line. Jeannie said it depends on which program activities develop, such as whether they participate in social action activities -- like Habitat for Humanity, which charges fees to participate -- or social activities.

Rowan is considering 5-6 week projects with youth, such as a food justice unit in the fall.

**~ Update Committee issues/reports: All**

- The joint ops and committee chairs meeting is this Saturday, March 12th. Susan will order food.
- The BoT does a FUSN Newsletter column every 2 weeks, and Susan asked if Ops could contribute a couple of columns. Andrea wonders if something will come out of the joint chairs meeting that would be good to put in the newsletter, and she would write it. Laurel said Eric Haas is doing the next column on the Welcoming Congregation topic.
- Van service - No further update is available. Some people are getting rides already through other means. Erin suggested letting the lay ministers deal with this.
- B&G fire safety - Jeannie is searching for the pdf of the floor plan to post. Rowan said Beth indicated Dorshei Tzedek may have a version to provide. John said one of the basement exits, the former food pantry exit door, has a trip hazard. Laurel said there's a lip in the floor that people could trip on. Judy suggested it could be highlighted with reflective or striped tape to make it safer. Laurel authorized John to purchase such tape, and B&G will reimburse him.

Rowan said that after the floor plan is available, they could do a walk-through. Meanwhile, teachers should know where to take the children, and parents where to meet them. Rowan would also like to have a fire drill, perhaps in the fall.

Laurel asked for clarification as to where the kids would go. It will be difficult to contain large groups of children. She proposed that children in the basement go out the basement door to the lawn, children in the first floor classrooms go out under the tower door to the front driveway, children on the stage and youth room go directly outside from those spaces, and children on the second floor go down the balcony stairs and out the Parish Hall door to playground. This is the simplest idea for all to absorb/remember and the quickest way out of the building. I think Rowan was hoping they could all meet on the playground.

**~ Thank yous: All**

Carol Reichert and Laura Bishop for the Youth Coffee House.

Pat Rohan for chairing the services auction.

Respectfully submitted,  
 Wendy Schwartz,  
 Assistant Clerk

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**APPENDIX**

**FUSN SERVICE INITIATIVE**

**What is often said about serving the FUSN community?**

- ❖ *“I’ve been the \_\_\_\_\_ Chair/running for x years and need someone to take my place, but no one is willing to do it”*
- ❖ *“I put out a call to volunteer, but no one has responded. It’s like pulling teeth”*
- ❖ *“I’m new and want to be more involved, but I can’t figure out how. The opportunities I do hear about are small tasks that don’t empower me to be involved in any decision-making”*
- ❖ *“I’m really new here but have been asked to do committee work. How do I say no?”*

**What is the current status of volunteerism, belonging and growth at FUSN?**

Volunteerism	Growth
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Same people volunteering repeatedly; Staff/Committees asking same people to volunteer - All leads to burnout</li> <li>❖ Long-time volunteers ready for a break but can’t find anyone to step in</li> <li>❖ Leaders don’t know who to ask or how to get volunteers - don’t know people’s passions, interests or availability</li> <li>❖ Few respond to call to volunteer</li> <li>❖ New leaders overwhelmed - <i>What did I just get myself into?</i></li> <li>❖ Service seen as obligation or drudgery, not gift/meaningful</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Low # visitors (0-3/week)</li> <li>❖ Lack of clear communication about events, groups and committees (where, when, how to contribute, opportunities) - knowledge gap leading to unintended exclusion, fewer newcomers, &amp; low volunteer #s</li> <li>❖ Giving work to newcomers - excited by new people to take their place but new people overwhelmed</li> </ul>

## **What are the goals of the FUSN Service Initiative?**

- ❖ Find a way for people to feel excited about serving and see it as no longer drudgery but rather as a spiritual gift that is fulfilling and empowering
- ❖ Build collaboration and community. Emphasize the importance of service to UU values and the FUSN community and build a more service-oriented culture
- ❖ Foster a greater sense of responsibility and ownership in how FUSN runs and functions
- ❖ Match people to meaningful activities to encourage them on their spiritual journeys as well as to give long-standing leaders greater freedom to step down from their roles
- ❖ Address the information gap and make communication clearer for all, not just newcomers, so that everyone feels they play a meaningful part at FUSN
- ❖ Offer greater support to FUSN leaders so they do not feel overwhelmed or stuck
- ❖ **Above all, create a culture in which individuals experience spiritual growth through meaningful service opportunities**

## **That all sounds nice, but how can we achieve those goals?**

- ❖ Be inspired by the Unitarian Universalist Church of Delaware County's (UUCDC's) "Growth Through Service Plan" and adapt our own to FUSN
  - Had the same problems as FUSN - burnout, lack of volunteers
  - Now: Culture is service-oriented - when during a Sunday service they asked for Service Auction volunteers, they "had thirty-five volunteers in minutes"
  - Spearheaded "Growth Through Service", in which they developed a leadership development team - part of the Spiritual Growth and Enrichment Ministry Team
  - This team conducted interviews with everyone (270 members) over 2 years and developed personal development plan for each. They then restarted the interviews the next year; always meeting with each person every 2 yrs to check in.

- Example questions: What meaningful service have I done in the past? How have I experienced spiritual growth through service in the past? What type of service do I plan to seek in the future that will help with my spiritual development? What meaningful service am I involved in currently?
- Recorded these findings online and inputted into database
- Developed a form with descriptions of leadership positions, along with required skills and responsibilities. Made this available to Committees, etc. who then submit openings online and post it on the Open Service Opportunities page, where all congregants could see what positions were open (clear communication)
- Using the database and interview information, LDT helped match individuals to opportunities; committees also had a better idea of what opportunities were attractive to/fed the soul of the congregation and what may no longer be a good fit
- Also defined term limits for all leadership positions (i.e. committee chairs). Leader then responsible (with help of LDT) for finding replacement before term ends.

### **What are the proposed steps to implement this Initiative?**

1. Membership Coordinator develops a script/conversation guide for those holding interviews. Team A provides feedback on script, finds volunteers (Team B) to conduct interviews, and provides a training workshop for them
  - a. Timeframe: ~ 3 months
  - b. Team A consisting of at least 3 people (Potentially from Ops Council, Member Services Committee and Developing Leadership Team - potentially also from RE Council); Ensure script is inclusive and welcoming
2. Team B holds conversations with all FUSNites - members, friends, and newcomers [408 members; ~225 friends and newcomers] - and documents all findings, passing it along to the Membership Coordinator
  - a. Timeframe: ~2 yrs (Interview ~300 people in Yr 1, ~300 in Yr 2; then begin again in Yr 3 but this time ~200 people (Group 1), ~200 in Yr 4 (Group 2), ~200 in Yr 5 (Group 3); cycle back to Group 1 in Yr 6; Group 2 in Yr 7; Group 3 in Yr 8 and so on)
  - b. Newcomers ought to be interviewed straightaway after relationship has been established
  - c. Team B consisting of ~ 5 people (Member Services Coordinator and members of Ops Council, Member Services, and Developing Leadership Team)
  - d. Requires having Josie's brochure on different committees/groups at FUSN finalized and ready, so that interviewers are aware of all opportunities and can give one to interviewees



3. Membership Coordinator inputs information into database
  - a. Timeframe: Ongoing
4. Membership Coordinator and Communications Team (?) build a clear website page for service opportunities with clear, detailed explanations (timeframe, skills needed, contact information)
  - a. Timeframe: 2 weeks
5. Committees post any openings they have on the website page
  - a. Timeframe: Ongoing
6. Congregants directed to check website page if want to volunteer. Committees also go to Membership Coordinator if having trouble finding help, and they will recommend individuals based on their interests reported in the database from the interviews
  - a. Timeframe: Ongoing
  - b. Requires changing the culture and marketing skills
7. Define metrics to evaluate the program on an annual basis - what can be improved, feedback, etc.

#### **What is being asked of the Ops Council?**

Given the Ops Council's role in the congregation and relationship to committees and day-to-day operations, I first wanted to inform the Council of this initiative. I secondly ask the Ops Council for its input on the outline of this initiative - any thoughts and/or questions are greatly appreciated. I especially look to the Ops Council for recommendations regarding the make-up of Team A and Team B.