

Prairie Circle Unitarian Universalist Congregation Grayslake, Illinois

Board Meeting Minutes — November 22, 2009 – 7:00pm

The Board met at Susan Bellmore's home on October 22, 2009 at 7:30 pm. Present: Steve King, Susan Bellmore, Diana Fox, Norine Fendrych, Elizabeth Harding and Andrea Mills. Also present: Peg Fredrickson, Jan Kirch, Ric Sarmont, Duane Shaneyfelt and Tonia Becker VerShaw.

Opening Reading & Chalice Lighting

An opening reading was provided by Reverend Harding and the chalice was lit.

Conversation with the Social Action Committee – Peg Fredrickson

Peg reported that the consensus from the committee is that we need wider participation from the congregation. The committee is looking for how to strategically inspire the congregation to participate. One idea is that we can give them "small bites" so as not to overwhelm them. Norine and Lynae will make a thermometer to demonstrate our financial donations; the goal is \$2000 (increased from \$1000). Avon Food Pantry reports an increase in clients including veterans. The Guest at Your Table program will begin this Sunday. PADS has an increase in family clients and they have a great need for diapers and baby wipes so we will be coordinating the donation of these items during the holidays. The next PADS dinner at which we will cook and serve will be January 17th and will be lead by the Petros family. We will be adopting a family on an ongoing basis (a mother, father and four children) and hope to work with the RE department on this project. Diana reported that we could pay a bill that is overdue, take the family on recreational outings, celebrate events with them, and give them gift cards for groceries. The family would remain anonymous. Peg invited the Board members to contribute their ideas now or later to help the Social Action Committee with their goals. Steve agreed that it is a good tactic to give people small ways to participate (from a time standpoint) that may later lead to greater participation. Norine mentioned that she has seen, at the UUA level, the idea that social action is the heart of the church and she believes we should pursue that approach. Jan agreed and would like to see social action becoming more of a focus of our congregation.

Conversation with the Caring Committee – Jan Kirch

Jan reported that the Caring Committee's role in the congregation varies as the needs of the members vary. This creates a challenge in planning since they never know how much need there will be. Elizabeth has been a big part of the Caring Committee. Jan mentioned that a future direction of the Caring Committee is to also support and participate with members in their joys (weddings, etc.) as well as their needs. There was a discussion about the portion of last Sunday's service devoted to memorializing Roberta Rogers. Elizabeth discussed the idea of a record book that would record significant events in our members' lives to create a history of our congregation. The note cards will help with the Caring Committee mission. Susan announced that the note cards will be delivered tomorrow. Elizabeth believes that the greatest challenge for the Caring Committee is communication. Jan explained that she is at most services and makes notes on the joys and concerns but sometimes people do not stand up and express their joy or concern. It was also expressed that it is difficult to communicate to the congregation since people do not always absorb the written announcements. Norine asked Jan to make it known to the congregation that she is the chair of the Caring Committee. Steve suggested that, as the service leader announces the Joys and Concerns, a sentence should be added inviting people to express their joy or concern directly to Jan if they do not want to come forward during the service. Steve expressed appreciation for the work that Jan and the Caring Committee does.

Consulting Minister's Report (complete report included at the end of this document)

Reverend Harding reported that her report was sent by e-mail. She specifically pointed out her request for a week of vacation from December 25th through January 1st.

Visitor Statistics (see graph at the end of this document)

Diana asked if visitors are counted twice if they come twice. Andrea explained that a visitor is anyone who fills out a Visitor Information Sheet. Visitors normally only complete this form on their first visit.

Report on Small Congregations Web Seminar – Reverend Harding (the complete notes are attached at the end of this document)

The seminar listed ten "best practices" of small congregations. The first best practice was to listen to your congregation's stories. A repeating theme that Reverend Harding frequently hears is that "we're too small to do that" or "we don't have enough money to do that". A second story she hears is "we don't want to work with the district" or "we've had bad experiences with outsiders". She wonders what the Board might be able to do to change those stories.

The third best practice is about creating a covenant. Elizabeth would like us to consider going through the process of creating a covenant. Many churches do this and display it prominently in their space. Elizabeth discussed the content of other churches' covenants and offered to bring several examples for the Board to review. Steve suggested that this be an item for discussion at the Board Retreat.

Diana suggested that we go through Reverend Harding's notes from the seminar in more detail at the Board Retreat. Steve suggested that, tonight, we focus on one and see how it goes. It was decided that we should discuss the fourth item on the list: "create a process for what to do when we fall away from our covenant" since this will be an item we will discuss more later in tonight's meeting.

Conflict Resolution Process

Norine explained that she found the example she brought to the meeting on the UUA website. She likes the practical, step-by-step quality of it. Susan appreciated the first step of a person involved in the conflict working directly with the person they have the conflict with. Diana agreed that this is a healthy approach. Elizabeth expressed that some people are not comfortable with that and there should be other steps in the process to help those people. Susan expressed how important this document and process is because conflicts between people or groups can be very damaging to churches. Norine felt that there should be something in the document making it okay to put your concerns in writing and bring it with you to discuss with the other person in person. Diana agreed and added that you can get an immediate reaction to your words this way.

With regard to step #3, Steve wondered if there should be a conflict resolution committee. Diana felt this would be more effective than the Committee on Ministry because of the skills needed for this role that the COM members may not have. Norine preferred the wording in the UUA document but believes that we should ensure that the COM feels comfortable with this role. It was agreed that the COM would only be involved if the Minister was involved in the conflict.

With regard to step #4, Steve wondered if the congregation would feel comfortable giving the power to the Board to remove someone from the congregation. Norine explained that, in section 3.06 of the ByLaws, as the result of a discussion at an Annual Meeting several years ago, the Board already has this power. Elizabeth suggested seeing if other congregation's give their Board that amount of power. Diana did not want the Board to make a decision on this with two members absent.

Steve suggested that he edit steps #1, 2 & 3 based on the discussion tonight and bring the new version to the next meeting. Step #4 can be discussed in more depth with the entire Board present. Steve agreed to start an e-mail dialogue on this issue prior to the next Board meeting. Susan expressed a desire to make sure this process includes guidelines for communication by e-mail. The Board agreed and Steve will add this to his revised version. The Board agreed.

Committee Issues

Policy & Guidelines for Announcements – Tonia Becker VerShaw

The Worship Committee would like to make sure that, when we have announcements on Sunday mornings, we retain the worship quality of the services so that an atmosphere of a “club” is not projected. The Worship Committee’s policy requires that announcements be submitted on the Friday before the service to the Service Leader. To prevent Tonia from being overwhelmed by questions of who the Service Leader is, she has set up a Google Doc that all committee chairs & Board members have access to so that they can refer to this document rather than contacting her. Messages should be short, relevant and refer to PCUUC or UUA activities. Elizabeth thanked Tonia for her leadership on this sometimes difficult issue. Because there is now a policy, the Worship Committee Chair has something to refer when there are violations and this takes the personal out of it. The Board unanimously agreed that the policy is excellent. Tonia will prepare an article for the December newsletter on the new policy. Reverend Harding and Tonia will announce the policy at the service on Sunday and provide paper copies.

Pledge Drive Responsibilities – Steve King

Steve announced that he believes that if the Board does not find someone to chair the pledge drive, the Board will end up being responsible for it. Norine said that she has heard that some think the Fundraising Committee will be responsible in some way for the pledge drive. Diana believes very strongly that the Fundraising Committee is a sub-committee of the Stewardship Committee; the Board members agreed. Steve explained the role of the chair of the Pledge Drive: you begin with the list of members, send out pledge cards, do some marketing and then are tenacious in following-up with those who do not return their pledge cards. Steve expressed a belief that we need to create purpose and enthusiasm at the Congregational Meeting in January that will lead to larger pledges. Last year, a lack of specific purpose combined with the bad economy led to lower pledges. Tonia added that we also need leadership to inspire the congregation. Diana will speak with Dayle Kozlowski and Carol Niec. Steve will talk with Bruce Moon, Jim Cubit and Sally Merritt to see if they have an interest.

Other Business

Board Retreat – Steve King

The Board Retreat will be on Saturday, December 5th from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Steve said that the main point of the Board Retreat will be the design of the Congregational Retreat in January. Reverend Harding informed us that the individuals from the District who might have attended and assisted with the Board Retreat will not be available on December 5th but we could invite them to the Congregational Retreat. They might be useful as a neutral party. Steve said that he would like to discuss the issues he brought up in his sermon (purpose, urgency, risk and

milestones). The Board agreed. Steve will find a location for the Board Retreat. On behalf of John Crowley, Ric asked if employees will attend the Congregational Retreat. Steve said that we can answer that question better after the Board Retreat.

Congregational Retreat – Steve King

The Congregational Retreat will be held on January 23rd. Diana reminded us that we need to advertise this event to the congregation and generate excitement. Norine volunteered to draw up a poster to display. Steve agreed to write an article for the December newsletter. Norine wondered if we needed a sign-up sheet. Susan agreed to call Sally Merritt to ask about the mechanics of the previous Congregational Retreat such as setup, sign-up and communication. The State Bank of the Lakes community room was suggested as a location. Tonia will research that option.

Publication of Church Finances

There was a general discussion about whether or not the church's financial information should be published. Reverend Harding felt it would take away some of the anxiety of seeing them for the first time at an important event such as the annual meeting. The Board agreed to post the financials presented at the Board meetings on the website along with the Board meeting minutes. Steve will discuss with Mike whether we should publish any financial information in the Orders of Service or newsletters.

Summary of Follow-Up Actions

Steve will revise steps #1, 2 & 3 of the conflict resolution process.

Tonia will write an article for the December newsletter about the new announcements policy. **Reverend Harding** and **Tonia** will announce the policy at Sunday service and provide paper copies.

Diana will speak with Dayle Kozlowski and Carol Niec about being the Pledge Drive Chair.

Steve will talk with Bruce Moon, Jim Cubit and Sally Merritt.

Steve will find a location for the Board Retreat.

Norine will prepare a poster to advertise the Congregational Retreat. **Steve** will write an article for the December newsletter. **Susan** will call Sally Merritt to ask about the mechanics of the previous Congregational meeting. Tonia will check into the State Bank of the Lakes as a possible location.

Steve will discuss with Mike the publication of financial information.

Closing Reading and Adjournment

A closing reading was presented by Reverend Harding. Diana moved to adjourn the meeting and Teresa seconded the motion. The next board meeting will be held at 7:00 pm on December 17, 2009 at the home of Norine Fendrych.

Respectfully Submitted,

Andrea Mills
PCUUC Administrator

Board Report November 2009

Rev. Elizabeth Harding

Completed Activities

Attended monthly minister's cluster meeting Nov. 18

Developed plan for Introduction to UUism 101

Assisted in scheduling for Christmas Eve

Coordinated memorial of Roberta Rogers on 11.15

Ongoing Activities

Developed script and OOS for emergencies w/worship cmte

Updating wedding packet

Developing the possibility of podcasting for the congregation

Committee meetings postponed due to illness

Upcoming Activities

Thanksgiving Intergenerational service 11.22

Developing plan for Christmas Eve with worship committee

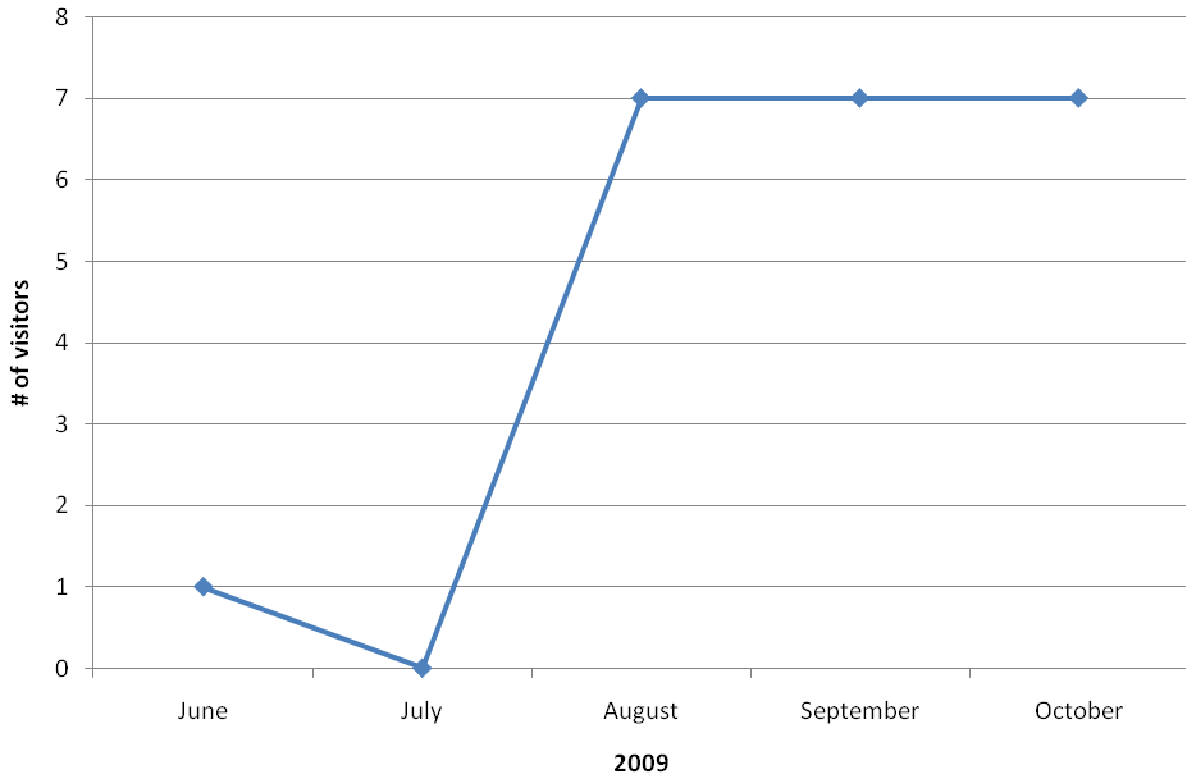
Will Attend New Member Orientation 11.22

Preaching PCUUC Dec. 6, 20, 24

Vacation Time: I respectfully request to take the week post-Christmas as a vacation week.

Opportunities: The opportunities remain the same for the congregation as my previous Board Reports. Compensation Consultant available to help congregation as they work with the Minister around growth and support of both congregation and Minister.

Visitor Statistics



10 Best Practices for Small UU congregations

Introduction

- Strength is not related to size. Strength or vitality has more to do with positive energy, the ability of a congregation to care for one another and serve others beyond the congregation.
- Small congregations may have the potential to be more intergenerational.
- Small congregations can be quite well known in their communities; being able to build relationships with other community organizations and having a presence or influence in their community that is larger than their actual size.
- Small congregations can provide many opportunities and practice for leadership development and faith development for members (some members in large congregations do not get that opportunity – especially for preaching).

1. Pay attention to the Stories we tell about the congregation.

- The stories (descriptions or statements) that are repeated are our strengths to each other and the community - they can encourage us or stop us.
- When leadership or lay members get tired or discouraged it is too easy to focus on failures which are hard to overcome and hard to enter into as a newcomer.
- Learn from what has failed in the past and try to state what your greatest strengths are. Introduce yourselves and your work from that strength and also with your hopes and dreams.

2. Mission, Vision, Purpose.

<http://www.uua.org/documents/congservices/visionmissioncovenant.pdf>

The congregation will be more powerful when it clearly states its hopes and dreams in the form of mission, vision, and purpose. Without these or a clear understanding of its reason for being, decisions can be made out of fear, based on what has always been done, or by the strongest personalities. Having a clearly stated mission, vision and/or purpose will help the congregation make decisions based on its best intentions rather than its habits.

Getting into a new habit of using the statement might take practice.

- Print the statement(s) in the order of worship
- Make it available at Board meetings
- Read it out loud at the start of meetings
- Ask one person to make it their job to help the group remember to focus on it when they are working on a problem
- When a decision has been made check to make sure it supports the stated mission or dream

3. Create a Covenant.

<http://www.uua.org/documents/congservices/visionmissioncovenant.pdf>

The covenant is a promise of how we intend to behave with one another. It can be critical to support the health and vitality of a congregation.

- Learning to live what we say we believe may be one of the greatest gifts to ourselves and our larger communities, and one of the most difficult jobs of a congregation.

How do we balance individual and community needs?

How do we honor tradition and new practice?

- A covenant will support our effort to be truthful and compassionate with one another as we work through these and many other challenging things.

4. Create process for what to do when we fall away from our covenant. Creating the covenant is just the first important step.

1. Respectfully remind all involved of the covenant.

One reason it is helpful to have is that when things are not going well, it is possible to respectfully, even gently, remind a person that we all agreed to try to treat each other in a particular way.

2. Ask what is needed to get back into covenant.

A person or group can be asked what they might need to try to get back into covenant (Ask what is happening? A short break? Silence? Prayer or song? Apologies or acknowledgement of something difficult? A private conversation? Protein? Stretch? Etc.)

3. Try to do what is identified.

Try to let people do what they say they need to do without rescuing them.

4. Start again, if appropriate, perhaps rereading the covenant.

If it is not appropriate to start again immediately, make it clear how the continued conversation will be set up for later.

5. It helps a great deal if the leadership can remain calm.

5. Too much to do? Try re-evaluating how things are done.

- a. Are there more jobs than energy to do them? Are there more jobs than you really need to have?

- b. Do you need to reorganize to pare down the work? One good resource is the Small Talk Newsletter and list serve

- <http://www.uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary/leaderslibrary/interconnections/41809.shtml>

- c. Is it time to temporarily let go of or just clarify some jobs?

- d. Can the jobs be created as time specific tasks rather than open-ended and very broad?

- e. How can leaders support each other as volunteers with thanks, information, and the like?

- f. Build in rest and Sabbath time for the congregation and leaders.

g. Invite people to do work that is meaningful and helps connect them to the purpose of the congregation.

6. Increase opportunities to share deeply.

- Leaders of small congregations sometimes think that being small automatically fills people's need for deep connection. It is likely not true, especially as tasks can overwhelm the desire to connect.
- Consider ways to increase those opportunities to share such as small group ministry <http://www.uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary/smallgroup/21822.shtml> or personal testimonials in church.

7. Be as non-anxious as possible. Invite people into leadership for your congregation who are good at this.

- When leaders are able to listen without a knee-jerk reaction, it is more likely that tensions will be managed without escalation, and that people will feel more heard even when they disagree strongly with each other.
- There are lots of techniques to practice and build this skill and two that are popular among UU leadership include Leading Change in the Congregation by Gilbert Rendle <http://www.uuabookstore.org/searchproducts.cfm> and a DVD of UUUniversity 2007 <http://www.uuabookstore.org/showproducts.cfm?FullCat=92>
 1. 'Getting on the balcony' is one of the most useful techniques. This concept is drawn from the work of Ron Heifetz on adaptive leadership. The idea here is that a leader can get some perspective about what is happening 'on the dance floor' better by 'going up to the balcony.' To do this, leaders need to be able to lessen their own emotional investment or entanglement. More of the work of Ron Heifetz <http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&source=hp&q=ron+heifetz+adaptive+leadership&aq=1sx&oq=Ron+Heifetz&aqi=g-s1g-sx5>
 2. Communicate, communicate, communicate. It is so easy in small congregations to assume everyone knows everything and to forget that unless a decision is made formal and advertised, that informal habits can take over. Communicating often and clearly will help bring anxiety down!

8. Dealing with rather than ignoring difficult personalities

- Small congregations think of themselves as being able to take everyone in and love one another. It is likely that different family upbringing and different regions of the country manage this differently, but ask yourself, when someone is acting in a way that is really not ok, what are you inclined to do?
- Many small congregations are full of people who want only to be kind, but when someone is not able to act within the covenant you have agreed upon, they may need

clear help being able to do that. Kindness is not always being nice. If we tend to think it is more kind to just ignore bad behavior, two things could happen:

1. the individual who may need outside help to be in covenantal relationship may get worse or feel people are insincere since the person may know they are off
2. some members or newcomers may feel unsafe and leave

- Invite the person(s) in your congregation most skilled at helping people with difficult personalities to create some guidelines and possibly do some training for the whole congregation in practicing honest, compassionate and accountable relationship.
- Contact your District Office.
- Consider adopting and implementing a disruptive behavior covenant* that will help create a sense of safe limits and guidelines to respond when a person occasionally cannot act within the covenant. Examples of Policies or procedures can be found through your district office or at http://www.uurestoration.us/documents/09-01-27_UUCR_Procedure_for_Addressing_Disruptive_Behavior_COM_final.pdf

9. Work with tension around change –

Leadership will help bring tension in the congregation down as they are themselves less anxious and when they

- Communicate regularly and in many ways
- See and articulate the value in the different perspectives (what will be gained either way, what could be lost either way) An excellent resource for this is the book Polarity management: identifying and managing unsolvable problems By Barry Johnson
- Help congregation focus on larger vision
- Make the process and time-line for decision-making and change clear and up front
- Include lots of opportunities for listening without making decisions
- Include opportunities to discuss how change is going
- Ask for help from your district staff

10. Increase opportunities to play together and celebrate who you are together.

The desire to “do church right” can sometimes distract members and friends of all ages from knowing who they are and why they come together in the first place!

- Plan ahead for church year – be sure to schedule some celebratory and fun events far in advance.
- Some congregations have had success lightening the load by doing fewer worship services and occasionally having small group ministry or intergenerational celebration and sharing instead of worship.
- Others do their accustomed number of services and add fun events immediately before or after.
- Whatever you choose, pay attention to whether your congregation celebrates and plays enough together.