

**Congregational Meeting  
Unitarian Universalist Congregation, Santa Rosa  
January 26, 2020**

**MINUTES**

**Meeting called to order at 11:13 am:** Natalie Brundred, President, Board of Trustees

**Chalice Lighting and Opening Words:** Rev. Chris Bell, Senior Minister

**Meeting Introduction:** Natalie Brundred

- Parliamentarian: Richard Senghas
- Recording Secretary: Susan Thollaug
- Agenda: Adopted as written.
- Minutes from the June 9, 2019 Congregational Meeting were adopted as written.

**Co-Ordination of Millie Phillips:** Rev. Chris Bell, Senior Minister –  
**VOTING ITEM**

Millie Phillips, UUCSR's intern minister for two years, will be ordained later today at the UU Society of San Francisco. Rev. Chris moved that UUCSR make co-ordain Millie. He would take the message to Millie today, and give her a stole from our congregation.

**VOTE:** The congregation unanimously approved co-ordination of Millie Phillips.

**Treasurer's report:** Michael Randolph, Treasurer

Last fiscal year (2018/19) was an ambitious year. We hired our Assistant Minister, whose costs were to be covered by increased pledges. The Stewardship Committee led a successful drive and raised about \$50k. We took a little hit in terms of reduced rental income. Unfortunately, unanticipated loss of pledges also occurred.

We posted a \$21k loss, but much of that loss was mitigated by our having a \$17k surplus from the previous year. We ended last year's budget about 3.5% below where we wanted to be. It's not as catastrophic as anticipated earlier in the year, and we have reserve funds to cover the rest.

On the expense side, we were able to save some money. Also, we paid off all of our member notes, a major congregational achievement.

Last year we donated funds to the community through the Saturday Breakfast (about \$25k) and Share the basket (about \$32k). In addition we

contributed to the UU Congregation in Chico after the Paradise fire. In total, we gave out over \$70k to our community.

**Status of the Current Fiscal Year (2019/20) Budget:** Update through December

We're showing a healthy cash flow, and we have \$75k in emergency funds. We're in pretty good shape for the first 6 months of the year.

Projecting out to the end of this year, we could reach 99% of our budgeted expenses. Pledges are off slightly. Glaser Center income has dropped 25-30% off of our projected amounts. How the year ends is not knowable now.

We received a favorable reduction in our property tax, with much effort by Linda Balabanian, from \$11k to \$5.8k.

Our UUA dues are about \$31k. We usually pay in two installments, but haven't made a payment yet. If we end the year with a deficit we'll have to decide whether to use the reserve fund, UUA dues, or some other way to balance the budget.

**Nominations and Elections: Mark Sowers, Nominating Committee member - VOTING ITEMS**

Proposed interim member of the Nominating Committee:

Monique Pavon was nominated to fill an unexpired term.

**VOTE:** Monique was approved unanimously to fill the interim position.

Nominations for the Endowment Committee:

Dick Allen, Paul Poling, and Pam Tennant were nominated. There were no additional nominations from the floor.

**VOTE:** The full slate of nominees for the Endowment Committee was approved unanimously.

Nominations for the Board of Trustees:

Paul Brockmann, Andy Levine and Jane DeYoung were nominated. There were no additional nominations from the floor.

**VOTE:** The full slate of nominees for the Board was approved unanimously.

Nominations for UU General Assembly Delegates (Providence RI, June 24-28, 2020):

Nominations were requested from the floor. Richard Senghas nominated himself. No other nominations were made. Volunteers who come forward can be appointed by the Board before the General Assembly in June.

**VOTE:** Richard Senghas was approved unanimously.

**Appreciations – Honoring Members Who Have Gone Above and Beyond:** Cathie Wiese Cathie recognized three UUCSR members:

Katie Trieller - for her work on our small-group ministry, leading our TIE group and Soul Matters programs.

Leslie Norinsky - for her work and leadership in our social justice programs, including the Diversity Project banners, Diversity Dialogues and leading Borders and Beyond.

Marianne Sonntag - for her efforts that have created a place of beauty and serenity in our memorial garden and our outdoor spaces, as well as for her work as a Desk Angel in the office.

**Board Report and Debrief of October 2019 Town Hall:** Natalie

Brundred, President, Board of Trustees

Anonymous donors have made it possible to move forward with purchasing an up-to-date church management software package. In the coming months we'll purchase the new software and gradually roll it out.

Dawn and Rev. Chris gathered several marketing experts to develop suggestions for how we can effectively reach out to the larger community so that people find out about us. Some very good cost-effective ideas have been generated already, and they are continuing to meet.

The Board has signed on as a co-sponsor of "Sonoma County, United in Kindness", a declaration started by the Sonoma County Interfaith Council to eliminate discrimination in our county.

Rev. Chris is going on sabbatical next week and will return on June 7. We have an excellent sabbatical minister, Bonnie Dlott, ready to fill in. Rev. Chris is preparing his study agenda around how to effectively support the growth of the congregation.

**Our "Expecting Growth" Initiative:** Natalie Brundred, President, Board of Trustees and John Mason, Board member

The Board's focus this year has been on growth. We started out with a really bold idea: to grow the congregation really large in a pretty short period of time. As things unfolded, we realized that things take time for a congregation to work through, and that it's not really about growth *per se*, but about spreading our message, welcoming people well and involving them in our community. Growth will likely be a result of that.

We had two forums in October and a town hall meeting in early November that were mostly devoted to this subject. Mostly people gave their

suggestions and input for how to go forward. What was evident was how much we value what we have now and what we get from being in this community. We're passionate about wanting to see this congregation succeed and continue. From the forums and the town hall it also became clear that really we need to talk about *how* we do those things, and we need to give everyone an opportunity to reflect and discuss this whole idea and contribute.

The Board is reviving the idea of house meetings, to be an ongoing part of our congregational life. We'd like the first round of meetings to be about this topic of where we're heading and how. The Board has formed a steering committee, and would like to have the first round of meetings in March and April. We'll compile feedback and have forums in possibly late April to let the congregation know about the results so far, and we'll discuss this together at our June congregational meeting. Rev. Chris will explore how different congregations of different denominations have grown, and report back to us then.

**Neighborhood Groups:** John Mason, chair of the Neighborhood Groups steering committee

Groups of 15-18 people who live in roughly the same geographical area will meet in people's homes. Each group will have a facilitator, who will have received some training. That person will schedule the meeting and have notes and questions to guide the discussion.

We want these groups to develop into an ongoing program to build a sense of community for all congregants. People can get to know their fellow UUCSR members who live nearby. It's a great vehicle for welcoming new members. These groups are also a great way to care for each other in times of illness or other needs.

We hope groups will meet two or three times a year and rotate the hosting. It will be up to each group to choose their own format.

**Reflection on the State of the Congregation:** Rev. Chris Bell, Senior Minister

Our congregation has one of best attendance rates of membership on Sunday morning, which is one of the best signs of congregational health. We had 364 members last year, and 200-250 show up on Sundays.

We will probably report to UUA the same number of members this year. We are at a plateau point where some kind of revolution in the structure of the organization is required. Usually that means more complex duties being handed over to staff, including some of our IT requirements, perhaps a

membership professional, a communications professional, expanded care for the building, and a bit more centralization of decision-making in the Board-level leadership. Staff members would coordinate teams of volunteers, rather than having volunteers coordinate volunteers.

The Expect Growth plan was based on input from committee heads about where we'd like to be in five years, and what would be needed. The timeline may be quite different from what we first proposed, but hopefully the basic ingredients of that plan are what we'll continue to engage with. Rev. Chris is not attached to a timetable, but we do need to continue to expect growth because if a congregation is doing its work well people are drawn to it.

In this next phase, we'll look at how to welcome and integrate people who are coming to our congregation for the first time.

With the help of our volunteer group of marketing professionals, we'll have greater consistency in our "brand", and will be improving our online presence as part of this effort. There are things congregants can do to help: go to Yelp and write a review; go to our Facebook page and "like" or "share" items there. This is the first priority of the marketing team - to lift up the profile of UUCSR through social media.

Rev. Chris has begun compiling information about the kinds of congregations he wants to study — mid-sized congregations who've transitioned into that next size and layer of organization, which he believes is the future of our community.

### **Open Forum/Questions/Concerns/Appreciations/Aspirations**

The Bohemian survey has once again identified Rev. Chris as the best minister, and UUCSR as the best church!

**Closing Words: Rev. Chris Bell, Senior Minister**

**Meeting Adjourned: 1:00 pm**

*Next Congregational Meeting: June 14, 2020*

*Respectfully submitted by Susan Thollaug, Recording Secretary*