

First Unitarian Church of Oakland
BOARD OF TRUSTEES
MEETING AGENDA
November 29, 2022, 6:45 - 9:00 pm

Our Mission: We, the members of the First Unitarian Church of Oakland, unite to build a beloved community within and beyond our walls. Guided by individual conscience and wisdom from many sources, we gather in worship and service to nourish the spirit, work for justice, and celebrate the divine in all. *(Adopted by the congregation on March 18, 2019)*

Present: Barbara North, Zia Swim, Debby Kaplan, Nicole Fitzhugh, Claudine Tong, Marilyn McMahon, Rev. Ninán Soto

Meeting Chair: Zia

RACI chart, Timekeeper, Stack: Barbara

Communications Facilitator: Nicole

Readings: Marilyn

Process Monitor: Dennis Rowcliffe

Guests: Noemi de Guzman, Corless Smith, Janet McFarland, Donna Fujioka, Rev. Rod Richards, Steve Thomasberger, Tamara Haw, Tom Haw, Dick Bailey, Claudia Morgan, Bill Blakely, Alex Haider-Winnett, Jane Asche, Rev. Laura Shennum, Mary Foran, Michael Fitzhugh, Linda Propert Sanford, Micky Duxbury, Laurel Egenberger, Lucia Savage, Rev. Carlton Elliot Smith, Rinda Bartley,

6:45 pm - Special Meeting Introduction & NVC Facilitation Description

Zia

Zia explained that the agenda was changed to accommodate one group's request for 15 minutes of comment, time for others to comment, and an expected desire for discussion. The entire first half of the agenda was replaced by an extended public comments period. The planned board business was condensed to fill only the second half. Zia explained fundamentals of NonViolent Communication (Use "I" statements; Don't assume motives or emotions; Be honest, Be loving and empathic) and urged speakers to follow these.

6:53 pm - Chalice Lighting & Opening Reading -

Marilyn

Daniel Day Williams: "Love does not resolve every conflict. It accepts conflict as the arena in which the work of love is to be done."

6:55 pm - Facilitated Open Communication Period

All

Q: What is the status of the Board's phone outreach campaign? A: Don't know the number of calls made so far, but there are lots more to be done.

The floor was now given to a group of seven congregants for whom the Board had preapproved a 15-minute period to speak.

Steve: We want an annual ministerial evaluation, as is called for in Rev. Soto's contract. (Described history, in which the Board's intent was to conduct such an evaluation after Rev. Soto's fellowship application process was completed. (Reading from statement by UU minister Sue Phillips: "Ministers and church staff deserve to know what is expected of them, what resources are available to them, and how their performance will be judged and appreciated.") We feel that Rev. Soto deserves this supportive process.

We recommend that: (1) the Board immediately establishes an Evaluation Team, including a Board member and at least two other lay people who serve on other church committees. This would be better than having COWSM responsible for the evaluation. (2) Board gives guidance to the Evaluation Team. (3) The Eval. Team meets with the minister to agree on goals and expectations for the coming year, and an annual schedule for evaluation. (4) The Eval. Team reports to the Board.

The "mutual examination" that the COWSM plans to do can proceed separately from, but should not delay, the ministerial evaluation, which should take place rapidly. We ask the Board to decide the schedule for the ministerial evaluation no later than the December Board meeting.

Tom: We're lacking love and unity in our community. We can do the 360/mutual assessment at the same time as the ministerial evaluation. Let's get going on our goals. We can succeed if we come together.

[Open comment period was now opened to all.]

Rev. Soto asked people to refer to them by name. Please use the respectful title, either "Pastor" or "Rev.", followed by your choice of "Theresa" or "Soto" or "Ninán". Using their name communicates that you are speaking of this actual person.

Rev. Soto and Tom agreed to talk directly to discuss details of their disagreements. Rev. Soto stressed own desire for talking with a person, rather than written communication.

Zia reported that the Board had reached out to the UUA (Pacific Western Region) for help (mediation or facilitation), and that some mediation had occurred.

Tamara expressed her dislike of conflict or feeling rebuked, and Rev. Soto identified that as a place where work needed to be done between them. Rev. Soto expressed their own feeling that their contributions to conversations were considered less important, and stated their need to be able to speak without being characterized as defensive.

The Haws expressed that more is needed than a meeting between them and Rev. Soto, and Rev. Soto said that it must be done in layers, because there are multiple issues. Tom said, "It's not all about Rev. Soto. It's *us*--we've lost our way. As a *congregation*, we need to come together."

A statement by Sherry Weston-Vigil was read, expressing that, as a member of the search committee, her high regard for Rev. Soto's many good qualities was unchanged.

Janet noted that before Rev. Soto, we had one-and-a-half ministers doing the job that Rev. Soto alone is doing now, and that we need more staff.

Debby urged people, before piling on criticism of the Board, to consider that the Board is shorthanded, and its work needs to be shared more widely. "I encourage you who care about our church direction to seriously consider joining the Board."

Rev. Carlton Smith, invited by Rev. Soto to attend, introduced himself. He is the lead for the PWR (Pacific Western Region of the UUA) and our primary contact there (with Melissa James, who he supervises). He served at FUCO with the Eller-Isaacs. He supports us in our work together. Zia asked whether he would lead facilitation here, and he replied that he would, if qualified, and otherwise would help us identify such a person.

Claudia expressed her disappointment with what had happened before this meeting. She had simply sent a request to the Board for time to speak at the meeting, but this was interpreted by some in an entirely different way. Claudia resents and regrets that people expected an attack on Rev. Soto.

Rinda agreed with Debby about how hard it is on the Board. Rinda has been offering from the start to assist in various ways but has not been taken up on it. She supports the idea of evaluation of the minister. In her time on the Board, they discussed that it's important to evaluate what's going well and what obstacles might be cropping up. When people lack ways to give feedback, they get frustrated and jump to conclusions. Rinda believes we can do an evaluation and speak with each other honestly.

Corless volunteers to help with any evaluation that happens.

Barbara asked former Board members to point the Board to any records of past ministerial evaluations at FUCO, if known.

Rev. Soto promised to be "100% a partner to this process." Their dream scenario is that "the team comes with ten things, and I come with three things, and then we work together on all of them."

Rev. Richards, a minister from the San Luis Obispo church, brought a message of centering and support from his congregation. He values the role of congregations reminding each other of our highest aspirations. He read parts of FUCO's mission and congregational covenant.

7:50 Debrief and Synthesis

Zia

7:55 BREAK

8:01 Employee Vacation accrual policy

Barbara

Nicole explained issue re carryover of accrued vacation, state law, and UUA recommendation of 50% carryover. Our personnel handbook says nothing about our policy.

MOTION: Proposed that we follow the UUA recommended 50% carryover policy and consult an attorney about what to do with time already accrued before our decision (Zia; Nicole 2d). PASSED.

Nicole will follow up. She suggests that the month of May should be a hard deadline, so we have it in place for new facilities manager.

Minister's Report

Rev Soto

Rev Soto: How is each person doing? 5 = awesome, 1 = terrible. (Everyone still on the call gave a number.) Friends, your number matters. Whatever it is, it matters.

Operations Team Report

Noemi

Noemi: I'll just highlight the theme of uniting and connecting. We inaugurated the quarterly meeting of OT with Board officers. We've had great events, organized by Jef, Mary, Steve, and have an upcoming music team concert. Hester and Bill Blakely have been working hard on finances as always.

Stefan and the reopening team propose dropping requirement to show vaccination proof, if Board approves.

Finance Report

Debby

Debby: Just got data yesterday, so no report now. Will send something out well before December Board meeting so we can digest it. Had a productive meeting with Noemi and Pastor Ninán re budget process and foreseen challenges, and financial implications of Stefan's retirement, etc. Hoping we'll have a budget proposal before the end of this year.

COWSM next steps & timeline

Sarah not in attendance, so no report. Also, no written report submitted. We wanted to find out COWSM's next steps. We'll move forward with COWSM on email.

"For the Good of the Order"

Zia

(Questions, brief planning, spontaneous items, or pulled from consent agenda)

- **Scheduling: December Board meeting**

- Decided: **Sunday, Dec. 18 at 3:00 pm**
- **Stewardship**
Nicole showed the written Stewardship report and summarized it. It included a recommendation of having a volunteer coordinator.
Brief discussion of meaning of discrepancy between the median pledge and mean pledge numbers. Hester said that it's best to have those figures pretty close, because if the mean is much higher, that shows we're dependent on a small number of large pledges. Barbara said we'd need to look at the full data to interpret it. Rev. Soto said that the goal is for our *team* to be large, not the individual pledges.
 - **Scheduling: Orientation, trainings for Board members to be elected in March**
Marilyn proposed that, in advance of election of new trustees, we set dates for training and orientation. Will put on agenda for Dec. meeting.
 - **Scheduling: Annual membership meeting**
Decided: **Sunday, March 19th**
 - **Board thanks**
Steve T for neighborhood cleanup event
Mary Foran for book sale
Rev. Carlton
The SLO church for sending its support (and Rev. Rod)
 - **Review tasks/responsibilities list**

Process monitoring comments

Dennis

Closing reading

Marilyn

(Words by Bets Wienecke:) "May we leave this place / Seeking an uncharted and freely chosen way to wholeness, /Knowing we have companions along the way."