

Minutes
FCC Board Meeting
First Congregational Church of Minnesota, United Church of Christ
January 16, 2024 - 7:00 – 8:30 pm - Meeting on Zoom

Agenda

Attendance: Jane McBride, Linda Valerian, Jean Anderson, Mary Byers, Tom von Sternberg, Hikaru Peterson, Paul Fate, Xan Laurence, Chris Bohnhoff

Absent: Carl Dyar

1. Opening — Linda
2. Check in with each other
3. Approve minutes from December meeting
Move - Tom, Second - Hikaru **Passed**
4. Review the First Church Constitution (as adopted 12/5/2021) and Board Governance policies. **Questions to guide our conversation:** *Review these documents to remind ourselves how they define the role of the Board. For those who have been serving on the Board for a while, how do you feel we are doing in fulfilling that role? Are there areas that need more attention? Or ways we are straying from our purpose? Also, please look for aspects of these documents that might need to be changed or updated.*

Discussion

- Responsibilities as outlined seem to reflect our activity. We are applying the discernment feature in our current Middle East discussion.
- Are we collapsing the two functions of self evaluation and evaluation of principal minister – should we separate them? (Sec 3, e).
- Can the Board evaluate itself? At a later time, can we re phrase or re work this? Is there a way for the congregation to evaluate the Board?
- Some of the responsibilities and committees don't add up in the Board Policies of Governance. Perhaps we should revisit the Board Policies at another time to determine if we are following our own Policies.
- Re the Constitution – Art 4, Faith and Covenant, Sec 2 – The Covenant recognizes the caring for each other, but where is the heart? It feels it's a little cerebral.
- Sec 3 (i) – How do we discern the congregational stance?
- Constitutions should be broad, not too prescriptive.

Conclusion: *Elements of both the Constitution and the Policies of Governance could bear closer examination. A future meeting (or meetings) could be devoted to parsing the wording of each document.*

5. Review Board committees: committee chairs will summarize anticipated activity for 2024

- Building Committee – Kris and Greg Hubinger are co-chairs; meet monthly on Zoom, with new members and staff; big issues – interior painting and HVAC, plus lots of smaller ongoing issues
 - Personnel (Hikaru) – main work focuses on feedback from congregation about Jane; given her sabbatical, the review will be a month earlier. And more recently, they will be developing Chris’s contract
 - Jane – each committee has a policy and for each one they should keep track of and review annually to make sure that the policy and the reality are in synch
 - Finance Committee – (Xan) – will be meeting soon to discuss last year’s income and expenses. Possible upcoming HVAC expenses will need to be addressed – possibly Capital Campaign. Jane – Financial Secretary role is very labor intensive – might need to involve staff more or come up with alternative ways to accomplish the duties.
 - Discernment Committee (Jane is on committee) – We have one person currently (Schanan Harris) who is in care. There is no set schedule – they meet when Schanan feels the need. The committee can go through periods of inactivity, and then lots of activity.
6. Review ongoing projects and decision-making conversations anticipated for 2024 (see *“Yearly Tasks of the First Church Board”* and *“Important projects and discussions for 2024 - First Church Board”* documents)
- This summary seems to accurately reflect the past six months’ or so of Board conversations and decisions. We are acting on all these topics.
 - Some of the details around the Flourish activity are unclear, which is why there isn’t a lot of detail.
7. Update information about the listening sessions; discuss as needed
- Facilitators and Recorders met last night. Jane will be integrating results of the meeting into a format for both Facilitators and Recorders. The format is in the DropBox.
 - Tom – was in a meeting last week with Sen Klobuchar about health care policy. She spent a lot of time talking about the high level of vitriol that she and her staff have been facing since the start of the Israel Palestine issue. He thinks that we have to be sensitive to the extraordinary level of tensions that we all are facing. Tom feels that we need to carefully think about the implications of going to someone’s home (rather than office) to hold them accountable for policy decisions. He would like to see Facilitators keep things general but also remain sensitive to impact of protestors on individual politicians.
 - Kris reiterated that the meeting last night was rich and that we have reinforced our intentions to listen and to hold each other in love.
8. Approve “Guiding Values and Missional Priorities” identified through our process with Flourish Placemaking
Move - Tom, Second – Paul **Passed**
9. Discuss our communications strategy – Jane

- See document below.
 - Why is the bulletin a repeat of the e news? Because not everyone reads the e news.
 - Would we also expect that if we develop the website, that it becomes the landing place for members? We hope to decrease the amount of energy devoted to interior communications. This may be part of the longer-term strategy. Rather than presenting it as a decrease in overall communication, presenting it as a shift to the website as the primary source of information for everyone, not just outsiders.
 - This proposal focuses us on making progress in our external communications. People who love Chimes may be upset, so it may be more strategic to focus on a shift rather than a reduction. There is also excitement about internal signage and to have a committee give careful thought to how we use our internal space. With Flourish starting, we need a clean visual as people enter the building – where offices, bathrooms, etc are located. This is good timing to address this issue.
 - It's possible that we will return to a monthly publication of Chimes, but there will be a policy in place that will help guide volunteers and staff going forward.
 - If Chimes has reflective articles, it might be good to put those articles on the website.
 - Chris – What channels exist, and who uses them? (i.e., website, Chimes, bulletin, etc) This proposal might also give people a way to plug in as new members of the congregation (by sharing their technology and communication skills).
 - It would be helpful if a couple of volunteers had access to website, rather than relying on Sarah being the sole website fixer.
10. Assign Board members to ministry team meetings
- Don't sign up tonight – Jane needs to double check dates. If two Board members want to attend, please coordinate so that both people attend the same meeting.
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11. Reports and action – discuss only as needed:
- a. Treasurer and Finance Committee
 - b. COVID working group
 - c. Building Committee
 - d. Preservation Projects
 - e. Building Use group
 - f. Planned Giving group
 - g. Principal Minister
 - h. Personnel Committee
12. Closing — Linda

Note: February 12, 2024 - Special Meeting with the Justice Team regarding reparations 6 – 7:30
Has tended to be a potluck – all attendees are encouraged to bring a dish. Kris will not be able to attend, so someone else will need to take minutes.

Next board meeting: Could we move to the third Thursday of the month? **Next meeting is February 15, 7 pm.**

Communications Plan Proposal -from Jane 1-16-24

Background:

Reflecting on the review process this year (my own and Sarah's, specifically) I became more aware of a dynamic we are experiencing. Even as we prioritize our tasks and seek to use our time efficiently, we struggle with a sense that we don't have the capacity to keep up with the work before us. We also feel this dilemma as we interact with leaders and volunteers. Despite improvements in the congregation's overall energy level, we still feel a lag when seeking responses to the routine tasks or special projects. People are (wisely) careful about how they invest their time and energy these days. And realistically, though there are always a few folks who are not deeply engaged in any volunteer organization, our percentage of folks who are involved and motivated is pretty high. In many ways, this capacity issue is a good problem to have; it reflects the congregation's passion, despite our small size, to impact on our community.

Given this dynamic around capacity, communication with those beyond our congregation is an area that consistently receives very little of our attention, whether from staff or the congregation as a whole. We focus most of our time and energy on internal communications—the bulletin, the Chimes, and the weekly First Notes. We struggle to keep up the basic elements of our website and social media presence, as well as our external and internal physical signage. We also lack an overall strategy for this communications work. Having a clear strategy would help us to better use the resources of staff and volunteer time that we do have available.

Proposal:

I would like to propose that over the next year, we make some time and space to focus on developing a communications strategy, with a focus on better balancing our internal and external communications.

For the next year, I would like to experiment with publishing the Chimes quarterly, instead of monthly. The rhythm would roughly correspond to the liturgical year -- February (Lent), May (Summer), Sept (Fall) and November (Advent). The emphasis would be more on reflective pieces and less on sharing all the latest news (which would happen in the First Notes, and occasional special emails). We could seek feedback from the congregation about this experiment, and decide, at the end of the year, whether or not to return to monthly publication schedule.

At the same time, we would foster a conversation/ convene a task force to develop our communications strategy. Chris has knowledge and skill, as well as leadership energy, that he is willing to bring to this task. Sarah and I would also be integrally involved. And we would seek out a few people from the congregation to help us – hopefully folks who might be willing to serve as ongoing volunteers in the area of developing social media or web content.