

FCC Board Meeting Minutes
First Congregational Church of Minnesota, United Church of Christ
Thursday, April 24, 2025
7:00 – 8:30 pm

In attendance: Allegra Montanari, Mary Byers, Jane McBride, Jean Anderson, Paul Snyder, Rob cooper, Jeff Peterson, Xan Laurence; absent, Linda Valerian, Kris Felbeck. Paul Snyder facilitated in place of Linda, who was ill.

1. For the opening, Allegra read Robert Frost's "A Time to Talk"
2. Minutes from March meeting were approved
3. Creating our mission statement: *What are our initial "take aways" from the input we've gathered? What outcomes do we hope will come from our retreat? What sort of process will support us in creating these outcomes?*

Board members shared impressions from 1:1 conversations and the March 23 service. These included:

- The church seems like a safe, friendly welcoming place
- There is connectedness and community, but is there a danger of becoming too insular, too inward looking?
- The church evokes a visual of being held.
- It has a unique location and history
- If people feel we're safe, does that mean they've experienced unsafe churches?
- The church meets the needs of its members
- Is the feeling of safety because of the instability of the current time?
- Safety is not only physical or political, but also spiritual, but not much is said about the spiritual aspect
- The spiritual aspect seems to be implicit, not explicit
- Members experience a variety of spiritual experiences or desires – there is a spectrum of belief, but all are accepted
- Acceptance and belonging were referenced in the Flourish report
- The idea of "cultivating space for belonging, looking both inward and outward" was raised
- The Vinery collaboration and building use efforts push us toward being more rooted in and connected to the immediate neighborhood – is that our real priority? Should we emphasize Marcy Holmes, Minneapolis, or what?

4. The expectations for the Board Retreat were discussed.

What do we need from this board retreat, and how much can we accomplish in three hours?

Come up with a draft of a statement, something describing us, something that gives us a sense of direction. But we should not expect to end up with a finished statement right away.

How do our goals fit in? Do we have a strategic plan? Can we say what we're about and what we're going to do?

Can we create a brief statement that we put on everything – website, bulletin, newsletter, etc.?

Do we want to change or keep our current visual logo?

How do we incorporate the input from the various conversations?

We need to create a memorable, aspirational statement, which is challenging. It can start as a top-down, abstract concept, or as a bottom-up, concrete expression.

It could be brief statement or a “tagline”, along with a deeper mission or vision statement that says, “This is what you can find, or who you can be if you join us” – an answer to the question “What do I get out of going here? Why should I bother?”

People have to want to be here – there's so much else that is competing with Sunday morning church services.

Make it an artistic experience, like the Easter Sunday service – fresh, surprising, magical.

One response to the YouTube video of the Good Friday service called it “performance art”.

A suggestion was made that each board member bring to the retreat three verbs, three nouns, and three adjectives that could be used for formulating the statement.

Using AI to help with creating the statement was discussed. There were various opinions, pro and con. Artificial intelligence has no soul or spiritual side, but might be useful for data analysis. Some were curious to find out what results it might produce.

5. Board member ministry team reports

- *Jeff, Congregational Care Team*

Jeff attended the meeting on March 3 and reported on the current activities such as mailing cards to members experiencing times of concern or celebration, collaborating with the Vinery team, hosting game nights, planning other events and gatherings, and supporting members' needs. He conveyed the team's appreciation for the board setting goals and annual themes. His full report is in Dropbox.

6. Chimes – *Now that we've had time to experience the change in our publication calendar of Chimes, what have we learned, and where do we want to go from here?*

The board's observations included:

We need to improve our internal communication with the members. A year ago, the Chimes went from being published monthly to quarterly, but it still contains reports, reflections, upcoming events, and other information.

We also need to improve our external communication, such as the website, YouTube channel, and social media.

The Chimes is a part of church history – if we stop publishing it altogether, we should acknowledge it and recognize it.

Can we keep the same information available in some other form for those members who find the reports and reflections to be of value to them, perhaps as blog entries linked from the weekly emails?

A suggestion was made to publish the Chimes as an annual, but we already do an annual report, which is large and daunting to some readers. A newsletter is less so. The communication process is about meaning-making.

Which is the more labor intensive, content creation, or publication preparation?

We need to distinguish the information that we are willing to share internally, but which may not be for external publication.

We have a lot going on, and other voices should be heard, not just those of the pastor and the board.

Jane's reflections could give the public an idea of who we are.

Could this be a physical thing again, as it was in the past, but in a different format with more visual interest? The current version is extremely text heavy. What would give the most value for the least amount of work, but still include the most vital information?

Mary, Rob, Allegra, Jane, and Sarah T. will discuss surveying the congregation for their thoughts about what they need the Chimes to be.

7. Reports and action –

- Personnel Committee

Allegra reported that there would be information to share regarding Brad's medical leave at the next board meeting.

8. Allegra closed with Wendy Cope's "The Orange"

Board retreat: May 10, 9:00AM – 12:00PM

Next Board meeting: May 15, 2025, 7:00-8:30PM

Xan Laurence, secretary