

**Thomas Jefferson Memorial Church - Unitarian Universalist
BOARD OF TRUSTEES MARCH MEETING**

March 29, 2018

MINUTES

BOARD GOALS

- **VISION** - Develop and share vision for church in effective ways
- **STEWARDSHIP** - Increase understanding that all TJMC members are responsible for its well-being
- **ADMINISTRATION** - Ensure TJMC's infrastructure can meet its needs
- **RACIAL JUSTICE** - Lead TJMC's racial justice work inside and outside our walls
- **TRUST** - Strengthen trust relationships between congregation members, and board and congregation
- **75TH ANNIVERSARY** - Create a fun and meaningful celebration

BOARD COVENANT

As the 2017-2018 Board of Trustees, we covenant with one another:

- To show up prepared, and ready to work
- To keep our mission in the forefront of our thinking
- To engage with one another and our work thoughtfully, respectfully, and with a whole heart
- To take on responsibilities beyond our monthly meetings, and then to follow through
- To listen deeply, assuming good intentions
- To speak our own truth, to honor the lived experiences of others
- To remember those who are not in the room, and to be mindful of the impact of our decisions (and our interactions) and not just our intent
- To help one another grow into our best selves
- To speak with one voice once a Board decision has been made
- To keep space in our meetings for laughter and love.

In attendance - Adam Slate - President, Annalee Durland-Jones, Colleen Anderson - President Elect, Ian Sole, Ann Salamini - Secretary, David Mick, Karen Ransom - Past President, Erik Wikstrom - Ex Officio, Leia Durland-Jones - Ex Officio, Cindy Shepard, Chris Rivera - Ex Officio, Jeanine Braithwaite - Treasurer

Absent - Katharine Maus

Guests - Frank Dukes

I. Opening--(45 minutes total) Opening/Closing Words (Adam), Snacks (Adam), and Process Review (All)

Opening words – Adam

Public Comment – None

Check in -

1. Acceptance of Agenda

MOTION: Accept the Agenda.

Unanimously accepted.

2. Correspondence - (see text at end of minutes)

- Sheri Edgecomb - email on anonymity of Pulse Survey responses
- Stan Walker - letter of apology
- Lynn Heath - In support of the church I love

II. Reports

1. President's Report (written) – Adam Slate.

2. Vice President's Report (n/a) – vacant

3. Treasurer's Report (oral) – Jeanine Braithwaite

Finance Committee reviewed their past interactions with the DAF and wrote an apology to her. They have projected a budget for 2018-19 including a program budget overlay to accompany the line item budget. These will be distributed to the board electronically. The budget will be in deficit when it is presented to the congregation in May. Finance will dialog with the congregation about spending priorities compared to what we have spent on in the past. This outreach will be paired with requests for increased pledging as the fastest way to get one's priorities funded. Finance will seek this input via a drop-by table in the Social Hall. There will be index cards to fill out, names encouraged. They hope people will recognize and engage with all the things this church does.

Finance offered to provide a draft balanced budget with reduced staff costs, but were reminded that that was not the direction from the board at this time. We have asked instead for projections based on increased revenue .

Finance members have been asked to participate in stewardship calls. They prefer to work with numbers, not people. Regardless of our comfort level, we're all going to have to do a lot of talking with people about money.

Discussion -

- Are we being inconsistent by allowing anonymous feedback in this case? - Finance discussed this at length. The index cards will have check boxes for feedback and names will be actively encouraged.
- We will need one or two extra board meetings on the budget. - We can schedule them now.

4. Lead Minister's Report (written) – Erik Wikstrom
Comments -

- This report contained an honest reflection of the Monday night listening circle.

5. Director of Faith Development Report (written) – Leia Durland-Jones

The racist note and aftermath made for a really hard month, which started the day after Dream Quest. Pastoral care needs have really risen, including around crises of faith.

6. Director of Administration and Finance Report (written) – Christina Rivera

The deficit is back on track for where it should be, at \$33K. Pledge income from February, a short month, was low. This is the time of year when lump sum pledges start coming in. The situation is being monitored carefully.

A homeschool group has had a rental walk through. They hope to rent the Lower Hall every Monday during the school year. Chris based the contract on the Molly Michie Preschool contract with the difference that the homeschool group will be responsible for returning the rooms to normal setup. The homeschool has its own insurance.

Since Monday is a light rental day and the office is closed, there should be minimal competition with church groups for the space.

Discussion -

- People may like seeing activity in the church.
- Chris asked for feedback about her authority to write a lengthy contract. - Although this contract is relatively small, larger contracts would benefit from another pair of eyes looking it over.
- Has our template contract been reviewed legally? - Perhaps there is legal expertise within the church to review indemnification clauses, etc., for the protection of the church.

There will be a one-year-only bump in the deficit at the end of this fiscal year because of changing how late pledges are posted. It is explainable and doesn't affect the actual deficit, but will raise concern.

Personnel Committee has delayed implementation of the retroactive payment for staff insurance, which is frustrating for the staff involved. Donna Redmond was elected chair of the committee. They had a productive and functional meeting.

Regarding the elephant in the report, It will take time to heal, do the work required and move on. It's hard to be at one's best after such an incident; please be patient.

7. Membership Report (written) – Sally Taylor

Membership stands at 419, up 2 from last month.

8. Board Liaison Reports

- Personnel Committee – Chris
See DAF report.

- Nominating Committee – Karen

There are some critical positions open on the board and Nominating Committee and not a lot of names in the pot. Please keep thinking about good people for some of these positions. The board Vice President can be a shared position; Sally Taylor will undertake the VP tasks but needs a partner to act as the board member.

- 75th anniversary - Karen/Leia

There have been no conversations since the postponement. This needs to get back on track. Erik contributed that April 29th will be the anniversary Sunday service and celebratory potluck. After the state of the church conversation we can better assess how to move forward with other anniversary-related events.

III. Consent Agenda / Electronic Motions

1. Approve February 2018 Board Minutes.
2. Accept verbal and written reports as submitted.

MOTION: Approve the Consent Agenda.

Unanimously approved.

IV. Old Business

1. Pledge drive - Chris and Adam (5 min)
(What will the pledge drive look like this year?)

The people who will be contacted (for coffee, visits, conversation) have been identified as well as those who have indicated willingness to make visits. There will be a mini training session before assigning names. The person's history and suggested ask will be provided, as well as feedback questions about where people are feeling engaged with the congregation. These will be full stewardship asks, not just fiscal asks.

Discussion -

- Can we also contact those who have not completed their pledge for this year? - They will be part of this outreach. We are making a shift toward year round stewardship
- Are people clear about the automatic rollover of pledges? We need to do more teaching about this. - Filling out pledge cards will come after the stewardship calls.
- What is the timetable? - The visits will happen in April and communication about renewing pledges will be at the end of April.
- Can we schedule the training sessions and layout when visits should be made? - It's difficult to have a firm timeline because these conversations will be draining in the current situation. The budget conversation is not predicated on these visits, however; we

have good budget projections in hand right now. Any effect of the stewardship visits will be to decrease the deficit.

- Changing to this pledge system allows us to create a reasonable budget before the pledge total comes in. We have the expertise to project with some confidence.
- We had planned to renew pledges this year with an automatic increase, but the stewardship work hasn't progressed that far. We are getting the organizational format in place now, however.

2. Update on UUA consulting - Adam + Erik (5 min)

This update refers to bringing in a facilitator to work on the recommendations from the Next Steps consultation last August. Adam has been in conversation with UUA Southern Region staff, who have put us in touch with a UU consultant, Paula Cole Jones. She is well qualified for this role as well as helping us address our current needs around processing the issues since the anonymous note.

The Southern Region staff also wants to have a call with the board as an introduction. (The regional staff will have a coaching role with the board. Paula Cole Jones will interact more with the congregation.) We can do it as a ZOOM call so everyone feels more present. Adam will send an email to select the date. (April 19th is a possible date.)

Erik has corresponded with Paula Cole Jones who asked a lot of good questions for context. Where does one discussion end and the other start? Her opinion is that the note is an example of a deeper distrust within the congregation, so the same conversation will naturally address both issues. She suggests a weekend event:

- Friday night session for senior staff and board aimed at getting us working really well together. She uses a personality tool for this purpose.
- Saturday session with the congregation to work on trust and relationship. She has materials to help us navigate change and move toward being a more inclusive congregation. The goal is to avoid polarization and examine who we want to be.

She has a wise way of bringing the two seemingly separate conversations into one.

Discussion -

- The personality tool doesn't seem like a good use of our time. We did similar work at our board retreat; the current board is in its last months. - This will be good feedback for her.
- This weekend will be the beginning of a longer process, shaped by the results of the weekend.
- The UUA can be in touch with the congregation on this work for up to two years.
- Remember that we've got a lot of extras planned for board - budget, auction, stewardship visits. Be aware of the fatigue on the board and the congregation. - There are four suggested weekends in May and June.
- We are keeping updates in the orders of service and weekly emails to remind the congregation that we are working on setting up the consultations.
- The congregation is currently polarized. Are we seeking a cultural change or just to remind people what our culture is? - This is a big topic we should explore.

BREAK AND GRATITUDE CARDS (15 min) - Please think of people the Board should recognize for their recent contributions to our church community.

3. Report on Board process observation - Frank Dukes (30 min)

Frank observed the February Board meeting. He passed out a report called Prologue for a TJMC-UU Equity Audit. He advised us to pay attention to the burnout issue, particularly of Board presidents, and pointed out the importance of relationships to help with this.

Prologue for a TJMCU-U Equity Audit

1. This is prologue: One visit to one Board meeting, by one white male, is only dipping a toe into the self-examination that we collectively need to be conducting, not only of Board meetings but of our bylaws, structures and processes. A facilitated equity audit allows for ongoing self-examination and learning.

2. Affirmation: I saw mostly positive elements of the meeting, in addition to the fact that so many of the Board and Staff were giving of your precious time. These include attention to relationship, as shown by beginning with a check-in; multiple examples of active listening and acknowledgment; allowance of free back and forth; and a number of responses from Adam acknowledging the limitations of his perspective, while checking in with the group.

3. The significance of relationship: The story of Board burn-out is common. There can be many reasons for that. But I note that in general, people *begin* their involvement for substantive reasons (or because they are asked!), but what *keeps* people engaged most often is the meaning they find in that involvement. That especially includes the meaning they find in relationships with one another.

4. Balancing relationship/learning/vision/detail (following up on #3): Technical matters are essential – committee reports, budgets, facilities maintenance, for example. But I am concerned that so much time spent talking about those can mask the need to talk through issues of vision and values. Focus on the details can be an expression of conflict avoidance. It also may cost you an opportunity to share and learn from a group of dedicated, creative, generous individuals. Is there any way to flip the ratio of detail to big picture discussion?

5. Consider relieving the Board President from the duty of running the meeting, which should mean paying close attention to group culture and dynamics rather than the substance of issues. Doing that would allow the Presidents to focus on that substance and their role as a voting member of the Board.

Some brief observations:

- More than one member spent parts of the meeting on their devices attending to other matters. Even those presumably taking notes often were not facing the speaker(s), which is a subtle but impactful way of breaking relationship. Perhaps it is not a micro-aggression, but it is a micro-disruption.
- Instead of “public input”, why not name it something more inviting and something that does not imply a “we” and “they” – perhaps, “community matters” or “community time”?

A not-overwhelming list of resources:

Begin with White Supremacy Culture. Focus on what to do (in bold) rather than the characteristics, especially if you have problems labeling all of those aspects as white supremacy rather than patriarch or narcissism or other lenses that also see those behaviors. For example, antidotes [to perfectionism]: develop a culture of appreciation, where the organization takes time to make sure that people’s work and efforts are appreciated; develop a learning organization, where it is expected that everyone will make mistakes and those mistakes offer opportunities for learning ...

http://www.cwsworkshop.org/PARC_site_B/dr-culture.html

Staffing for diversity From the UUA (especially V, “Ongoing Staff Support”): Note question 3: How might our congregational/community culture support attracting and retaining diversity in our staff leadership? How might our congregation/community need to change? What are we willing to sacrifice to achieve this goal?

<https://www.uua.org/careers/congregations/staffing/diversity>

Note also this advice from Staffing for diversity. I think this questioning needs to be an ongoing process; just like brushing our teeth, doing this once is not enough: What norms are operating in your congregation - unwritten rules, patterns, or ways of being that you don't even notice because they are simply "part of the water you swim in"? Congregational norms aren't necessarily good or bad, but it's important to recognize them and to consider how they might make life easier for some staff members and harder for others. Adding to these organizational norms are biases and assumptions that you and other individuals might bring to your leadership. See if you can name things that are "just how it works" in your congregation, look at your own leadership with fresh eyes, and think about how these ways of being may impact staff of marginalized identities.

Reaching for Higher Ground: Tools for Powerful Groups and Communities. This book, in Rev Wik’s library (and I have copies to lend), provides guidance for groups to examine and change those norms that are unproductive or even destructive, and to build those that enhance relationship and group effectiveness.

Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA) – by Race Forward. This is a 2-page guide that is useful during decision making processes.

https://www.raceforward.org/sites/default/files/RacialJusticeImpactAssessment_v5.pdf

Assessing Organizational Racism. This is another 2-page guide that can help prompt reflection.

<http://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/westernstates2.pdf>

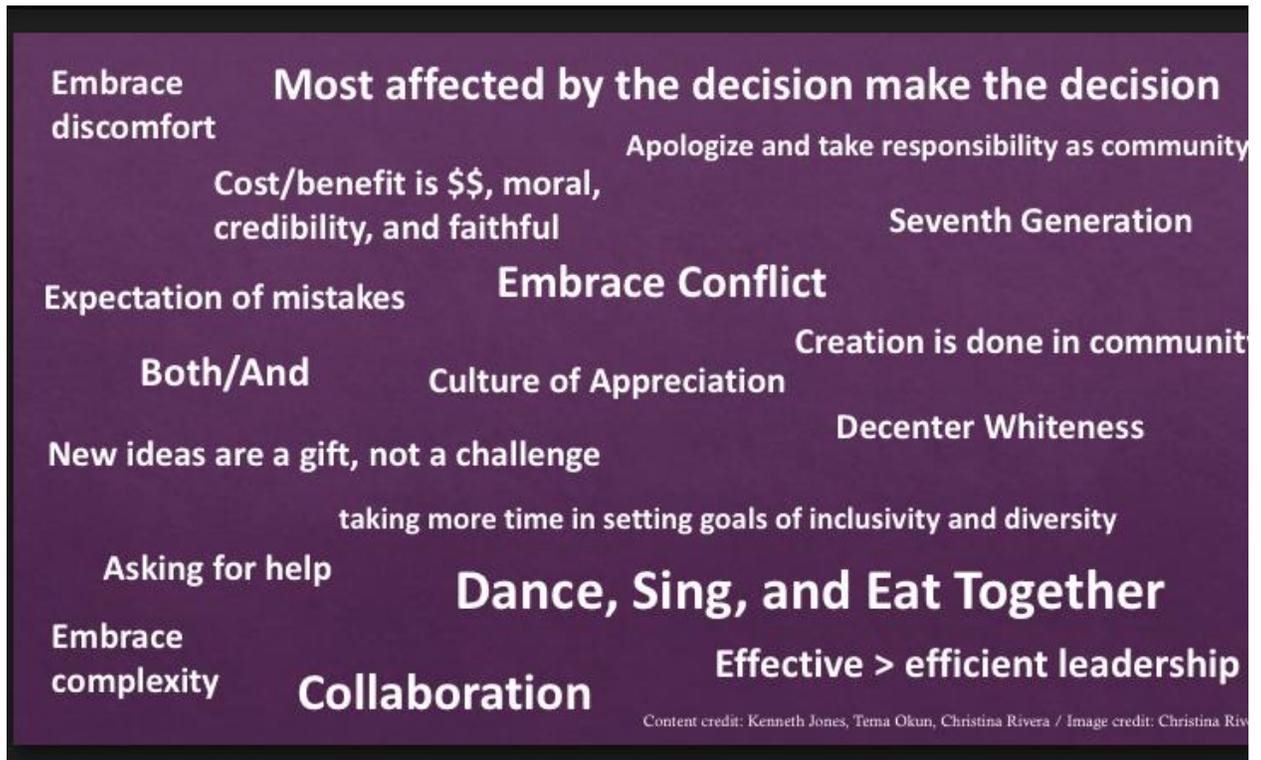
Breaking Robert's Rules: The New Way to Run Your Meeting, Build Consensus, and Get Results. Robert's Rules of Order privileges one way of thinking and behaving. There are others, and this book helps support authentic consensus building.

For a longer list, look at Organizational Assessment Tools and Resources:
<https://www.racialequitytools.org/plan/informing-the-plan/organizational-assessment-tools-and-resources>

Frank doesn't think of this as a broken board or a broken church. But we've ignored some things for a long time which have caused deep hurt to the board and to other people who are no longer with the church. We should embrace the idea of ongoing self-assessment to become the church, and the board, we want to be.

Discussion -

- Should we put the board covenant on the agenda? - Yes. Having this up front is a good idea. Even reading it aloud together would help ground us as the meeting starts.
- Add what you would like to see different in the ending process review, to encourage comment from someone who is less satisfied.
- The relationship piece is huge and part of all areas of church life.
- The board always dances between detail / task and big picture. We are trying to avoid micromanagement but still need to pay attention to this.
- The idea of a moderator to run the meeting is worth considering. It is very difficult for the President to focus on both the mechanics and content of the meeting.
 - Running the meetings is not the board's priority. It's helpful to have someone paying attention to the details.
 - It's part of succession change for the past president to do that for the new president. To give context and remind about loose ends.
 - People can take charge of pieces of the meeting to relieve the president. This helps others to pay attention to the dynamics of the meeting. The culture we're embedded in is so challenging to escape.
- Changing Public Comment to Community Time is a small but meaningful change.
- One can routinely ask "How are we living up / falling short?"
- In Characteristics of White Supremacy, we tend to focus on the characteristics but not antidotes. Chris has put them all on one page for us to keep before us. It would help us learn to flex that muscle.
 - Put this in the minutes.
 - This should be shared with the congregation as well.



- We will be bringing in a consultant to look at trust issues and governance structure, overlapping with what's been happening in the church over the last month. Where would the racial equity audit fit in?
 - The Racial Justice Committee will be advocating for some kind of continuing racial equity audit.
 - The committee has requested money in the budget for this.
 - This process is not a burden. It can be very helpful, as well as enjoyable, liberating and energizing.

Many thanks to Frank!

4. Facilitated discussion of current state of the church and Board's leadership role -

Adam (30 min)

Discussion -

- It's every board member's job to engage with congregation, especially now. Please do this.
- Thanks for the excellent sermon Sunday (March 25, "Resurrecting Our Commitments") with Adam and Laurie Craddock.
- The congregation needs to hear many different voices.
- We've discussed why anonymity is inappropriate, yet we still grapple with carrying it out. We clearly responded to this example of anonymity. But the quandary generally is that

you can't really respond to an anonymous comment. - This was an attack, which requires a different reaction.

- Best practice recommends that an anonymous comment should be disregarded. But some things (a bomb threat, for example) must be responded to. The note also pointed out a systemic issue, which likewise requires a response.
- Church leadership promptly responded to the note as unacceptable. That initial response has generated responses leading to a larger and larger conversation. This has opened the eyes of many that we are not as far removed from white supremacy and racist behavior as we like to think. If we want to be a multicultural community, we can't enforce white culture and assumptions.
- Back channel conversations among congregants can amount to rehearsing grievances, but they can also help to shape opinion and lead to engaging with the congregation as a whole. The letter circulated last year before the vote on the deficit budget and the effort to fund IMPACT this year are examples of positive engagement.
- Avoidance of conflict is a problem. It makes discussion with a person over a disagreement or performance issues impossible.
- There are many reasons people want the option of anonymity. They may prefer to remain silent or step away from the church rather than speak an uncomfortable or difficult or extreme point of view. Generally, anonymity encourages more points to be expressed.
- Anonymity within a power differential may be appropriate.
- This is a great failing of our church. If we are supposed to be a loving church family, there must be trust. - The "family" metaphor doesn't really work with a group of 400 people.
- Trust may exist between / among some and not others.
- There are ways to move toward a feeling of trust within a large group that allows people to feel safe to express themselves.
- Congregants don't realize how much power is given them in the bylaws.
- Erik recalled his metaphor of the minister as the navigator, not the captain. That is because this is a congregationally directed group.
- People expressed wildly divergent thoughts at the Monday night listening circle, and they were listened to. We stayed in a circle in spite of saying difficult things. So encouraging safety decreased the need for anonymity.
- We should weigh feedback from people who attend regularly more heavily than those who attend occasionally. If comments are anonymous, how do you weigh them?
- Anonymity is not the real issue. It's 'do I feel safe expressing myself and do I feel heard?' People are feeling defensive, vulnerable, confused. We need to make points again and again with patience.
- Making TJMC-UU a place that feels inclusive to people from the margins is our responsibility.
- The level of trust is low in the congregation. Requiring a name puts people on guard.
- Context is important in deciding if anonymity is appropriate.
- White allies have work to do to make it a safe place to talk about racism. Chris provided a link to the VUU episode about white UU allies self-identifying as racist:

- <https://youtu.be/ubKHEyAPZr8> Link to previous episodes:
<https://www.questformeaning.org/vuu/>
- This is an opportunity for faith development. The spectrum of where people are is amazing. People need opportunities to grow and change and stretch themselves. We need to stay with the work, show up in ways to build trust and strengthen our community.

V. New Business

VI. Closing Activities (5 minutes)

1. Process Review (all):

2. Things to do / communicate –

- Schedule extra Board budget meetings
- Adam - send email to select Zoom call date with Southern Region staff
- Set up stewardship visits, training
- Select consultancy weekend
- All - make auction donations by April 8

3. Closing words - Adam

Dates to remember –

April 4, 2018 – Board Exec meeting

April 18, 2018 – Board meeting

April 21, 2018 - Spring Auction

June 3, 2018 Annual Business Meeting after 10AM service

Upcoming topics -

- Policy Review panel - (Empower group to undertake policy review process and bring policy manual up to date)
- Charge for Personnel Committee

REPORTS

President's Report

President's Report to Board March 14, 2018

Dear TJMC Board of Trustees,

Thank you for your attention this month to supporting our Director of Administration & Finance, Christina Rivera, and also being engaged with the congregation as a whole. It continues to be an

important time for church leaders to be solidifying our relationships with members of our community.

Last month, the Committee on Ministry (COM) asked us to respond promptly to the congregational survey once we receive the results. Our responsibility is to share the results with the congregation openly and in a manner that allows us to discuss it together. I would also suggest that we have a role to play in making sure that the results are seen as a pulse check on the congregation at a point in time, and not necessarily an action checklist to be completed.

The COM had several recommendations for us that are all consistent with the approach the Board has been taking regarding communicating with the congregation. They are:

- As soon as possible after accepting the results compiled by the COM, notify the congregation that the results have been received, and express gratitude to all participants.
- Celebrate the ideas that receive positive feedback, and note how these areas will continue to be supported.
- Restate issues that need to be addressed, and emphasize that there will be plans to remedy them as appropriate.
- Communicate the above in the Board minutes, on the TJMC-UU website, and in an email to the congregation.
- Conduct open discussions about the survey with the congregation.

I hope you agree that these are all reasonable ways to publicize and process the survey results.

Recall that the survey was to be issued starting in mid-March, but is being held for a couple of months. At this point the COM is evaluating whether it makes sense to release it in May or wait until after Summer, a time of year when attendance and participation tend to be lower. I believe they should drive this decision as part of their charge to administer the survey.

I want to update you on my conversations with the UUA regarding having a consultant work with our congregation. At this point, they are recommending that the Southern Region staff work directly with us to coach the board, and also bring in a consultant to work with the congregation on trust and governance issues. We are right in the middle of these conversations, and so I cannot

give you many more details beyond this, but I hope that Colleen and I will be able to come to you at one of our next couple of meetings with a specific proposal to approve for how we might do this work.

This month I have met with a lot of congregation members both at and outside of church. While I am seeing a range of opinions and anxiety levels about the current health of TJMC, I do believe that nearly everyone is committed to maintaining a just, safe, and fulfilling church for our members, staff, and visitors.

Faithfully,
Adam

Treasurer's Report

Minister's Report

Lead Minister's Report to the Board – March 2018

My energy and attention this month has been focused on responding to the vile racist attack against Christina (and her family). While it is certainly clear that not everyone shares this view, I am proud of the way(s) congregational leadership has responded. From the decision to postpone the 75th Anniversary Celebration & Service that had been planned for Wednesday, February 28, support for the strong and unequivocal stands I took both during that service and the one the following Sunday, as well as the Presidents' and the Board's public statements, I think we demonstrated what a "firm and prompt" response to a racist attack looks like. We have not been perfect, of course, and no one should ever expect us (or themselves) to be. I have heard, though, that some of the many embattled UU religious professionals of color have taken our statements to their own Boards to say, in essence, "here's an example of a congregation that's really working to actively support religious professional of color serving there."

All that said, I would like to use this month's Report to the Board to offer my observations of the Congregational Listening Circle held on Monday, March 20th. Others who were there – Adam, Karen, Jeanine, Ann – undoubtedly will have their own perspectives. I am truly grateful that so many Board members *were* able to attend and participate, and want to thank those who for a variety of different reasons were *not* able to be there yet who all sent their supportive best wishes. (I'll add that nearly the entire Committee on the Ministry was able to attend, which I was very glad to see.)

I had no idea how many people would attend the event, but I'd suggested to the people who had volunteered to set up chairs in Lower Hall 2 (Linda Dukes, et al.) that maybe we'd want a circle

of about 20 or 25 chairs. We ended up with somewhere around 75 people! Although the room was more than a little cramped, we stayed there so that we could for the most part see one another. It would have been a very different evening if we'd moved up to the Sanctuary to sit in rows looking at the backs of each others' heads.

I had made an effort to reach out to people who I either knew to have opinions different than my own, or who I thought knew folks who did. I wanted to make sure that there was a diversity of thoughts and feelings in the room, and there certainly was! Some quite honestly didn't see anything particularly racist or threatening in the note that was delivered to Christina; some saw that it was inappropriate and "bad form;" some said they could see it as nothing other than "a terrorist attack." Sometimes there were people with diametrically opposed, and strongly held views sitting near one another.

The intent and structure of the Listening Circle was designed to decrease the likelihood that the evening would devolve into an argument about who was "right" and who was "wrong." Instead, it was to be an opportunity to say what we thought and felt, and an opportunity to *listen* to what others had to say. There were a lot of emotions in the room – pain, anger, suspicion, worry, distrust, offense, compassion, love for the congregation and all of the people in the room (including those who felt differently), commitment to the community, and concern for its future.

It would be impossible to recount the entire evening's content. (The Circle lasted for 2 ½ hours!) We touched on a number of topics, often with different people expressing divergent views on the same topic. In advance I asked that people try to be respectful of the number of people in the room and our limited time; that we should, as we say in our covenant, "communicate with compassion and respect, especially when we disagree;" and that we should focus our attention on the note and what has happened since, rather than talk about performance issues, concerns about the budget, etc. Not everyone was happy about this; some were quite clearly quite frustrated and angry about what may have seemed like an arbitrary limitation on what concerns would be considered valid. I noted that we already have mechanisms in place to have conversations about those things, but that we don't have any mechanisms for talking about a specific racist attack on a member of our community and the way(s) congregational leadership responded. We also don't already have established avenues for talking together about some of the issues raised, such as our individual and collective complicity (recognizing that our congregational systems and structures are both informed by, and reflect, the dominant white supremacist culture we say we're committed to dismantling), as well as the idea that our welcome need not, and should not, be as open as many think. Since we don't already have ways to talk about these things, I said that I thought we should focus on them, leaving other issues to be discussed through the channels that already exist.

I've mentioned earlier that people saw the original note in different ways. There were people there who wanted to express pride and gratitude for the way the leadership has handled things so far, and people who think we took exactly the wrong tack at every turn and that we have worsened the divide and the damage. There were people who thought that Christina's letter was inappropriate and not what should be expected of a faith leader. Others found it to be just

what we all needed to hear, one person saying that he found it to be “a gift,” and an invitation for us go more deeply into our work dismantling white supremacy – as individuals and as a community. Some said that they felt angry and very uncomfortable in a congregation which would say that somebody isn’t welcome; a woman of color said that she wasn’t sure anymore whether this was a congregation in which she and her biracial children really are welcome; and one person asked if it mattered to anyone that we’d heard from a person of color who said quite clearly that she was no longer sure that she and her family belonged. It was noted that the congregation has a culture of treating its leadership badly, freely criticizing in both unhelpful and hurtful ways. It was said that our leadership is, and has been, too aggressive, not open to hearing criticism, and taking the church in the wrong direction.

In short, people *did* say what was on their minds – even, at times, acknowledging that they were worried that people might not still like them after they finished saying what they had to say. I hope people *felt* heard; there have been far too many people who feel that their voices have been silenced. I know that there were people who had chosen not to participate. I hope that if they had, they’d have heard their thoughts and feelings represented. That was one of the two primary reasons for the gathering in the first place – so that every voice could be heard.

I don’t think that the group was divided 50-50 between people who appreciate how things have been handled and those who don’t. I think that it was probably more like 60-40, leaning toward those who disagree with one or more aspects of how congregational leadership (and for many, me specifically) has responded. It is my hope that at least three things came out of the evening:

- People felt that they’d had a fair chance to say what they’re thinking and feeling. I hope no one left feeling that they’d been silenced or dismissed.
- People really heard that there were a number of others who thought and felt what they did, *and* that there were a number of others who did not agree with them. I hope people saw that “we” don’t have just one response.
- People left having heard something from someone they disagreed with that they hadn’t heard or thought of before. I hope that there will be a willingness to practice being the open-minded and open-hearted people our faith calls us to be.

I want to call the Board’s attention to one relevant point that has not, to my knowledge, been brought up in these conversations yet. (Although Patty Wallens did make reference to it in her response to Rob Craighurst’s post on *The Talk of TJMC*.)

Beginning on pg. 71 of our Policy Manual there is a policy regarding, “disruptive behaviors.” (POLICY VIII.A.1) Here are two excerpts I think are extremely relevant to our current situation. (I have italicized a few passages for emphasis.)

Rationale: While honoring the worth and dignity of every individual is one of the central tenets held by TJMC, and is expressed in the Unitarian Universalist Purposes and Principles, we believe our congregation must maintain a secure atmosphere in which openness can exist. Our church strives to be an inclusive community, affirming our differences in belief, opinions, and life

experiences. *Concern for the physical safety and emotional well-being of our congregation as a whole must be given priority over the privileges and inclusion of a particular individual. To the degree the disruption compromises the health and well-being of this congregation, our actions as a church must reflect this emphasis on personal safety and security.* When any person's physical and/or emotional well-being or freedom to safely express his or her beliefs is threatened, the sources of this threat must be addressed firmly and promptly. To the degree possible and appropriate, confidentiality will be maintained.

Definition: *For purpose of this policy, disruptive behavior includes but is not limited to:*

1. Perceived threats to the safety of any adult or child, such as physical or verbal abuse, threats of bodily harm, or sexually inappropriate behavior.
2. Disruption of church activities; and
3. *Diminishment of the appeal of the church to its existing and potential membership through unwanted advances, harassment, and abusive or inappropriate language.*

The Policy identifies four levels of response, the last of which is "expulsion," which, according to our policy, "means that the individual is no longer a member of the congregation, and the individual is directed not to participate in church activities or come onto church property." Our congregation has already affirmed that sometimes our invitation and our welcome need to have limits.

Over the years I have preached repeatedly that the work of dismantling the culture of white supremacy — in ourselves, in our congregation, and in the wider world — will require those of us who identify as white to become extremely uncomfortable. On more than one occasion the congregation responded with applause when I said that it is those of us who are white who will need to do the heavy lifting; who will need to be willing to let go of our assumptions about how things should be done and our expectation that we should be the ones who get to call all the shots; and that the different world we're working for will *be* different and we white folks will feel disoriented and discomfited. After each of those services people called me "brave" for saying what I did.

Our congregation, and we as individuals, are now experiencing some of that discomfort, and it is no less intense than I'd promised. Whether we "get beyond this," as one participant said last night, or, as another one said, "we get through this," will make all the difference in what the next 75 years of our congregational story will look like.

Pax tecum,

RevWik

Director of Faith Development Report

Report to the Board

March 2018

Leia Durland-Jones, Director of Faith Development

Children's Programming (Nursery through 5th grade)

- The **Spring session** of our children's religious education program continues with fun, faith-filled weekly activities nurturing UU identity and emphasizing our shared values and justice work.
- The children made **100 meal packets** on March 18 for distribution through the Interfaith Humanitarian Sanctum. Thanks so much to Margaret Gorman for all her leadership with this initiative.
- The **RE Committee** is at work planning next year's programming for children and youth. Registration for the 2018-2019 church school year begins next month. We hope to host a Kindergarten-Senior High OWL facilitator training for our cluster in August 2018.
- The church's **parents' group** for families with children under twelve will meet in April for fellowship, support and family faith formation.
- We'll be celebrating **May Day** with our annual spring festival including the may pole on Sunday April 29. While this is primarily a celebration for children during their RE time, all are invited to join in the merriment outside (weather permitting) after both services.

Youth Programming (6th-12th grades)

- Our **Neighboring Faiths** (6th & 7th grades) continues to explore the meaning and history of religion and faith traditions. This spring they have learned about Islam and visited the Islamic Society of Central Virginia. They also welcomed a guest speaker on Buddhism.
- Our **Challenge: Coming of Age** (8th & 9th grades) continues to deepen their understanding of Unitarian Universalism through their Sunday RE classes as well as their work with their mentors and COA notebooks. They are hard at work on their faith statements and preparing for the worship service they will lead for the congregation on May 6.
- **YRUU** continues to explore a variety of topics and current events. They enjoyed a recent field trip to Hearthwood Books on the UVa Corner and had lunch together at Bodos. David Mick visited on March 25 to lead an exploration of mindfulness and stress reduction with the group. Thank you David!
- Preparations for **ASP (Appalachia Service Project)** continue for our Coming of Age and YRUU groups. We will participate in ASP this July 1-7. We have an organization meeting planned for April and a safety session coming up in May. Adult advisors for this year's trip are: Beth Jaeger-Landis, Kim Grover, Richard Price, Bob Kiefer, Amy Wissekerke and me.

Adult Programming

Winter/Spring Adult Faith Development classes:

- Our racial justice offerings have been well attended this semester. Upcoming offerings include: Book Discussion of *White Like Me* by Tim Wise, "Lynching in America", and "Racism in the North."
- **Additional, and in some cases ongoing, Adult Faith Development offerings** this semester include: Short Story Reading Group, Tai Chi, Wednesday Wonderings (led

by Lou Centore), Building Your Own Theology (led by Alex McGee,) Being a UU Parent (led by me,) Meditation for People Who Don't Like to Meditate (led by RevWik.)

· Our **Women's Dream Quest** was a great success. Many thanks to the Dream Quest Planning Circle for all their hard work to make it such a great event (Patty Wallens, Michelle Benedict, Anita Holmes, Caitlin Levine, Bonnie Hansen, Claire Zillmer, Callie Smith, Cindy Mick and me.) Members of the DQPC very much enjoyed co-weaving worship with guest preacher Judith Tripp on Sunday February 25.

Multigenerational Programming

· Fun was had by all on Sunday March 18 as we had our first Sunday morning experience of **PJs and Pancakes**. The RE Committee will definitely be including this event on a Sunday morning next year—in fact, maybe more than once during the year.

· A big thanks to the Gill Family (especially Margo and Jeremy) for coordinating and leading our annual multigenerational **Passover Seder**. This event is always delightful!

Worship

Children's Worship

- Erik led Children's Worship on February 25 while I co-led worship in the sanctuary with the Dream Quest Planning Circle.
- We are focusing on the Rainbow Chalice (the pneumatic device for memorizing the UU principles) for the remaining Sundays of the church year. The children always love how we work our way through the rainbow together.

Contemplative Worship

- Contemplative Worship enjoys a steady attendance each Wednesday of 8-10 people and is a lovely mid-week pause. A professor in the UVa art department reached out to me about the possibility of suggesting that some of her students attend and I assured her they would be warmly welcomed. If ever you are free on Wednesdays between 11:30-12:30, I invite you to join us.

Multigenerational Worship

- Our next multigenerational worship service is Easter (April 1.) I will be co-weaving this service with Erik and Lorie Craddock.

Pastoral

· There has been an increase in pastoral care work this past month as congregants have wanted to talk about the racist attack on Chris and what it means both personally and for us as a congregation. It is not an overstatement to say that for some, this incident has provoked a crisis of faith.

· I was happy to interface with members of the Friends Meeting House as they borrowed our congregation's versatile labyrinth for their annual silent retreat.

Professional Development and Opportunities

- My work with the UUA's Resource Revision Team for the UUA's Credentialing Program finishes up in early April.
- I was pleased to be invited to co-lead another on-line UUA Renaissance Module (a continuing education program for religious professionals) on UU Identity.

Director of Administration and Finance Report

Director of Administration and Finance – Christina Rivera

Board Report, March 29 2018 mtg

February 2018

- Number of emails received: 2796
- Helped prep and support PACEM
- Prepped facilities for inclement weather days
- Prep and attended following meetings:
 - Exec. Mtg
 - Board Meeting
 - Presidents Mtgs
 - Finance Committee Mtg

FY 18 Financial Report Notes:

February 2018

Year to Date Month-End Report*

	Budget	Actual	Difference
Revenue	\$368K	\$317K	(\$51K)
Expenses	\$373K	\$350K	\$23K
Revenue/(Deficit)	(\$5K)	(\$33K)	(\$28K)

- Operating deficit increased according to budget to \$33K
- Expenses continue to be managed with deferred staff and program costs
- Revenue: Rental income continues to track high due to sustained repeat rentals with various organizations
- Revenue is tracking lower in two areas:
 - Pledge lag: the pledge lag increased from last month and I will continue to closely monitor pledge payments.
- Professional Development expenses are overstated due to the credit card payment not yet being line item coded in full. However, the payment has been allocated to expenses so it will not affect our bottom line expense/revenues. As of this report writing I have coded all but one of the payments and expect to have that complete by the next reporting cycle.

Stewardship Coordination / Admin assistance:

- I have selected Steven Radilla, a first year UVa student, to be our contract Admin Assistant. He has begun his work and has been welcomed to the office.
- Have continued prepping reports needed for initial stewardship contacts and planning

Personnel Notes:

- Personnel Committee met on 2/26 without me due to extenuating circumstances. Adam Slate filled in and led the committee on a re-review of its decision from last month regarding Health Care Benefits paid to employees per the Personnel Policy Manual. The Committee decided to delay its previous decision and will reconvene to explore the issue further.
- Based upon the above decision by the Personnel Committee, I have paused working up a payment schedule for the retroactive payments and will not be presenting a proposal at the March Board meeting. 3/29 Update: the Personnel Committee met yesterday and asked that I provide them with the dollar figures for retroactive payments.
- Your DAF found the above actions distressing in an already stressful time. The employee who originally asked for this review has waited almost a full year and I had communicated to them the resolution from last month which was welcome news to them. I then had to retract that communication and place them back into a holding pattern. I have communicated my distress to Adam and we have been in conversation about impact vs intent.

Elephant in the report:

- By the time of the reading of this report it will have been a month since I received the anonymous racist message in my inbox. It has been and continues to be a challenging, difficult, and exhausting time to serve TJMC-UU. I appreciate your messages of support and everything that is being done to move the congregation through these times. I would remind folks that it will take time for us all to heal and me specifically. Please be patient.
- I ask that the following pieces of initial public correspondence around this issue be included in this Board packet when posted to the website. The reason is so that there is some institutional documentation of this event.
 - 2-27-2018 Email “Important Announcement from TJMC-UU”
 - 3-2-2018 Letter from the TJMC Board of Trustees
 - 3-3-2018 Email “Culture of Complicity”

2-27-2018 Email “Important Announcement from TJMC-UU”

Dear Members and Friends of TJMC-UU,

The following anonymous note was discovered on Monday in the office mailbox of Christina Rivera, our Director of Administration & Finance:

quit your whining. its always about racism with you. you have a job do it. we went into debt for your full time and now you complain? your kids must be so proud at least they are just half maybe they are learning from their dad. you should be thankful and get to working.

This racist act is unacceptable. As Presidents of the Board of Trustees, Lead Minister, and Director of Faith Development, we are outraged. Let us be perfectly clear--this will not be tolerated in our congregation.

In light of this, we feel that it would be disingenuous to go forward with the celebration of TJMC's 75th anniversary on Wednesday evening. We have instead decided to organize a worship service to allow us to gather and begin confronting what has happened and what it says about white supremacy in our congregation. This service will begin at 6:15pm, and be the only event taking place that evening. Childcare will be provided. Family time and the shared dinner will be postponed until the 75th anniversary celebration is rescheduled.

In faith,
Adam Slate, President
Colleen Anderson, President-Elect
Karen Ransom, Past-President
Erik Wikstrom, Lead Minister
Leia Durland-Jones, Director of Faith Development

3-2-2018 Letter from the TJMC Board of Trustees

Dear Members and Friends of TJMC-UU,

We are writing to you in response to the unacceptable racist act towards our Director of Administration and Finance, Christina Rivera.

We are outraged. Our faith calls us to speak out against racism. Our first principle calls us to respect the inherent worth and dignity of every person. As Rev. Wik often says, "We welcome all who would welcome all."

Unitarian Universalism is an interconnected web of faith, community, and responsibility. As part of this covenant, we agree to respect each other no matter the race, age, gender, or sexual orientation of those who are a part of our community. This act of blatant racism is out of covenant.

As a congregation, we must support Chris and her family both on a professional and a personal level. We admire you Chris, and we hold you, support you, and will be here for you through this difficult time.

We commit ourselves, as a board and as a congregation, to examine and eradicate our own perpetuation of the culture of white supremacy under which this despicable action occurred.

In love and faith,

The TJMC-UU Board of Trustees

Culture of Complicity

Like every other Monday morning since I started at TJMC-UU in 2015, after our ministry staff team meeting I picked up my mail and sat at my desk to sort it. I came to "the note" towards the last. As I read the note, my breath stopped...not like a metaphorical stop, it actually stopped. I couldn't breathe and at the same time I wanted to vomit. I must have made some kind of sound because Alex came out of her office and stood in my doorway and asked if I was alright. I could only hold my hand out in a stop motion so that she wouldn't come near me, I couldn't image anyone touching me in that moment. When I finally took a breath it was to begin a keening cry of rage, anger, hate, hurt and sorrow. In my mind I was desperate to know where my children were and remembered they were at school. I didn't know what to do; I couldn't stay at church and I didn't want that vile piece of paper in my hand so I took a picture of it, handed the note to Alex and asked her to get it to Wik. I ran from the building to my car and drove away. Do you feel it? Do you feel my humanity being stripped away in one quick motion? Do you feel a mother's terror at thinking this person who has hate in their heart for me knows my children?

This is not the first time a member of this congregation has anonymously attacked staff. Rev. Leslie Takahashi recounts this event:

In the winter of 2008, we were conducting a church-wide exercise in visioning and we asked people to send in their wishes/hopes/dreams. One was not signed and it said something like: "My hope is that we never have to hear Leslie's (derogatory words) voice again."

We raised it with the Board however their sentiment was that it was just one voice. That incident was part of our decision to move on because it was clear that there was not commitment to protect me as a minister of color. Glad to hear the Board has a different response today. In faith, Leslie

But let me be absolutely clear...the congregation as a whole and individually are responsible for these types of racist attacks. Let me say it again, if you are reading this you bear some measure of responsibility for this attack. Because it is a congregational culture of white supremacy that made this person feel it was entirely appropriate to have these thoughts, had them affirmed and then acted out on them. This congregation is complicit in creating an atmosphere in which those thoughts and feelings thrive and were then born into action.

And in the time I have been here, I have experienced a myriad of ways the congregation has exerted its white supremacy culture into my ministry. Here are just a few I can name off the top of my head:

I will be grouping my following notes into categories (micro-aggressions, perfectionism, sense of urgency, defensiveness, quantity over quality, worship of the written word, paternalism, either/or thinking, power hoarding, fear of open conflict, progress is bigger/more, objectivity, right to comfort)

- *Last year's vacation*
- *Behind the scenes complaining about my role in last year's exposing white supremacy in the UUA*
- *Program Budget*
- *Church size dynamics*
- *Medical premium payout*
- *Working 30 hours vs fulfilling every expressed need*
- *Putting staff fair compensation before building reserve*
- *Revisiting staff medical premium benefit decision*
- *Questioning time spent on denominational leadership*
- *Being told that it is hard to do my assessment because leadership had to be careful because it could be seen as racist*
- *Putting racial justice before calendaring*
- *Finance Comm members saying I lied about budget being shown to them before it being shown to Board*
- *Hiring contracts going to POC*

- *Weaponizing pledging*
- *Quincanera comments*
- *Finance committee members feeling like they had less input into budget development when it was the exact same process, the only difference was I completed the budget format rather than the former treasurer, a white male minister*
- *Jesse Jackson POC only seating*

I have appreciated your many notes, emails, calls and messages of support and encouragement. Many of you reached out to say how glad you are that I am here, that my family and I are in your thoughts and prayers. I really appreciated all of those expressions...AND I, WE, people of color, need your BEHAVIOUR to change. Let me say it again, we don't need your thoughts and prayers...we need your BEHAVIOUR to change.

And if you don't think any of the above behavior actually made a difference in the culture of white supremacy at TJMC-UU let me just challenge you to this...just try it...try and change your behavior and let's see where that gets us. Set up an accountability circle, and decide on actual behaviours you are going to change and then check in with each other. When you get called in by someone take a moment to check in with your circle. Maybe nothing will change...or maybe everything will.

So here are some behaviors we need to change at TJMC-UU to make a shift into true Anti-Oppression, Anti-Racism Multi-Cultural (ARAOMC) space:

- You will not undercut my, or any staff's, ministry anymore. The time and effort we spend thinking about how you all are going to react to every level of decision making is exhausting and makes our entire congregation, and our ministry in particular, ineffective.
 - We are going to assume that you are behind us...all the way...for EVERY decision we make. Because you called us to this ministry...and we are finally going to take you at your word.
 - If you have a concern about our leadership, you will come to me (or Wik or Leia) directly, that's it...no stopping off anywhere else on your way to us. If we cannot work it out, we will seek the help of an appropriate facilitator AFTER you have met with a clearing council which will help you work through your concern with an ARAOMC lens.
 - But other than that, we are going to lead...because that is why you called us. If, after participating in the process named above, you don't like where or HOW we are leading, you will need to leave or ask us to leave.
- We are going to fully fund the budget. No more deficit. If you are here you are all in. No more using your pledge like a weapon. It is a pledge of your financial commitment to this church, its mission and our service in ministry. Because as long as we are looking inward at our perceived scarcity we are not looking outward at work that needs to be done in the world.
- Everyone will make some stewardship commitment as able in their circumstance:

- Financial and/or
- Volunteering (RE, Buildings and Grounds, Worship, committee service, making a meal for staff, something!)
 - Support the Board of Trustees as they navigate these new waters.
- Are you concerned that the minutes aren't on the website, ask how you can help rather than assume something is being done to hide the information.
- Wondering about a decision? ask that person and then sit with the answer for at least a week. Or better yet take it to that accountability circle and discuss.
- Check in with the Board every other month, how can you help support their leadership and success? What do they need?
 - Bring at least one idea to the Racial Justice team about how we can be active in our community directly support communities affected by mass incarceration and deportation. And then be prepared to not do any of the ideas that you brought but support other ideas which come from these communities. Why these communities? Because it's what we said we'd do when we passed the Black Lives Matter public witness statement. Now is the time to act on that commitment.
 - Celebrate our ministry (Board and Staff)
- Let us know when our work touches you spiritually, makes a difference in your life, the life of the congregation, or the community
- Affirm our decisions, even and ESPECIALLY when you are not sure about them
- Specific to your religious professional of color, this is LIBERATION THEOLOGY at work. I start off from a place yards behind my colleagues, it will take your specific amplification of my ministry to even bring me to the starting point that they are at already in their ministry....and it always will. This is the work of dismantling white supremacy.

And if you see yourself complicit in any of the above and right now as you are reading this you are already forming defensive thoughts....you will STOP...stop right now. Stop being defensive and start being CURIOUS. Curious about what grounds your defense, what cultural assumptions ground that defensive posture and then questioning again...can you really support any change in the world with just thoughts and prayers? Because our Unitarian Universalist theology gives a resounding "no" to that question and if you are not prepared to change your behavior then it is time to think about whether you are here as a Unitarian Universalist or just as a social club.

For the past 3 days as I walk by my office door, I have not be able to even pull out my mail. My hand starts to shake and my breath becomes ragged. I look away as I even enter my office. I don't know what awaits me in there. Now I have to ask another staff member to go through it, to make sure it is ok for me to see. I have had to change my behavior based on hate brought to me by this congregation.

So I ask you again, as I have sacrificed my safety to be in community with you...what are you willing to sacrifice...what change are you willing to be in the world...what

discomfort are you willing to bear...how will you change your BEHAVIOR in order to work for our mutual liberation. Because anything less is keeping us in chains.

In the words of Assata Shakur on the wall of my office:

It is our duty to fight for our freedom

It is our duty to win

We must love each other and support each other

We have nothing to lose but our chains.

YoUUrs in service,

Christina Rivera

Director of Administration and Finance

Membership Report

TOTAL MEMBERSHIP as of January 31, 2018: 417

Add:

T'Keyah Vaughan, Feb. 18, 2018

Jess Hench, Feb. 25, 2018

Drop:

TOTAL MEMBERSHIP as of Feb. 28, 2018: 419 members

Sally Taylor

Membership Tracker for Membership Committee

CORRESPONDENCE -

Dear Members of the Board,

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the upcoming pulse survey. It is my understanding that this survey is designed to allow for anonymous responses regarding our staff. Given recent events I feel that providing a platform for anonymous comments

is not only inappropriate, but could be highly damaging to our community and our mission as a church.

In the response Christina Rivera wrote to the congregation, one of her first requests was that people bring their concerns about our ministers directly to the person they have concerns about. This is the only acceptable way for individuals in our community to address their concerns. Our church also provides multiple other options which, though less than ideal, would also be considered an acceptable first step. I am thinking primarily of the many other church members who could be called in to support a person who has concerns, yet might not feel safe in a one on one setting.

Should we choose to provide an anonymous platform at this time the results could be disastrous. Since this is very foreseeable, it would also be unforgivable. I request that you direct the Committee on Ministry to require accountability for all responses to the pulse survey.

Kindly,
Sheri Edgecomb

To the Board of TJMC-UU

I feel that I must write the Board again, but this time to apologize to Christina for my actions that she references in her post.

First, the anonymous note left for Christina was despicable, abhorrent and inexcusable most especially because it is anonymous. I am truly dismayed by the probability that one of our members could write such a thing.

Second, in her response to this, Christina references a behavior of mine, and she is correct. I should not have spoken to anyone about my concerns with a spreadsheet she sent me before she had responded to my communication to her. I absolutely apologize to her for that, and have sent her a separate communication to that effect. No excuses. It was a particularly bad choice on my part, and I will do my best to never let anything similar happen again.

Sincerely

Stan Walker

In support of the church I love

I remember a church where members of the congregation reached out in love. We reached out in love, even when it was hard.

In my first or second year as a member, a young man who grew up in our church committed a serious crime. His brother was in my RE class, and I watched that class make a circle around their friend. They held him in their arms, and in their hearts, and they told him they would be with him.

And the congregation surrounded that whole family. They raised money for legal help, although the crime was a terrible one. They wrote him letters throughout his prison term. Some members visited him regularly. They held on to that young man, and they loved him, and he started a new life.

That congregation knew how to hold both the perpetrator and the victim in their hearts. I was new to the church, and it was a powerful message.

It was the same greeting extended to me. I came to the church hurt and angry and lost, and I was surrounded by love. There was an energy that surrounded me and pulled me forward, out of my misery. I met people who embodied love, who lived the seven principles. I met people who modeled what I wanted to be when I grew up. They loved me into being a kinder, happier person. They gently challenged me, and I rose to that challenge.

I remember when my church adopted a new statement of covenant. The draft said “if” we fall out of covenant, we will reach out to bring each other back. We changed it to “when,” in the knowledge that we are all moving towards the goal, but we will inevitably fall short.

It’s been 16 years since I joined the church, and I tell people my life has been transformed by this church. Nearly all of my friends belong to TJMC, and all of my good friends do. I was invited into a book club that talks more about church than books. I think of it as the “kitchen cabinet,” because its members include such wisdom, such breadth, and such commitment to our beloved church. Among our members, we cover almost every aspect of church life, and our varied perspectives add greatly needed depth to our conversations.

One of my first church events was the dinner where the Alliance (literally) passed the torch to the UUppity Women. We honored those women who built our church, sustained it, and provided leadership for so many years. It was a sacred moment, full of history, appreciation, and continuity. As that group ages into our senior years, I don't see the same spirit. Instead, I hear how a small group of people thinks they run the church and they need to let go. Not only do we feel unappreciated, we feel maligned.

I find myself in a crisis of faith. I want to believe my church is a church of love, that we support each other and we support our church. It's becoming increasingly hard. Our church is doing a great job of afflicting the comfortable, but has it stopped comforting the afflicted? Has that job been off-loaded completely into our individual circles of friendship?

I remember when we were rallying for marriage equality, and Dick Dershimer movingly and bravely stood up and said that he had been homophobic, and we had gently challenged him and stretched him and he had changed his views. We didn't bully him or shame him or guilt him. We loved him into examining his own beliefs, into a personal search that led to transformation. We met him where he was, we stretched out a hand, and we walked with him on a new path.

I don't see that happening now. I see voices being stilled, being outshouted. I don't see room for growth; I see demands for immediate change. I don't see room for dissenting views. I don't see people being lovingly brought back into covenant. I see judgment and casting out of those we don't agree with. I see prescriptions, proscriptions, punishments, and harsh words aimed at people deemed complicit. Some of us are wondering what on earth we did wrong, why we are encouraged to form "accountability circles" when our leaders seem accountable to no one, and – possibly most important – what form dissent is allowed to take these days.

As Unitarian Universalists, we are called to a personal search for meaning, but also to test that meaning by bringing it back into community. One of the best things I have learned in my years at TJMC is to listen deeply and non-defensively, to see what I can learn from others. In countless committee meetings and outside discussions, I have learned that the best solutions are derived from thoughtfully incorporating wisdom from many sources, despite the time it may take to reach agreement.

I think we have lost the church that I loved. I think we have forgotten how to give each other the benefit of the doubt, to believe that we are motivated by good intent. We are so busy looking for ways we have breached our covenant that maybe we have forgotten

that we agreed to it in the first place. We agreed that we would try our best, that we would fail, and that we would try again. In love.

Lynn Heath