

**Minutes of the UUCSC Board of Directors Meeting
(approved via e-mail)**

November 18, 2020 6PM-8PM

Zoom Meeting

Present: President Natalie Herbermann, VP Rosemary Galiani, Treasurer Mary Alice Kimball, Clerk Linda Dupuis, Nancy Dean, Dave Hurdis, Bill Rodriguez, Rev. DL Helfer.

Guests: Sue Rogala, Jean Bowen

Call to Order: 6:05PM Natalie Herbermann

Reading of Our Covenant: Natalie Herbermann

Chalice Lighting

Invocation: Rev. DL Helfer

Welcome to Sue Rogala: Sue Rogala was introduced by Rev. DL Helfer. She was hired as congregational administrator, but the decision was made to divide the position into two parts. Sue will have the title of Financial Assistant. She has been doing financial work for the congregation, taking over some of the work now done by Mary Alice Kimball. Sue has had many years of experience in finance. She will be preparing financial statements for the bank, previously done by a CPA who charged \$2000. A new Congregational Administrator will be hired after the building has reopened.

PROPOSAL: Natalie Herbermann proposes to ratify the minutes for the 10/22/2020 Board Meeting as approved by email. Seconded. Passed unanimously.

Treasurer's Report: Mary Alice Kimball. Printed copies are on file with the Board clerk. Congregants are keeping up with pledge payments. Expenses have been lower due to non-use of the building, but work on the furnace is an added expense. The finance committee has been exploring a method for online donations; Dennis Bowman provided information regarding the various vendors. Aline Couture with assistance from Etta Zasloff are setting up a PayPal account with Bank Newport. There will be a button on the website for donations such as Sunday plate offerings. Online Pledge payments are not encouraged, due to the 2.5% PayPal charge. Hopefully this will go live by the Christmas Eve service. Instructions will be on the website.

Our liability insurance has increased somewhat, and now includes a rider for terrorist attacks for which the cost is an added \$1.00.

There will be no financial audit, but in the spring, we will have a process audit done by Mary Fulton, Pat Gilligan, and Sue Strakosch. Our finance process is divided into distinct roles such as collector, check writing, and bank deposits; this process will be evaluated.

David Hurdis asked about the electric bills which have not decreased as expected due to the building closure. Mary Alice Kimball said that the electric bills are being monitored.

RISE will evaluate the lighting in our building in the spring.

Staff Reports: via email: Printed copies are on file with the Board Clerk and posted on the UUCSC website.

DRE Report: Lee Cowan

Office Administrator's Report: Sue Rogala

Music Director's Report: Michael Galib

Minister's Report: Rev. DL Helfer

Social Justice Initiatives: see the social justice initiatives letter attached below*

Jean Bowen discussed the Womxn's Project. The Board members reviewed the "Transparency in Government" letter, attached below.* The Womxn Project will be promoting accessibility.

The UUA is promoting the 8th Principle. The UUCSC Anti-Racist Group meets every Monday evening; activism and spirituality will be addressed separately on alternate Mondays. Board members are urged to join via Zoom. The Board of Directors members are asked to promote the 8th Principle to the rest of the congregation. Embracing racial justice, and our commitment to becoming allies of Black people is why we want to promote the 8th principle.

Jean Bowman wants to step down as chair of the Social Justice Committee; Kathy Solomon has been approached to take the position.

Rev. DL Helfer– updates and staff reports

Natalie Herbermann and Rev. DL complemented the staff for their work during this difficult time: Lee Cowan, Michael Galib, Sue Rogala, and Rev. DL Helfer have all done amazing jobs. People in the community are hurting financially; what can we do to help? Pastoral Care is discussing a drive-by contact-less collection for the community. Board members discussed the idea and all were in favor.

Extending and Communicating Virtual Congregational Activities during Covid-19:

Natalie Herbermann discussed a document from the UUA that was sent to the Board members with guidelines for reopening; these guidelines may be more stringent than the State of RI suggests. Topics discussed include the use of virtual methods instead of in-person gatherings. UUCSC will use this document for guidance on topics such as how to decide when to resume live meetings and outdoor gatherings; Board members can use this document as a reference for answering questions from the congregation. We need to emphasize that virtual activities will continue but no in person gatherings. Natalie Herbermann will send a letter to the congregation summarizing this information with links to the documents.

Building Usage: we will use the RIDOH guidelines for building usage.

The Board agreed that the congregation will be notified about remaining virtual. The building needs to be used for specific activities and we need clear guidelines. A group including Rosemary Galiani, Mary Alice Kimball, and Nancy Dean will review the guidelines and update and clarify building usage policies. Natalie Herbermann submitted the COVID-19 Control Plan Template, a check list of guidelines that we will follow for building usage. Rosemary Galiano suggested that we post a summary of these guidelines outside the building.

PROPOSAL: Natalie Herbermann proposed that we agree with the UUA recommendations that all in person congregational activities must remain virtual until at least May 2021. This applies to worship, events, meetings, and rites of passage. The Board of Directors will revisit this decision again at the March 2021 meeting.

Retreat Planning: A Board of Directors retreat was tentatively scheduled for Jan 13, 2021; committee chairs and assignment of liaisons will be addressed. The retreat will take the place of the January Board meeting.

Committee on Ministry: Bill Rodrigues has agreed to serve on this committee.

Intern Minister: a group is needed to discuss the idea of an intern minister for UUCSC and to come back with a proposal. Natalie Herbermann, Mary Alice Kimball and Bill Rodrigues volunteered.

Fundraising: Mary Alice Kimball and Rosemary Galiani discussed getting a group together from the congregation to brainstorm fundraising ideas, including organizing a virtual auction in January or February, 2021.

Other Business: Mary Alice Kimball reported that the paperwork for the forgiveness of the PPP loan has been submitted to the bank. The SBA will give the approval.

Adjourn: 7:57PM

Next Board of Directors meeting: Dec. 18, 2020. 6-8PM via Zoom.

Respectfully Submitted,
Linda Dupuis, Clerk

*Social Justice Initiatives from Jean Bowen

#1

The Women Project has been circulating this letter and call to the Rhode Island General Assembly to increase and improve transparency of the process and access to good governance. This would provide increased access for citizens to comment on legislation especially important to underserved communities.

The Social Justice Team met this week and would like to sign on to the letter as would Rev. DL. I think it would have more impact if the Board of Trustees signed on. It is non-partisan and within the scope of our mission and seven principles.

Please provide a response to me as soon as you can. It would be best if you can send in advance of your Wednesday meeting so that they can approve next week.

#2 Adoption of the 8th Principle

It is time to pursue adoption of the UUA's recommendation to adopt the 8th principle. Congregations all over the country are holding informative forums, writing about it in newsletters and featuring sermons on why this makes us a stronger faith.

It states: "We covenant to affirm and promote:

journeying toward spiritual wholeness by building a diverse multicultural Beloved Community by our actions that accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions."

***RE: Organizations Demand Open, Accessible, Engaged Process for 2021 Legislative Session**

Members of the Rhode Island General Assembly:

We, the undersigned, are organizations who are dedicated to mobilizing constituents to advocate for policies that address the needs of their families and communities. We are concerned that the pandemic will continue to be a barrier to a responsive, transparent, and accessible legislative process. The pandemic has created and exacerbated many challenges facing Rhode Islanders. It is imperative that all Rhode Islanders are able to communicate with the people who represent us, and that we have a say in the process that impacts our day-to-day lives. We are writing to invite you to work together with us to ensure that when the 2021 legislative session begins, the legislature has structures and systems in place to ensure accountability and an open, accessible, and transparent process that allows for meaningful input from the public and where important decisions that affect the day-to-day lives of Rhode Islanders are made in public, not behind closed doors.

This past spring, we were in a time of crisis and were not prepared to swiftly change the way that legislative business occurs in Rhode Island. At that time, it was understandable that the General Assembly essentially shut down and was not conducting its legislative business. For the past seven months, however, we have had time to consider options and learn. Every Rhode Islander has had to rethink how they live their lives and been forced to adapt—juggling education, work, healthcare, and familial responsibilities. Some have had the luxury to work remotely while others have had to face the daily risk of in-person, public-facing work due to their work being classified “essential.” Every other public body, from city and town councils and school committees, to state boards and commissions, have found ways to continue their work while, for the most part, maintaining openness and transparency. The General Assembly can learn from lessons of other public bodies in Rhode Island, as well as other state legislatures around the nation, that have continued to meet and serve the public during the pandemic. Is not governing as essential as educating children, delivering mail, and stocking grocery shelves? In light of public health concerns, the General Assembly must rethink and adapt its approach to legislating.

We have the opportunity and the obligation to reimagine how democracy works in Rhode Island. We cannot dismantle systematic and institutional racism if we exclude people from the legislative process. The current process, which consists of last-minute meeting agendas, opaque and inconsistent testimony procedures, a lack of remote participation options, and absence of a variety of hours, times, and places for participation, ensures that only the most privileged voices will be heard by legislators and effectively silences a wide range of constituents. Exclusion simply cannot continue. We must use this extraordinary moment in our history to rethink how our democratic institutions function and make them better than they were before in our prepandemic world. For the General Assembly, that means fixing existing problems that made public participation a somewhat futile exercise for members of the public and legislators. Not only did members of the public have to wait hours because of flawed testimony procedures, but they often spoke to a mostly empty dais because the legislators had left to attend other committees, or worse, to attend their colleague’s fundraisers.

Many Rhode Islanders continue to struggle as a result of COVID-19. Because the pandemic exacerbated existing systemic inequities and health disparities, Black, indigenous, and people of color, low-income individuals, and people with disabilities have been hit especially hard. These communities also have historically struggled to be heard and have faced significant obstacles to participate in our legislative process. These struggles make the need for intentional and thoughtful consideration around public participation even more urgent and imperative.

We are disappointed that leadership has not had an open, public discussion about how it will conduct legislative business in 2021. We urge you to create a process and procedures that are more open and accessible for all people. To protect democracy and encourage public participation in the legislative process, both during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, we call on you to develop, share publicly, and implement a plan and updated processes that include the following elements:

1) Create a plan that allows for meeting of the General Assembly that adheres to public health guidelines.

a) Conduct the legislative session virtually

The State House continues to be closed to the public, and the House and the Senate have not met in person since mid-July. Under current R.I. Department of Health guidance and in light of spiking coronavirus infections, all 75 Representatives and 38 Senators should not physically gather in their respective State House chambers. There simply is not enough space for the members to socially distance. Yet, Rhode Island needs our elected officials to do the work they were elected to do, that is, legislate.

During the June 1, 2020, Senate Rules Committee hearing, we were informed that the Rhode Island Constitution prohibited the General Assembly from meeting online, specifically, Article VI, section 6, which states,

Each house shall be the judge of the elections and qualifications of its members; and a majority shall constitute a quorum to do business; but a smaller number may adjourn from day to day, and may compel the attendance of absent members in such manner, and under such penalties, as may be prescribed by such house or by law. The organization of the two houses may be regulated by law, subject to the limitations contained in this Constitution.

We were not provided any legal support for that conclusion. We demand that leadership provide a written legal analysis for this statement.

b) Meet in person with social distancing, testing, and masking If leadership is so adamant that a virtual legislative session is unconstitutional, why isn't leadership looking for safe solutions for the General Assembly to meet and the public to participate? Other state legislatures, such as Virginia and Arkansas, have met in tents and basketball arenas respectively in order to meet their constitutional requirements for in-person sessions, while preserving the health of

their members. Rhode Island school districts are requiring teachers to teach in person and wear masks all day while at school even if those teachers have pre-existing conditions that increase their risk of complications from a coronavirus infection. Why isn't there a mask mandate inside the chambers? Why aren't the galleries being used for social distancing purposes? Why isn't leadership exploring creative options such as using the convention center or a larger space for the legislative bodies to meet and legislate? Is not drafting and passing a state budget just as important as educating our children?

2) Accessible opportunities for engagement during public hearings and informational forums that adhere to public health guidelines.

a) Accessible technology

Remote public access to public hearings and forums should take all steps possible to eliminate technological barriers that limit accessibility for some, including (but not limited to) providing closed captioning services, simultaneous language translation, and/or ASL interpreters, and an option to participate in the hearing via teleconference.

b) Recordings

The public should have the ability to watch all or any portion of a public hearing or forum in real time or, if necessary, via a recording.

c) Online registration to testify

Public testimony should be allowed at least to the same extent it would have been prior to COVID-19. People should have the ability to sign up to testify online. Those individuals then should receive a window of time in which they can expect to testify.

d) Testimony

Clear instructions should be provided on the General Assembly site with options for providing testimony.

This should include:

Video or teleconference testimony: People wishing to testify at public hearings should have the ability to testify via teleconference or videoconference and respond to questions in real time.

Pre-recorded testimony: People should also be afforded the opportunity to submit recorded video or audio testimony for viewing or listening during the public hearing.

Written testimony: People should be permitted to submit written testimony via an online portal or by dropping off paper copies of the testimony to the State House. Improving on the existing system, all written testimony should be available for public inspection online.

e) Public health guidelines

If public health guidelines limit the number of people able to be present at an in-person public hearing or forum, the General Assembly should move the public hearing or forum to a larger venue to allow for full public participation. The General Assembly should also make available safe, socially distant, public terminals for Rhode Islanders who otherwise do not have access to reliable internet access.

3) Open and transparent committee meetings that adhere to public health guidelines.

a) Online availability

The public should have the ability to watch all or any portion of a public committee meeting, including discussion and debate, in real time or via a recording.

b) Timely sharing of legislative language

The public should receive legislative language and amendments under discussion at least 24 hours before the Committee meeting.

c) Remote or alternative voting

If the legislature adopts an alternative method of voting, it must be implemented in such a way as to protect the security of the vote by ensuring they are verified in some fashion, while also publicly observable. All duly elected members of the General Assembly should be afforded the opportunity to participate and represent their constituents.

4) Full public access to legislative documents and materials.

Publicly accessible records : The General Assembly should compile, publish, and make accessible all public records for any legislative session to the same extent that such records would be accessible but for COVID-19.

5) Specific public notice of legislative schedule/predictable scheduling

The legislature currently provides at least a minimum of 48 hours advance notice of public proceedings, including committee meetings, votes, and public hearings. However, the legislature does not provide any schedule for the approximate time bills will be heard. Committee notices only provide a list of bills that the committee will begin hearing “at the rise,” which could be anytime between 4:45 pm – 6:30 pm depending on what is on the full Senate’s or House’s calendar. Committee chairs choose the order bills will be heard during the hearing so constituents have no idea if their bill of interest will be heard first or last. This lack of scheduling does a disservice to all individuals who wish to participate in the hearing because it provides no timeline for which the individual should be present. It discourages the participation of any person who relies on public transportation, who works, or who must negotiate childcare.

Committees should be required to post the approximate time that the hearing will begin and when they will hear a specific bill. Scheduling will allow more constituents to participate and make the hearing process more accessible.

Since the General Assembly must already significantly adjust existing processes due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this also provides a chance to rethink how you conduct business in order to ensure greater accessibility for all Rhode Islanders. The legislative process will be improved with more voices and connections, and that Rhode Islanders will benefit from a more deliberative, democratic process.

Having stated our expectations, we the undersigned, call on you to develop, publicly share, and implement a plan and improved set of processes that ensures and encourages public participation, especially among Rhode Island's most marginalized people. Please use this opportunity to create a stronger, more engaged legislative process.