

Congregational Meeting Minutes

January 26, 2025

Board President David Reitzell welcomed the congregation and declared that we have a quorum.

Rev. Dave Clements: As a community we come together in a symbol of unity.

Finances: Linda Lampson—

- Need a few folks who like to talk about money for the Finance Committee. I applaud all of you for your generosity.
- Challenge Grant
 - We passed a deficit budget in June for the 2nd or 3rd year in a row, but balanced budget is best. Linda Prue donated \$20,000 to a challenge grant to encourage others to increase their pledges; other donors brought challenge to \$50,000.
 - \$38,500 raised in increased pledges.
 - The last few years have been difficult for this congregation--fires, Covid, loss of 2 ministers. Pledging units decreased 32% but amount pledged decreased only 3%.
- This year, pledge revenue is ahead of budget by \$24,000, but other revenue is lagging so we are only \$15,000 over budget. Expenses are currently \$10,000 less than budgeted. Positive net income is now \$19,500.
- Several fund raisers coming up; everyone commit and have fun.
- Operating cash account now has \$225,000. The Investment account is \$126,000. The Emergency Fund has \$70,000. We have \$150,000 which covers three months in reserve. Emergency Funds has significant restrictions on how it can be used. Restricted funds like Saturday Breakfast cannot be used for operations.
- Questions:
 - Any room for negotiating salary package for new minister? Salary offer is \$108,000 negotiable.
 - Matching grant fell short by \$12,000; can people still contribute? Time has passed, but donors have given the full amount.
 - Saturday Breakfast: \$20,000 has come in from non-members. We don't have a total for member donations, but it is around \$30,000.

Thanks to Rose St. John a grant has been submitted for \$30,000.
Saturday Breakfast will continue.

Nominating Committee—Lucia Kasulis.

- Nominating Committee: Don Watson, Debrah Lyons, and Mary Wolfe, and Lucia Kasulis
- Please consider serving on the Board of Trustees. Four positions are open to be elected in June 2025. We need to have nominees by April 1, 2025.
- With the passing of the new Bylaws today the Endowment Committee Term start moves from January to July; those elected today will have 6 months added to their term. Two current members will continue serving until June 2008.
 - Two returning members are being nominated for the Endowment Committee: Kirsten Olney & Michael Randolph
 - **Vote was called. They were elected unanimously**
- Email if you want to attend GA in Baltimore MD in June:
Nominating@UUSantaRosa.com

Bylaws: Richard Senghas & John Mason, co-chairs with committee members Ethan Foote, Caroline Hobbs, Ellen Skagerberg.

- Over the past 2 years the Bylaws committee has worked to prepare a new set of comprehensively updated Bylaws.
- After passing today, the Bylaws will be cleaned up electronically, then immediately work on policies.
- Record retention/retrieval is very important. All documents need to be easily accessible to congregation.
- **Vote to accept the Bylaws was passed unanimously.**
- This team is tired—please step forward and help us out.

Sanctuary Congregation: Rev. Bev Spears

- Rev. Bev moved *that the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Santa Rosa (UUCSR) declare itself a Sanctuary Congregation in alliance with the Sonoma County Sanctuary Coalition for Immigrant Defense. UUCSR will not house people seeking sanctuary in this building, but will offer support to other faith communities, organizations, and immigrant communities that house sanctuary seekers. UUCSR will, through individual congregants, offer*

support to immigrant families as may be needed, including but not limited to: volunteering medical aid, meal preparation, mental health counseling, transportation services, advocacy, direct action such as vigils, marches and non-violent protests, on behalf of the immigrant community in Sonoma County.

- o The motion was seconded by Pat Bailey.
- o Rev. Bev's comments on the motion:
 - o We need to move quickly on this issue
 - o We will not house people in this building. There will be a coalition protocol to assist people seeking immediate protection to move them to permanent housing. If you want to personally provide housing, please contact Bev (by phone) only and don't tell anyone else.
 - o There is no financial cost to the congregation.
 - o The church has many committees needing volunteers, but people will go where their passions lead them.
 - o We have a list of specific services we are willing to provide.
 - o Level of risk depends on the tasks taken on.
 - Security is essential.
 - Training will be required for staff, safety team, and Saturday Breakfast volunteers.
 - More Safety Stewards will be needed for Saturday Breakfast.
 - o Many people will volunteer whether we become a Sanctuary church or not. We are ready to work for what we support.
 - o We are committed to protecting the immigrant community, LBGTQ+, and all vulnerable minorities.
- o Pat Bailey—**Statement from Sanctuary Task Force:** *As Unitarian Universalists, our core value is love. We are a people of open minds, loving hearts, and helping hands. We covenant to “affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person” (our First Principle), and to “accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions” (our Eighth Principle).*

As such, we stand in total opposition to our current government's cruel, inhumane policy of mass deportation. If and when our immigrant friends and neighbors are forcibly torn from their homes, their families, and their communities, we have a moral responsibility to act – just as so many before us did in the movements for Civil

Rights, women's rights, environmental justice, LGBTQ rights, and other moral imperatives.

We therefore propose that UUCSR declare itself to be a Sanctuary Congregation. While it may not be practical at this time to house threatened immigrants in our building, as a Sanctuary Congregation we will commit to working with the North Bay Organizing Project, other congregations, and immigrant communities to assist in whatever ways we can to provide practical support, public advocacy, education, fundraising, and other actions that will become clear over time.

The 16-plus-member Sanctuary Task Force is a diverse group of UUCSR members who passionately believe our faith calls us to make this commitment. We ask the members of UUCSR to vote "yes" to becoming a Sanctuary Congregation.

Discussion:

- Our services have various levels of risk. Training will help deal with ICE agents. Always record (film if possible) what is happening. Depending on the situation, those at risk can be placed in the middle of the room surrounded by those not at risk to try to protect them.
- There is little we can do to help people get documented. Those processes have been stopped now.
- We are not in charge; immigrant defense strategy is being developed and led by the immigrant community; they have invited us to be allies with them. They will call the shots.
- There are no rules here. The military is now being used to enforce the border. They sweep up citizens along with non-citizens. There are also vigilantes. In the past ICE did not enter certain spaces like churches, schools, and medical facilities; now those places are vulnerable.
- We will take in people who need help. If you look like you are an immigrant, you are in danger. You will be trained for what to do.
- Member called the question; passed. Vote on the motion to become a Sanctuary Church passed by more than 2/3 majority. Vote on UUCSR becoming a Sanctuary Congregation. Passed unanimously amidst great applause.

Search Committee: Judy Withee

- o We began work in August; will be finished May 4. This is called the discernment phase which means we are having in-depth conversations within committee and with candidates.
- o We have a lot to offer a ministerial candidate.
- o This is the cone of silence period. We are right on schedule, and we are very hopeful.

Endowment Distribution: Yearly distribution is \$13,000 this year. Board decided to postpone vote. Need more thoughtful consideration. This will be voted on at the June meeting.

- o Give suggestions to David, the Board of Trustees, the Endowment Committee, or the Finance Committee.
- o A binder in the workroom has all the church policies in it, including the guidelines on how the Endowment Distribution can be spent. Hopefully in the future that will be online.

Consider Renting the Founders' Room. David Reitzell. The Board has voted to accept the responsibility of considering rental of the Founders' Room to the Lost Church. See the good review in the last Weekly Blast.

- o Lost Church: Art nonprofit providing venues for a variety of art forms. Hub for diverse creative expression. Often serving budding artists. It is not a bar. Music/art is the primary importance. Education. Student recitals. They operate a successful performance space for 15-80 people.
- o Benefits: revenue of \$25,000/year (rental and heat), community engagement, safe place for artists of marginalized communities, support local arts, alignment of values like inclusiveness, value people for who they are. An opportunity for partnering for projects. They may sometimes rent the Glazer Center. They do have a liquor license (serve beer & wine) but that is not their focus.
- o Toured their facility and they have looked at our space.
- o Challenges: We would lose use of that space. Other spaces available are the Glaser Center, the choir practices in there.
- o Next step: We will discuss today. There will be an opportunity to get to know Lost Church after church next Sunday.

- o If the Board rents to Lost Church; they need a permit from the City of Santa Rosa. Performances would start in about 3-4 months. We will test for sound; the door would be sealed off. They don't need a loud space.
- o Comments:
 - o This is a sacred space that we have refurbished.
 - o When we rented to Islamic Society because at that time they were being attacked. It was closed off to us, no cultural exchange.
 - o Very few spaces for adult ed, DWSC, Taize.
 - o Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) presentation soon.
 - o Possibility of using upstairs? No elevator.
 - o RE wing is being fully used by RE.
 - o Glazer Center is too big for many presentations.
 - o Our membership is increasing; we need all the space we can get.
 - o Justice Council counts on that room.
 - o Process—the Board will make this decision?
 - Yes, the board was elected by you to make financial decisions.
 - o Could we use the room when they don't need it? They are willing to talk about that. They would have to staff it themselves because all their stuff would be in there.
 - o How many times weekly is the room being used? 4-5 times weekly, plus choir, sometimes on Sundays, Saturdays. Minimal cost on our side—legal advice for the lease.
 - o Part of our growth is multiple programs. We need more space.
 - o Finance Committee predicts a loss of \$30-50,000 every year for the next 3 years. Not thrilled about giving up the space, but we do need to think about the budget.
 - o I use the space, but I don't think we can afford not having that income. We've been in deficit ever since losing the Islamic Society.
 - o Lost Church model—venue for a performing group while they do all the advertising and provided space. Great venue. Having a new minister revitalizes the congregation; we may need that space. But we need the money.
 - o The Board is a representative body, but I assume that you will take our thoughts into consideration. A lot of people come to programs that do not come on Sunday morning.
 - o As a retired accountant; the financial statement was pretty positive. This would adversely impact the adult ed. Committee programs. We

would need to use the Board room or refurbish the Green room. Sanctuary is not ideal for small groups. Concerned about meeting space on Sundays when there are multiple events going on. RE wing is no longer available.

- o We need a lot more time, more information. We have used the Sanctuary for an entertainment venue that got out of hand. We value our space.
- o Before any decision is made, my concern is about due diligence been performed: contract reviewed by an attorney, insurance liability, any market research on going rents. The Board represents us; there is presumption on our part that the Board has done adequate due diligence. All this must be explored, documented, and presented to the congregation.
- o Please email questions. Plan is to get a lawyer, insurance will be covered in the lease, we have asked about our insurance.
- o Agree about due diligence. Hasn't heard why the Glaser center isn't hosting more events. Would we get backlash? We would have no control over what might go on in there.
- o Worked on budget; we've had deficit budget for many years saved by some Hail Mary like COVID relief money. We used to give ½ of basket weekly to local charities; now we share for only 2 Sundays/month. We have an expensive building; we support our staff well; we can't make this work without substantial rentals unless someone want to pony up \$25,000/year?
- o I have attended Lost Church events; it is loud; a lot of drinking. Doesn't seem like an appropriate choice.
- o We tried to rent RE to pre-school; deja-vu. Founders room is only one room; we can do without one room. It's a want, not a need. We used to have two services with so many people; we can't do that now.
- o In the past, we used upstairs for meditation groups. Not legal. We can't afford an elevator or proper stairs. We could use the common room in the RE wing; no longer available for us because we have invested in a wonderful RE director and we have a lot of kids. We don't have hot topics anymore. We have to make trade-offs.
- o This is so hard. We have had financial hardships since Rev. Julie times. I don't know what the answer is to the money, but this

doesn't feel good. Something important is being taken away from us. The answer is the Boards decision.

- o The answer to the financial issue is butts in the pews. From the Search perspective, we will have more people coming; we will have more contributions. We can't keep passing deficit budgets, but we are close to having things change. Let's have hope.
- o My step-brother performs at the Lost Church, however I hear these concerns. Suggests that this be tabled. Have more meetings like this about this issue.
- o Since 1987 we've always had budget crises, deficits, always panic about it. We're riding a wave up.
- o Thank you for concerns. We have an auction every year. It's clear that we have to do something, but it is hard without people stepping up to serve on auction committee and buy stuff. There are other ways to raise money, but you need to step up.
- o We have heard you. A lot of input. Thanks for your honesty about your feelings and your thoughts. Thanks for coming and for your votes.

Meeting adjourned.

Notes by Kathy Albury