

Unitarian Church of Lincoln Winter Congregational Meeting
Meeting Minutes, December 13, 2020
Draft Version

Board of Trustees President Trevor Jones called the meeting to order at 11:01 a.m. and declared the quorum requirement of 60 members was met.

Welcome

Meeting Rules

Meeting rules approved to vote electronically via Zoom for this online meeting with decisions made at the meeting to be reaffirmed at the next in-person meeting of the congregation.

Chalice Lighting/Opening Words

“To Invoke Love” by the Rev. Sean Parker Dennison read by the Rev. Oscar Sinclair.

2020 Spring Congregational Meeting Minutes Approval

Minutes approved as written.

Nominations Committee Nominee Approval

Nominations Committee report provided by Kate McDougall. Kate recognized and thanked the hard work of the Nominations Committee. The year 2020 was a challenging time to ask people to do more and Kate expressed appreciation to those who served on the committee and those who accepted nominations made by the committee.

Kate McDougall and Kathy Disney will be rotating off the Committee. Remaining members of the committee are Carol Kenrick, Mary K. Stillwell and Kristi Wamstead. Two candidates nominated to fill the vacancies left by Ms. McDougall and Ms. Disney are Molly Payzant and Arden Eli Hill.

Molly and Arden each introduced themselves.

Vote to approve Molly Payzant and Arden Eli Hill to the Nominations Committee passed.

Budget Discussion

Trevor Jones explained two Town Hall meetings preceded the Winter Congregational Meeting at which the 2021 budget was discussed extensively. In summary, the Board of Trustees planned for

a flat budget year in 2021. There is financial uncertainty moving into the coming year, and while the church is in good financial standing, it is important to note we benefited significantly from the Paycheck Protection Program Loan this year and there is no guarantee of a similar program in 2021. Budget for 2021 is built on the assumption we will be in the building for half the year.

Theresa Forsman reiterated the goal was not to increase the budget in 2021. The proposed budget is approximately \$452,000 which is about \$10,000 less than the current budget. We always use a three-year average for building the budget, but because this has been such an unusual year, the three-year average doesn't mean as much as it usually does. A few items to note:

- The A/V Committee budget line increased significantly to \$5000 to reflect the church goal for 2021 to greatly enhance our capabilities and be able to broadcast services and events instead of simply record them.
- Added a 2% cost of living increase for staff.
- Income line for pledging is usually reduced by 4% because the church typically receives 96% of total pledges. Due to the financial uncertainties of the coming year, pledge income was projected at 5% less than total pledge amount.

Theresa thanked the congregation for stepping up and the Pledge Chair, Dorothy Ramsey, for her work.

Trevor opened the floor to questions and answers.

Vote to approve the 2021 Operational Budget passed.

Reports

Minister

Rev. Oscar Sinclair explained it is the practice of our church to present a formal written annual report in the spring and use the Winter Congregational Meeting to provide a mid-year check-in delivered verbally.

This year continues to be defined by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. We've posted 40 Sunday morning worship services online, 169 daily updates, and countless emails and Zoom meetings. We held our first congregational retreat online in the fall, and we are becoming more comfortable with this online way of being a community. In the last two months, the staff have started to put together a way to track how we're doing across different areas of church life. The C.H.A.L.I.C.E. (Congregational Health and Livelihood in COVID Era) Report is presented to the Board of Trustees each month.

It has been a difficult year for the church financially. We have not rented out the building for the last nine months with the exception of Bluestem Montessori which has been closed while the local COVID-19 Risk Dial has been in the “red zone” (severe risk of spread). There has also been a moderate but sustained drop in pledge payments from members. These losses in rental and pledge income have been offset in two ways: some expenses are down and we received approximately \$40,000 in support through the Paycheck Protection Program Loan. While we don’t know the final numbers, it is likely we will end the congregational year in a deficit. We have reserves built up from previous surplus years, so the church will be fine this year but it is a worrying trend we are watching closely.

We have all had to learn new skills and adjust our level of comfort with change as we learn how to be in community together this year. While we have done well in our move to online, there is something missing. The measure of success in a pandemic is not a thriving community but a community that endures and survives. While we endure and survive, we are learning new skills and new ways of gathering and a different level of appreciation for this place. The pandemic will end. The decisions we are making now will ensure that our congregation doesn’t simply endure but will thrive in our future.

Lincoln Unitarian Foundation

Gene Hanlon presented a slide show and encouraged members to view the LUF written report and financial statement each of which are available online.

LUF has seven members and meets after service the second Sunday of even numbered months. Members are welcome. Chair of the Building Committee, Board Treasurer, and Board President are also invited to attend.

Gene thanked everyone who has contributed to the Anniversary Fund. As of the beginning of the church year, the Anniversary Fund had approximately \$7,500 that had been donated to the fund--\$1,900 so far this church year through September. Of that money, approximately \$2,300 has been expended. Anniversary Fund projects have included a WiFi thermostat for the auditorium and microphones for church. \$1,500 has been committed to purchase a laptop computer and BluRay player for the RGL Committee, and LUF is working with the Program Council to identify possible projects for 2021.

As of September 30, LUF held just under \$400,000 that it manages. Roughly \$236,000 is unrestricted. The Sorenson Fund has about \$78,000 and the Dyer Fund about \$23,000. There is approximately \$60,500 in Judy Cole Funds remaining. About \$85,000, along with the Judy Cole Funds, are held in a market account. Roughly \$250,000, as of September 30, is invested in a socially responsible investment fund.

Additional recent activities include contributing \$5,000 for the new church sign and sponsoring financial literacy training in October. LUF hopes to plan a financial literacy series in 2021.

Program Council

Program Council Chair Karen Heafer recognized and thanked the six cluster leaders who attend monthly meetings, attend regular meetings with their committees, make reports and bring ideas and concerns to the Program Council.

Since August the Program Council reviewed and made changes to the Organizational Chart which is available on the church website (including changing the name of the Membership Cluster to Congregation Cluster), updated the committee leaders and group task organizers chart which is available on the website, secured and mounted a Black Lives Matter banner on the church, gave input to the 2021 budget by providing budget requests from each committee, received three bids and selected a contractor to repair the Eldon Street entry to the parking lot, and working with a church member who expressed interests in purchasing a bench for inside the church building in memory of Amy Birky, and is working with Jean Helms to provide information about each cluster and committee for the website.

The Program Council will begin working on identifying projects from committees that might be funded through the LUF Anniversary Fund.

Karen encourages anyone who is interested in learning more about the process and procedures of the church to become involved with a committee or cluster.

Board President

Board President Trevor Jones expresses gratitude to volunteers and staff and describes three priorities that are the product of the Board's fall retreat:

1. Make robust plans for how best to return to the church building and improve onsite programs.
2. Maximize and improve the use of technology to better serve members remotely.
3. Improve racial justice in the larger Lincoln community through training and education.

Closing Words

"Take Courage Friends" by Wayne Arnason read by the Rev. Oscar Sinclair.

Adjourn

The Rev. Oscar Sinclair adjourned the meeting at 11:55 a.m.

Draft version of minutes submitted May 2, 2021 by Dan Payzant.