

**FIRST UNITARIAN SOCIETY  
PARISH MEETING  
MINUTES  
MADISON, WI  
May 31, 2009**

**ATTENDANCE**

158 members signed the attendance lists.

**OPENING**

Michael schuler welcomed the members and he noted how important it is that we meet to address our mutual interests in a democratic manner. This process is in the best tradition of our unitarian universalist principles.

**CALL TO ORDER**

First Unitarian Society President Laurie Joiner called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. Laurie began the meeting by going to the first order of business, which is the question of calling Karen Gustafson as a minister to the congregation.

**CALL OF KAREN GUSTAFSON AS MINISTER**

Jake Blasczyk presented the background report of the committee that was charged with the review of Karen's time here at First Unitarian Society. Karen was hired two years ago with the understanding that after two years we would decide as a congregation whether to call Karen as a minister and karen would decide whether or not to accept such a call. Jake's committee did background work to make a recommendation to the Board, which would then make a recommendation to the Congregation about calling Karen.

Jake introduced and thanked the members of the committee that did this important work and he referred to the summary conclusions reached by the committee (see handout) and accepted by the Board.

An important tool in this discernment process was the use of a survey to obtain the maximum amount of input from the members of the congregation. The response was extraordinary so it is statistically representative of the feelings of the members of the Congregation. Various groups were selected intentionally to participate in the survey and a random sample of the congregation was also

selected. A 75% response rate was obtained. Volumes of comments were obtained, which is typical of Unitarians in response to survey requests. No matter how the data was “sliced” the responses were the same in the responses that were obtained.

The Board received a 50 page report that led to the Board’s recommendation and it was reduced to one page for the congregation.

Clarification was solicited about the meaning of the statement that the data passes a test of significance. The term “test of significance” means that the data is good enough to generalize to the congregation as a whole. Laurie Joiner explained that the Board carefully reviewed the report and the Board along with Michael Schuler reached a final unanimous recommendation to call Karen Gustafson.

David Weber moved and Tom Garver seconded the motion to call Karen Gustafson as Associate Minister. The call will be for Karen to serve as an Associate Minister. Michael commented that “calling a minister” in our tradition means that the minister is requested by the congregation to serve the congregation and may only be removed by the congregation. Our congregation has “hired to call” the past two ministers we have called and these are the terms under which Karen was hired. The vote is to move Karen from a hired position to a called position.

A question was asked whether or not Karen’s role will change as a result of the call. It will not change any more than if Karen is not called. Bob Radford asked about hiring versus calling and how it affects salaries and benefits and other business matters. These matters are independent of actually calling a minister.

The question of how we dismiss ministers was raised because we have had two ministers leave without a parish vote. Michael said both departures has occurred while he has been here and a negotiated resignation has been used in both cases. a minister always has the right to request a parish vote when the minister has been called. However neither minister in the two cases mentioned chose to exercise that right.

A vote was taken and it was a unanimous vote to approve Karen’s call to be our new associate minister.

Karen was brought back to the auditorium where she received a standing

ovation in appreciation of her call. She expressed her gratitude for the confidence shown towards in her and she is delighted to accept the position.

## **APPROVAL OF ANNUAL OPERATING PLAN**

Brian Hellmer presented a budget update to the Congregation. He referred to the capital budget update handout. Before going further, he wanted to mention that on July 12, 2009 the floors will be fixed. This is one outstanding item that most members are interested in.

Brian reviewed the key Capital Budget figures. Basically we are still in good position. A few pledges are behind but it is not a major concern at this time. A long term interest rate can not be locked in with our bank because of the type of institution we are. Our bank wants to be able to re-examine our finances on a periodic basis and reset the interest at that time. Of course we can refinance anytime after that if rates are better.

Brian also reviewed the operating budget. Again refer to the data in the handout. We are building in debt repayments to get into that discipline in our budget. We did not build in cost of living increases for staff last year because of the tight finances we faced. We paid a bonus of 2% half way through the year when we discovered we had a slight surplus building up in the budget and we wanted to reward staff.

Finally Brian discussed our upcoming budget. Brian reviewed the basic principles we bear in mind as we face the budget. We want to balance the budget, we want to maintain the quality of our programs and we want to have the capacity to welcome new members. We want to continue to handle our mortgage debt as we go forward.

The good news is that the pledge campaign participation is up. It may not be as much as we would desire but it is still up. The bad news is that the average pledge is down. Hopefully this is just the effect of the economy that is in a severe recession. A lot of churches and other non-profit organizations are facing this issue. We are thankful that we are doing as well as we are. We would like to get the 100 or so families who have not pledged to do so.

This coming year our ability to pull into the budget the \$40,000 surplus from this past year's budget will allow us to continue our operations without the major pain we would have if we did not use this surplus. We are budgeting in a 1% cost of living raise for our staff that we are happy to be able to do. It is

small but it is an increase and many organizations are having to cut back. we are also funding for a half time information technology assistant and we are scheduling for future debt repayment. It is critical to note that we are not going to get the difference we need for next year's budget increase (i.e. the budget a year from now) in pledges. We know there will be an increase in the budget because of the increased debt payment even if everything else stays level. We need to work on new ideas to raise funds before 2010-2011 so we can meet that obligation and avoid any problem at that time. We have a year to do that planning. We are looking for other ideas and it will be important to get new ideas before a year from now. We are lucky that we have the capability now to do this planning through good financial projections that can forecast what is going to happen. So it is important to take advantage of this time to carefully and creatively figure out how to find the money we need.

A question was asked about where the \$40,000 surplus we have this year came from. Brian explained the sources of savings that all together added up to the \$40,000 savings. These savings came from several sources and not just one single savings item.

Another question was asked about how much of our pledged amount is typically not paid. Susan Koenig responded that about 1.5% of pledges typically are not paid. That is "good" for churches (meaning we are above average in the amount of pledges that are actually paid) although we would prefer that people would pay everything they pledge.

One member feels that we are lacking in not providing a memory garden for scattering ashes. A plaque could be provided and a fee could be charged to use it. She requested that we do not lose that idea. Lee Hansen will follow up with this on the financial stewardship council.

A member raised the issue of how we address the loss of time that we will experience when Wendy Cooper returns to school. Susan Koenig addressed this by saying that the position is being redefined and some of the work is being moved to other positions to make sure it gets done.

David Weber observed that this recognition of the importance of our budget is a cultural shift for us and we need to frankly address money issues in the future. We need to determine if who we think we are matches with what we can do using our budget. that reconciliation process does not address who we want to be, which goes even one step further.

Elizabeth Barrett asked whether or not our membership figures are inflated because we have a significant number of people who do not pledge. Michael commented that we write members who have not pledged for two or more years. However we do not actively remove people on a strict basis from our membership book for nonpledging and a degree of judgment is involved in deciding when a member should be removed from our membership list.

A motion to approve the annual operating budget for 2009-2010 was made and the motion was approved unanimously.

### **STONEHAULER'S RESOLUTION**

Tad Pinkerton discussed the role of the First Unitarian Society Foundation. One role is to track funds that are directed into programs. The money in the Foundation is invested until it is needed. One fund in the Foundation is the Stonehauler's Fund. It is an endowment fund so only interest and earnings are used from the fund. The goal is to achieve about \$35,000 as the approximate payout to the Society every year. The economic times are such that no regular earnings may be withdrawn. However in unusual circumstances a certain level of funds may be used and it is recommended by the Foundation Board that that two thirds of the congregation approve the use of the funds. A two-thirds vote is required in order to make this disbursement. The money will go to the capital budget and it is already part of that budget, which will not be met if we do not use these funds. A written motion to approve the use of these funds is made and seconded (see handout). The capital budget assumes it will receive these funds for six years. The written resolution states three years so that number in the resolution should be corrected to say six years. A motion to approve the motion as amended was made and passed unanimously.

### **PRESENTATION OF SLATE OF NOMINATIONS**

Jane Richardson presented the slate of nominations. Nominations from the floor were requested and none were received. A motion to approve the slate was made, seconded and it was approved unanimously.

### **APPROVAL OF LAY MINISTERS**

The six lay ministers who may perform weddings were presented for approval. The motion to approve these individuals for another term was made, seconded and unanimously passed.

### **APPROVAL OF PARISH MEETING MINUTES**

A MOTION TO APPROVE THE JUNE AND SEPTEMBER 2008 PARISH MEETING MINUTES (SEE HANDOUTS) WAS MADE, SECONDED AND UNANIMOUSLY PASSED.

### **CLOSING AND ADJOURNMENT**

KAREN GUSTAFSON CLOSED THE MEETING AND QUOTED THE FIFTH PRINCIPLE OF SUPPORTING OUR COMMUNITY THROUGH THE USE OF THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS THAT WE HAVE DEMONSTRATED AT OUR MEETING TODAY.

A MOTION TO ADJOURN WAS MADE AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

### **EXHIBITS**

agenda  
calling karen gustafson as minister  
annual operating budget  
stonehauler's *resolution*  
slate of nominations  
Minutes from June 2008  
Minutes from September 2008