

## **Strengthening our Shared Ministry**

Your Board of Trustees offers these answers to congregant questions about Board and ET initiatives that are already underway or planned.

### **What are the Board's goals for this church year and beyond?**

(Board Committees/teams assigned primary responsibility for each goal are noted in parentheses)

1. Support Reverend Alison Miller and assure a safe workspace for all Church staff. (Governance)
2. Hold at least four all church forums per year, enhancing communication and participation with the Congregation. (Communications)
3. Get back on track in completing annual duties as defined by bylaws and policies. (Governance)
4. During the 2024-2025 church year, prepare a by-laws amendment to reduce the Board size from 12 to 9, and present to the congregation for a vote to approve. (Governance and Communications)
5. Increase the number of congregants serving as nonvoting members on Board committees. (Governance, Finance and Communications)
6. Create a Right Relations Team (RRT) to serve the Congregation. (Governance and Executive Team)
7. Take action to improve our practices and model antiracist behavior as called for in the 8<sup>th</sup> Principle; continue to educate ourselves to better support this work within the congregation. (Board Liberation Team)
8. In partnership with the Executive Team and congregation, define our shared mission and vision and develop a strategic action plan to implement them. (Board and Executive Team)
9. Educate the congregation and Board to strengthen understanding of our church's fiscal health. (Finance Committee)

### **What Board and Executive Team (ET) initiatives are underway to strengthen church personnel policies and practices and improve conflict prevention and resolution processes?**

In January 2024 the ET, in consultation with the Board, convened a small group of congregants with expertise and experience in human resources issues to serve as the ET's Human Resources Advisory Group (Corbett Gordon, Randy Russell and Julia Spence are the current members). The ET requested that a Board liaison serve as a HRAG member, a role currently filled by John Bishop. In 2024, the HRAG completed a revised draft of the church's Staff Handbook. Currently the group is working with the ET to develop job descriptions and establish personnel evaluation processes. The Board receives regular updates on the HRAG's progress via the Board liaison.

The Board's Governance Committee recently created a Right Relations Formation Task Force (Task Force) charged with developing a proposal for a Right Relations Team (RRT) and process that will serve to resolve conflicts within our congregation. This Task Force includes Governance Committee members (John Bishop and Cathy Tortorici) and congregant volunteers (Lauren MacNeill, Jody Feldman and Kathy Ludlow). It has been meeting regularly since October 2024 to develop proposals to present to the Governance Committee. In many Unitarian Universalist churches, RRTs are groups of lay leaders entrusted to step in when conflicts arise, assisting congregations in "practicing faithful communication and creative conflict resolution based on values of mutuality and consent." The Governance Committee and full Board receives regular updates on Task Force progress from John Bishop, Committee Chair.

The ET, with Board input, is exploring implementing a Committee on Shared Ministry (COSM) consistent with Rev. Alison Miller's commitment to a shared ministry that sees all community members as valued participants. A central goal of a COSM is to facilitate open dialogue between congregants, staff, and ministry leaders to address concerns and provide feedback to help improve communications and prevent conflict. A COSM also works closely with the elected Board to identify ways to improve overall effectiveness of the church's ministry.

### **How will the Board continue to enhance the transparency of its budgeting and financial planning work on behalf of the congregation?**

At an all-church forum on October 27, the Board's Finance Committee shared its most recent financial statement, reviewed its annual goals, and responded to congregant questions. The Committee has invited congregants to work with its members to achieve a range of goals, including improving ways that information on church finances and budgets is shared with the congregation.

At the January 26 forum, Board Treasurer Roger Robinson gave an update on the Annual Fund Drive as well projected revenue and expenses for the 2024-2025 church year. The budget process continues with March and April presentations on the proposed budget. Congregants can also attend meetings of the Finance Committee to learn more.

As stewards of church resources, Board members are committed to creating a detailed budget that clarifies how our financial choices are aligned with church values and goals. The Finance Committee has begun to review approaches used by other UU churches to present financial information to congregants. These examples will help guide our efforts to increase understandability and transparency of the Board's finance-related communications with our church community.

Gifts and bequests to the church are managed by the First Unitarian Foundation, created as a separate entity in 2002 to support the church financially through socially responsible investments of its assets. Of the Foundation Board's seven members, two are Board of Trustees members. The Foundation Board is currently reviewing its long-term investment strategies and its approaches to supporting our church. Congregants are invited to attend and participate in the Foundation Board's regular zoom meetings.

### **Will the Board propose changes to church Bylaws to reduce the size of the Board?**

The Board's Governance Committee is preparing a proposed amendment to church Bylaws that will reduce the prescribed number of Board members from 12 to 9. During the past several years, the Board has consulted with other large UU churches that have reduced the size of their Boards, and sought advice from an expert in large church governance. In large churches such as ours with professional management (ET and staff leaders), the Board's primary roles are oversight of church management, strategic visioning and policymaking. A smaller Board is better able to build consensus and respond nimbly to a changing environment. Inviting congregants to serve as nonvoting members of Board committees brings additional skills and perspectives that enrich the Board's visioning and policymaking endeavors. The Board will provide more information about the expected benefits of Board down-sizing during the coming months.

### **Does the Board plan to propose changes in Bylaws that will protect the confidentiality of personal information congregants provide to the church?**

Oregon law provides that church members may ask to "inspect and copy" the church's official records, including its membership list, which typically includes members' contact information. Oregon law also provides that churches may include language in their Bylaws to "limit or abolish" members' right to inspect membership records to protect privacy interests. Our Bylaws currently contain no provision limiting members' access to personal or confidential member information. When members learned of this situation several months ago, the Board received numerous requests from congregants to keep their information private and confidential. The Governance Committee will offer a proposed amendment first to the full Board for approval, then to church members for a vote.

Rationale for and benefits of any proposed Bylaws amendments will be shared and discussed with congregants through forums and workshops convened by the Governance and Communications Committees. Amendments to Bylaws must be approved by a majority of the Board and by at least two-thirds of members voting.

## **How will the Board in collaboration with the ET engage congregants in envisioning our church's future as part of a strategic planning process?**

The ET is responsible for collaborating with the Board and congregation to develop a strategic plan founded on current mission, vision and goals statements. This church year the Board will work with the ET to launch a church-wide strategic planning process.

In the spring of 2023, more than 240 congregants attended the Community Conversations process. Rev. Miller, with assistance from congregant volunteers, invited participants to share what drew them to our church, what keeps them here, and what they hope our congregation will become. Results of these discussions will inform further conversations about the church's mission and vision for the future.

Look for more information on this process and how you can contribute in the coming months.