

**First Unitarian Church of Cincinnati**  
**Congregational Meeting Minutes**  
May 17, 2015

**Call to Order:** Larry Pytlinski, President of the Board of Trustees, convened the meeting at 11:36 a.m. and welcomed all present. The motion to adopt the agenda was accepted.

**Approval of Minutes from Prior Meeting:** The congregation approved minutes from January 25, 2015.

**Senior Minister's Report:** Reverend Sharon Dittmar reported on the possibility of First Unitarian adopting a church-wide unified curriculum offered by a multi-congregational UU working group, which many congregations like. The Martin Luther King Interchange highway project is expected to be completed in two years. She mentioned possible social justice projects going forward: a UUSC initiative to involve Cincinnati and Chicago; Preschool Promise; and activities in Avondale—a number of these are of interest. Finally, she thanked the Board, staff and congregation for their stewardship and presence.

**Registrar's Report:** Registrar Linda Miltner reported that the following six members established their eligibility to vote at future meetings by attending their first congregational meeting today. They were: Sarah Estes and Michael Bauersfeld, Rob Littner, Mary and Larry Lutz, and Akera Moi. Two new members have joined recently: Bill Ziegler and Amber Hedrick. When the church year began on July 1, 2014, our membership stood at 290. Eighteen (18) people have joined the church since then; however, we have lost sixteen (16) members for the following reasons: four have died; five have moved to inactive status, and seven have resigned (3 moved out of state, 2 joined another church, 2 for other reasons.) The current active membership is 292 people.

**President's Report:** Larry Pytlinski reviewed the Board's goals and how they have been met over the past year. The first goal was 'Communicate, communicate, communicate.' The various church committees have been coordinating more effectively and staff accomplishments have been cited and recognized. The second goal was to envision the future of the church. Many church members attended the congregational conversations on the futures issue. A copy of their many valuable comments will be posted on the church website. The Board's third goal was to ensure the stability of the church's mission. It is clear that the church will need new members and new sources of income to achieve stability. Larry thanked Dave Wallace and Jason Zoller warmly for their work on the 2015 Canvass. In considering the budget for the coming year, the Board chose not to reduce services, staff, or staff benefits, but instead to reduce temporarily the congregational contribution to the UUA. Change lies ahead for the church.

**Vote on Candidates for Board of Trustees:** Lyn Martin spoke on behalf of the Nominating Committee, indicating that it had considered the unique needs and skill sets needed on the Board given the specific challenges in upcoming years. She presented a slate of three strong candidates: Brian MacConnell, Beth McGrew, and Shelly Wallace. The congregation voted to approve the slate.

**Vote on Candidates for Nominating Committee:** As outgoing Board president, Larry automatically joins this committee. The other members proposed, Ralph Jacobs and Lyn Martin, were ratified by a vote.

**Vote on Candidate for Endowment Fund Board:** Member Alice Schneider was nominated and approved for this position.

**Report from the Endowment Fund:** Dick Miltner announced that the assets in the Fund stood at

\$1,064,842 as of Feb. 20, 2015, which is an all-time high. (This figure was prior to 2015 distributions to the church.) Distributions to the church occurred in April, 2015, for the 2015–2016 fiscal year, in the following amounts: Historical Building Account, \$35,816; Restated Building Account, \$3,486; General Account, \$1,267; Outreach Account (Social Justice), \$1,306; RE Account, \$615; the total distributions were \$42,490. This constitutes the second highest source of revenue to the church after members' pledges. Current assets (after distributions) stand at \$1,024,982. Two church members have joined the Legacy Society, having made estate plans that involve planned bequests to the Fund: Karen and Tom Rohrer. The Endowment Fund trustees and the congregation thanked them.

**Canvass Report:** Jayson Zoller reported with a PowerPoint presentation. On the positive side, 61% of the pledgers increased their pledges for FY 16; this was five times as many pledge units as those who decreased. Average giving levels are up by 7%. On the negative side, the total amount pledged was down by 5% from last year. This equals a funding gap of \$16,000 as compared to last year's canvass income. Unfortunately, we also have 20 fewer (12% less) pledge units than last year (148, down from 168), despite having 7 new pledge units. Giving remains highly concentrated: the top 20% of pledges represent a whopping 55% of the total canvass results. The top 50% of pledges represent 85% of the total canvas results. The break-even amount is \$1,175; if all pledgers could pay this amount we could fund the budget. Many do not. The key to growth will be new members.

**Recognition of Members:** The congregation thanked Nancy Crossen and Denise Olden for the new landscaping. Dutro Blocksom received enthusiastic thanks for 26 years chairing Buildings and Grounds.

**Presentation of 2015-2016 Budget:** Finance Chair Dennis Finney presented the budget, noting the difficulties involved. A large percentage, 90%, of the budget is given over to staffing and operations. The remaining 10% funds our committees, along with a very small amount of discretionary funding. This makes it extremely difficult to trim expenses. No staffing hours were cut. The budget as presented was balanced by reducing to zero our congregational contribution to the UUA and to the Mid-America Region. This allowed some modest funding of the Board's key goals for coming years: First Unitarian's futures initiative; staff professional development; leadership development; and communication needs.

**Discussion of Budget:** Discussion was long and sometimes passionate. Concerns were expressed about the fact that staff members have not had raises in the last three years. This budget would make that four years. Another concern was that we currently have \$30,000 in unpaid pledges from FY 13-14, and more unpaid pledges this year; deficit budgets are not healthy. Another person felt that we should take the hard step of cutting expenses as much as is necessary so as not to exceed our means. Numerous speakers made eloquent remarks about the necessity of honoring our covenant with the UUA by continuing to make denominational contributions to the UUA and Mid-America Region.

Various amendments were proposed. The first was to reduce all committee budgets by 1% to free up \$152 for the denominational contributions. Many felt this amount was not adequate. The amendment did not pass. A second amendment proposed that members be given an opportunity to pledge an additional amount for the UUA and Mid-America Region, over and above their previous pledges. If each member pledged \$60 for the UUA and an additional \$25 for the Region, that would suffice. Discussion revolved around the idea that we do not like to offer 'pick-and-choose' budget funding. The amendment failed to pass. A final amendment, to refer the budget back to the Board and the Finance Committee to be revised, bearing in mind the discussion from today, passed by a vote of 25 to 16.

The meeting adjourned at 1:43 p.m.