

Fountain Street Church Governing Board Meeting Minutes
February 21, 2022

Board Members Present: Steve DePolo, Win Irwin, Shellie Jeffries, Kristen Loch, Kristin Mayer, Brad Miller, Katie Mitchell, Amy Preston, James Taylor, Chip Wall, George Zuiderveen, Jerrod Nickels, Matthew Huizing, Geoff Kempter

Staff Present: Rev. Christopher Roe, Melissa Hoezee

Guests: Bunny Johnson, Buzz Wynbeek, Carol Kooistra, Carole V., Chip Meier, Joan Jung, Kathy Higgins, Kirsten McCarrel, Sherron Collins, Tim Creamer

Meeting called to order at 7:02 pm.

Call to Community: James Taylor shared a video about the word “leader”

Congregant Comments: None

FSC Thank Yous: New section! This is to recognize those at FSC who often don’t get acknowledged. Amy thanked the ushers and greeters.

Mind, Soul, World: Another new section - what does our mission mean to us? Starting with “Free the Mind”

- Geoff said he loves our mission. He loves that this is part of who we are, so important.
- George imagines a bird flying to freedom, liberation. A balance of Free the Mind and confusion.
- Brad feels there’s no wrong question at FSC. It’s a safe place for learning, unlike many other religious institutions.
- Kristin feels she’s missing having people in her life to disagree with in a safe space. She’d love to see more of that. Are we that safe space?
- Jerrod thinks about ego, and letting go of ego. That helps you grow the soul.

Governing Board Jan. Minutes: James moved to accept the minutes. Katie seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Finance: Win went over highlights. We exceeded our January budget with income of \$46,060. Melissa has already proceeded with a transfer of almost \$800,000 from the checking to a savings account, so we will begin to earn some unbudgeted interest.

Win moved to accept the Finance report, Geoff seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Stewardship: Win reported that he sent the current pledge history which shows 258 pledges and \$559,182 in total. He also sent the minutes which is just informational and gives the Governing Board an

idea of the fund-raising events and ideas that the committee is considering – the first will be the FSC Friends and Family Talent show. Win reminded the board to thank those who have pledged.

Bell Tower: Win reported that On Monday February 14 our architect Ann Dilcher of Quinn Evans , structural engineer Jenna Bressler of Skillman, Jeremy Taylor of OAK, and Blair Bates of Building Restoration Inc. Most of the Bell Tower Committee met with them prior to their going up to the Bell Tower to inspect it. As we reported last month, they are working on preparing a proposal with costs for the full structural review of the condition of the tower. We anticipate receiving this and then convening the Bell Tower Committee to make a recommendation. Because of the timing of their report and the necessity to keep this project moving.

Win moved that the Governing Board delegate to the Acting Senior Minister, the GB Chair, and the Treasurer to approve a proposal for the structural analysis work, with the understanding that we will immediately communicate with the Governing Board the specifics of that work and its costs. Kristen seconded.

- Geoff asked if it makes sense to include a congregant with building expertise. Win said the Bell Tower Committee, which includes impressive experts, will see this.
- Kristin asked for clarification on how this relates to our vote last month. Win said we voted to bring them in to estimate how much the structural analysis would cost.
- George asked if the officers should be in on this decision, just because it's a big deal. Win said yes. Kristen said this is the shortest path to get this report, because we need it.

George moved to amend the motion to give the officers the decision. James seconded. Win adopted George's amendment and made the motion again:

The Governing Board shall delegate to the Officer's Committee to approve a proposal for the structural analysis work, with the understanding that we will immediately communicate with the Governing Board the specifics of that work and its costs. Geoff seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Nominating Committee: Chip reported that we need to fill the vacancy on the Search Nominating Group (assigned to develop the slate for the Senior Minister Search Committee). Chip made a motion that Shellie Jeffries will replace Amber Kilpatrick on the Nominating Group. Brad seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Committee also hopes to have a candidate to replace Amber on the Governing Board.

Search Nominating Group: Tim Creamer reported that the group has put announcements in the Friday Flash. Working on gathering names, and would love to get more names. Slate will be 14, and 9 will be selected to serve on the Senior Minister Search Committee. Let us know of interested parties.

Kristin asked if there was a timeline on when the vote might happen. Tim said late spring is the ideal, but we want to take the time we need.

Communications: Kristin reminded us of the letter that was shared with the board, summarizing the Listening Circles. Want to send that out soon - last call for input. Also working on a formal ceremony of "letting go" for the congregation.

Staff Report: Rev. Christopher updated that we're continuing with some guest speakers. The Religious Services Committee is working on Summer Series. Also promoting things for Ash Wednesday and Lent.

Administrative Assistant Jake is leaving to take a job in his field of library science. Please be mindful of this transition and the staff's capacity. Congregant volunteers are welcome to help in the meantime!

Christopher is trying to do more visiting with congregants - averaging one or two visits a day right now (Zoom/call/in person). Trying to get a better system in place so we can get to everyone.

Win asked about Greta Jo reporting on working with the West Michigan Broad Based Org. Is that environmental/DEI? Christopher said it's a bit ambiguous. It's a way for faith communities to connect on various issues. St. Mark's invited us. We may be the celebratory launch venue as it's a large group involved. Jean Bahle is the point person on that.

George asked about Greta Jo's time with family. Was it a month? Christopher said no, just this past week. Kristin said she's part time so squeezed two weeks into one.

Shellie asked if people should contact Melissa to help in the office? Christopher said yes, and himself.

New Business: Amy said we were veering from the agenda and not talking about the Communications Committee and what will happen with that. But recent events led us to postpone that. We had an unexpected Officer's meeting this past weekend to discuss a couple of things:

Amy updated that we had an issue with the Samaritas group. Police were called, Kendall got involved wondering about an active shooter. It was involving a Samaritas student. We are in the process of addressing policies to see how we handle these kinds of things, because we have never been a school landlord before.

Amy shared that FSC has a reputation among clergy for being hard on its ministers. We had that conversation around Rev. Mariela. Chip and Rev. Christopher have also talked about this. A small group has been behaving toward Rev. Christopher and Rev. Greta Jo in ways that are harmful to FSC, seemingly to wear them down and even make them leave FSC.

We've been trying to move in a positive direction despite this. But we didn't feel it was urgent until an extreme such event this past week. Amy and Christopher met to discuss. She encouraged him to talk to Rev. Jody and then let us know how to help. After that update the officers met to determine next steps. So here we are.

According to our employee manual, if someone has a complaint about staff, it goes to their supervisor, not to the person themselves. Because Christopher is ACTING Senior Minister, not called clergy, complaints should be brought to Amy. Likewise, complaints about Greta Jo should go to Christopher. Amy assured that complaints will be addressed with involved staff/clergy members.

This behavior needs to be addressed for now and for future ministers and the health of the church. We have nothing in our bylaws and policies to address this at the moment. It might be worthwhile to adopt a code of conduct, as many other congregations have. How members interact with clergy, each other, and staff.

This behavior is coming from people we know and love. If members have issues with clergy, we will find alternative people to provide pastoral care. But the officers and board need to know and discuss.

This isn't fun, but it's part of the work we need to do. There's a lot of good happening at FSC, let's not forget. The hard interim work is for a healthy future going forward.

Geoff reminded that this is still a board discussion, not the congregation.

Chip said he's uneasy because people are worried if it's them. And that creates doubt. These are very few people who attack relentlessly, personally, destructively. We don't have a code of conduct, and he thinks, yes, we need that. Few people are the root of most problems. We have so much good to counter it.

Jerrold concurs. Really sad that we even have to go here. If we adopt a code of conduct, how do we enforce? Amy said we are looking at examples and Amy and Christopher are attending a 101 type class next month. It's up to us how we enforce. Oversight will fine tune details and volley back to us.

James is also in favor of exploring a code of conduct, but we have to let the congregation be involved. Have to be direct. Not angry. Can't let this fester, and be clear we won't tolerate it.

George says this reminds him of the Mariela days when we didn't have specifics. The lack of a code of conduct has been a thing, part of independence. So it's not surprising that people are pushing back. He suggests being direct.

Geoff said that George's words stress the need for the code. What he's suggesting would be IN the code.

George says we should do something now though, before we have a code.

Win said he would reference another officer, saying that people feel entitled. But FSC doesn't belong to certain people. It's for all of us. We can't be inclusive with that sense of entitlement or if we are judgemental. We can disagree, but we have to think about attacking this sense of entitlement.

Kristen said we're a year out from Mariela's resignation. This is the same thing. We're going to get a reputation as a revolving door. We can't do this again, and Christopher and Greta Jo have gotten us this far. They don't deserve this. We have to stop or we won't HAVE a congregation. Would love to see something go to Oversight or the Rapid Action Committee so we don't burn out our clergy.

Kristin added that this feels like not just a Gov Bd. policy need, but a whole congregation thing. The entitlement does not make for a safe and growing community. Code makes a lot of sense. Agrees with George that we should address these incidents in the meantime.

Amy said the officers would address.

Jerrod asked about addressing now. What ideas do we have for more immediate measures?

Kristin said go to the person and say we'll listen, but this is not appropriate. Here are the boundaries.

Brad said this is communication, really. This is sad, but we've been cloistered. The internet makes us feel like we can say whatever we want. Not like being in person. Build out from a code of conduct and deal compassionately. We have certain controls over social media as well. Let people know we respect our leadership. The majority of us will bond together.

Rev. Christopher said he understands the desire for specifics, and he does save all digital/paper communication. People are not wildly attacking him and Greta Jo but it's more passive aggression, such as on pledge cards. Some is less passive. This is more about the atmosphere. Our community is dealing with a lot of loss from recent and earlier times. Mariela and Fred both dealt with this, as did earlier ministers. This is not new. We want to be healthy, to address the root of conflict, which is loss. Lay leaders are dealing with it too. It's a culture thing, not some new war. We don't have to keep accepting it.

James said he'd like to make a motion for a vote of confidence for our minister. To show that our board supports the direction our church is moving. Jerrod and Shellie seconded. Motion passed unanimously, with Steve voting twice :).

Chip said great dialog. Suggested that we have the officers bring a temp code of conduct to the next meeting. Then the congregation can start working on it. **Chip made a motion that the Officers Committee bring a temporary code of conduct to the March meeting for the Governing Board to then vote on. From there the Communications Committee or whoever can take it. Brad and James and Geoff seconded.**

Kristin asked if Amy and Christopher are going to some class...? Amy said yes. Kristin wondered if it makes sense to take a little more time to develop a meaningful code rather than rush. Maybe wait until after the class? Amy suggested that she and Christopher will report to the board at the March meeting.

Geoff asked what goes into the code? Financial mismanagement? Love Chip's passion and this is outrageous, but we don't want to back ourselves into a corner. Let's wait until Amy and Christopher take the class.

Chip amended his motion that Amy and Christopher will report to the board before a draft is created. James seconded the amendment.

James agrees we should tread carefully and let the whole org weigh in. But the board can say what's appropriate and what's not. Amy certainly, as a lawyer, can help. Caution people to follow protocol.

Jerrod concurred and said he would abstain from a vote saying we had to wait. A basic statement from the board/officers is appropriate to remind people how to proceed.

Amy said we can do that right now. She reminded that these basic statements have been made many times in recent months.

Jerrod said that's two people. We need the whole board to say it.

Amy said, in addition, the Officers Committee will address it directly sooner rather than later. We are running over time, but this is the hard, healthy work we need to do. We need to decide what to do on Chip's motion.

Christopher clarified that he and Amy would be learning about behavioral covenants, not codes of conduct, which is more top down. But FSC's beauty is the peer-to-peer structure and this will be a communal effort. This is work for the whole community to name our pain, grief, etc. Those who don't want to participate... it will be their loss.

George has ideas about how to talk to the involved congregants and will email Amy.

Chip restated his motion to charge the officers to bring a code of conduct to bring to the Gov Bd next month. Get it out now and build on it later. Motion passed.

Congregant Comments: None

Adjourn: Great conversation to move us forward. Hoping to have the meeting hybrid - in person and on Zoom. George moved to adjourn. Chip seconded. Motion passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 8:50 p.m.