

**Fountain Street Church Governing Board Special Meeting Minutes
February 22, 2021**

Special meeting called in accordance with FSC By Laws 2.6 (C).

Board Members Present: Will Gallmeyer, Kathleen Higgins, Win Irwin, Shellie Jeffries, Geoff Kempster, Amber Kilpatrick, Kristen Loch, Kristin Mayer, Brad Miller, Katie Mitchell, Amy Preston, James Taylor, Chip Wall, George Zuiderveen, Steve De Polo

Staff Present: Rev. Christopher Roe, Melissa Hoezee, Conor Bardallis, Greta Jo Seidhol, Matthew Cockrum

Guests: Alan Bedell, Alice Gallmeyer, Alison Class, Alison G, Amy Klinkoski, Amy Landheer, Andrea, Arlene Chittleburgh, Awoelfel, Barb Wingard, Barbara Reinoehl, Bettigail Shively, Betty Porter, Bev Boerman, Bill Brunner, Bob Chapla, Bob Cooper, Bryan Walters, Bunny Johnson, Buzz, Camilla Martin, Camille Donnelly, Carol Holm, Carol Kooistra, Carol Ligda-Wong, Carol Townsend, Carole, Carolyn & Bruce Morrison, Carolyn Heines, Cascades ipad, Cele Badgerow, Chad, Charles Meir, Cheryl Mellblom, Chris Creek, Chris Van Antwerp, Christopher Caldwell, Christopher Toth, Claudia Bajema, Connie Graham, Connie Winter- Troutwine, Dan Bollock, Dana Munk, David Dorr, David Kapolka, Debra Willilamson, Denise Joseph, Dick, Dolli Lutes, Don Wheeler, Dorothy & Mike Bertsch, Elzinga, Evie Bowers, Evie Phillippi, Fred & Sharon Hickox, Gary Eberle, Gary Rowe, Georgine, Ginny Mikita, JD, Heather, iphone616800700, Jack Petiet, Jane Chamberlin, Janet Peterson, Janice Noah, Jaqueline Poehlman, Jay Fowler, Jean Bahle, Jennifer & John, Jerene, Jerrod & Robert, Jessica Hamp, Jill Van Antwerp, Jim James, Jim Johnson, John Collins, John Hunting, John Sebastian, John Teggelaar, Jon Hartman, Jon Spaulding, Judith Kempf, Judy Alberda, Judy Baiers, Judy Botts, Judy Mroz, June Streiby, Karen Brunner, Karen Dunnam, Karla Clark, Karry Kidder, KD Norris, Ken Porter, Kerry Rowe, Keverne, Kirsten Lundeen, Kristen Keys, Kurt & Lisa Elliott, Laura Hire, Les Neuman, Les Neuman, Linda Poskey, Linda Puskey, Lisa G, Lisa Locke, Lisa Walsh, Liz Bullock, Lorraine Miles, Lydia Stubbs, M&B, Maras ipad, Margi, Marie Maher Penny, Marilyn, Mark Fitzpatrick, Marilyn Holladay, Martha Edwards, Marti Arnold Marty Yarrington, Mary Ellen Patterson and Louise, Mary White, Marye Travis, Meredith Bradley, Michelle Alser, MS Nancy Hart, Nancy List, Nancy Lubbers, Nessa McCCasey, Norm Tubbs, Ockhams iphone, Owner, Pam Oldson, Patrice Vrona & John Considine, Patti and Todd Johnson, Paul Arnold, Peggy Pierce Barbour, Penny Barstow, Peter Lundeen, Plant, RD Bucknam, Renee, Richard, Ron Dirkse, Ruth Hutchison, Sandy Andrews, Schaderer, Sharon Morley, Sharon Rydzewski, Sharon, Sharons ipad, Sharyn Rose, Sherri, Sherron Collins, Skip Swanson, Steve Crandall, Steve Plaisted, Sue, Susannes ipad, Suzy Bonnan, Ted Perkins, Theodora S, Therese Hogerheide, Thomas Reinsma, Tim Berghuis, Tim Creamer, Tim, Todd Fettig, Tom & Kathy Robinson, Tom Hackett, Toni Helgessen, Tony Kroes, Tracey Cordes, Wendy Marty, Wes Beck

Meeting called to order by Chip Wall at 7:35 pm.

Board Chair Chip Wall made a statement:

The purpose of the Governing Board Meeting tonight is to discuss and vote on the Separation Agreement and Release of our Senior Minister Rev. Mariela Perez-Simons.

The Governing Board's Communications Committee is currently working on an all-Church Town-Hall in hopes of answering as many questions regarding the Request of Rev Mariela to be released from her contract or in simpler language her resignation as Senior Minister from FSC.

I said this at the board meeting we had last Monday [Feb. 15], and I feel it bears repeating. I want you all to know that through this entire process we gave Rev. Mariela plenty of space, time to talk and to work with her representation from the UUA. We are not a UUA church but worked with the UUA in hopes of reaching a mutually agreed upon resolution. It was my hope that we could work together to overcome any issues she may have felt we had to move forward to an exciting direction for FSC.

I need to assure you that we gave her space, we listened, we encouraged dialogue and sought any way possible to resolve any issues. We gave her time for reflection, thought and we ultimately supported her ultimate decision if we personally did not agree.

The decision to seek a negotiated separation from the church was Rev. Mariela's and Rev. Mariela's alone. Nobody that I know of on the board and in the wider community of FSC wanted this to end.

We loved the excitement, the joy that we felt we were all working on together. But Rev. Mariela believes that this is the best decision for her and her family, and we will honor that decision.

For those that have reached out to Clergy, staff and GB members, I would like you to understand that most of the questions you are asking such as why can not be answered by these folks and trust me you're simply putting people in awkward and, honestly, uncomfortable positions.

I would like to brief you on the timeline which started less than a month ago:

January 25, Monday: Amy Preston and I were made aware that Rev Mariela was going to take the weekend off as she needed some much-earned time off. We agreed to talk on Monday January 25, at which time she stated she wanted two weeks off, said she was tired and needs time off, needing time for rest and reflection feeling beaten down, feeling like she was dealing with negativity. I asked her if there was something that happened, she said it was not one thing it was lots of things. This was a short time before the GB, and we moved ahead with GB. We had zero idea of what was going on and simply only had a short time before the GB meeting. We also felt it important to shield Mariela and her ministry to better understand her concerns.

January 26, Tuesday: Your Officers were made aware of the concerns Rev Mariela had concerning carrying on at FSC.

January 27, Wednesday: We as officers sent a letter giving her our full support, asking to meet, talk and discuss any issues none of which we were aware of. Our letter was sharing our full support that of the GB and the greater congregation. WE fully supported her taking two weeks off and offered our support and availability to talk about what the issues that she felt she was facing at FSC.

January 28, Thursday: Rev. Mariela replied in an email, thanking us for the update and saying “no worries at all.”

February 2, Tuesday: Rev. Christopher called a meeting with myself and Amy, he told us that Rev. Mariela wants to ask for a release as Senior Minister from FSC. We met with our Officers of the GB that day to discuss, we determined that we needed a request in writing and not a verbal from Rev. Christopher.

February 3, Wednesday: Email sent to Rev. Mariela asking for a formal letter of resignation if that was truly her intent and that a verbal message sent thru Rev Christopher is not a formal request that we need.

After many verbal conversations that day, my last call of the day with Rev Mariela was an upbeat conversation nearly an hour long about what we could do moving forward about ideas to move FSC ahead. I personally walked away from the call invigorated that we could work to resolve any of the issues that she felt were in her way of fulfilling her and our dreams for FSC.

February 5, Friday: I was sent an email and the officers were copied requesting a meeting for Monday February 8th requesting a meeting to begin the conversation about a negotiated release from FSC. Letting us know the call would include her representative from the UUA and letting us know that she will have a letter to read to us at that time. In all honesty, I felt sucker punched after my last conversation which ended very positively. This message blindsided me.

February 8, Monday: Board Officers met with Rev. Mariela and her rep from the UUA, Rev. David Pyle Regional Lead of the Midwest UUA. A letter written by Rev. Mariela and addressed to the GB was shared with us.

The letter expressed that she wanted a negotiated release as she is not able to do the work she came here to do. It cited hostility that was taking a toll on her spiritual and physical health. It also cited that at the core of our problem is our wanting to be an independent church and not being able to tap into the UUA for guidance, which she felt would have suggested that we would have needed an interim minister. We were told that the negotiation team needed to now work with Rev Mariela’s UUA “Good Officer” moving forward.

I immediately sent an email asking for a meeting to begin the process once the “Good Officer” was identified. We were given a date a week away [Feb. 15] to meet the UUA Good Officer. I

replied that we had a board meeting that night and would like to speak sooner if possible, we have a congregation that needs answers, and we were given the date of Friday, 2/12/2021.

February 12, Friday: Bryan Walters, myself and the Rev. Maria Christina, the UUA “Good Officer,” met at 8:30 pm to start our discussion of a negotiated release with Rev. Mariela. It was agreed that we would draft a statement for our congregation that would be shared at the GB meeting on Monday, February 15th. This statement would be a mutually agreed upon statement, and once drafted was sent through the “Good Officer.”

February 13, Saturday: The whole GB met for an informational session to cover takeaways from the meeting with the “Good Officer.” The board was also brought up to speed with the new developments and shared what could be shared at that time. Later that day the “Good Officer” replied that our drafted statement was ok’d, and that Rev. Mariela would prepare a statement explaining a bit more the reasons why she is requesting a release. Also, that going forward she would like to communicate with me directly moving forward. And that she would not be using the UUA’s Good Officer and wanted to deal with me directly.

February 14, Sunday: Board Officers met with the Ministerial team to update them on where we were in the process, with limited knowledge to share at that time. Our goal was to let them know that this is a stressful time for our congregation, staff, ministers and leaders. They all gave us full support and we pledged to update them as best we can during this time.

An email announcing Rev. Mariela’s intent to resign was sent to the entire congregation at 1:15 pm: *“On February 8th, Rev. Mariela Perez-Simons formally asked the Governing Board to be released from her contract as Senior Minister of Fountain Street Church. The Board is currently working with Rev. Mariela’s UUA representative to coordinate the terms of her separation. During this transition, Rev. Mariela cannot be reached through FSC phones or email. In the meantime, your other ministers continue to be available for pastoral needs. We will do our best to keep the membership informed and updated as matters proceed.*

We know that this is very unexpected and difficult news, and know that it will require our Fountain Street best to help each other through this difficult time.

Fountain Street Governing Board”

February 15, Monday: Governing Board Meeting, during which I read the agreed statement from Rev. Mariela read to all attendees and the congregation as a whole.

Chip’s statement continues:

Bryan Walters and I have worked on this negotiated release for Rev Mariela. She and I have been in constant communication with her negotiating her release. We used our By-Laws to work on this agreement, Section 7 under Ministers 7.2 Resignation/Retirement of a Senior Minister, giving us 90 days’ notice.

In the Separation agreement we have used the date that we received written clarification of Rev. Mariela's intent to leave her position as Senior Minister, which was February 8, 2021, as the release date.

The proposed Separation has been signed by Rev. Mariela dated 2/20/2021. The remaining steps are for board approval and then my signature as GB Chair.

Please understand that Rev Mariela has a 7-day period that she may change her mind as to the terms of the Separation agreement.

Countless hours have been spent by your board, Officers and negotiators in securing a fair, just release under all the circumstances. This has been a fast moving highly stressful situation and we have worked daily on FSC's behalf.

The board has been provided a copy of the Separation agreement and release.

A motion was made to accept the Separation Agreement and Release of the Rev. Mariela Perez-Simons from the Senior Minister position at Fountain Street Church as it has been presented to the Board by Geoff Kempter and seconded by Brad Miller. In the discussion following the motion, Will stated he thought the generous agreement and appropriate, that it represents our good will toward Mariela and hopes it will help resolve this situation. Geoff clarified that the GB had an opportunity to discuss the agreement in depth at an information meeting. This is not a snap decision, this is a deeply informed decision.

The motion passed with one abstention.

Chip made a closing statement:

I feel the need to share a few things with you as congregants of FSC. I know we all had a great hope for our future, a future of unlimited possibilities. We have met with the staff and with our Ministerial staff. They all are dedicated to moving forward and keeping the momentum we all have into our future. Our ministers have certainly stepped up to the challenge of planning services and are helping the church to move forward. We anticipate working closely with them in upcoming weeks and months. We look forward to your input regarding this subject at our town halls to gather feedback not only to try to process Rev. Mariela's departure but to also gather your thoughts and comments on our future leadership at FSC.

A FSC Town-Hall is scheduled for Wednesday 2/24/2021 at 7:45 pm.

When I started as the Chair of the Governing Board over a year ago, my goal was to be as transparent as possible. I have had great support from the Officers and the Board, and I believe that transparency is key to working collectively for the health and trust of our beloved FSC.

I would like to highlight the Separation agreement and release for Rev Mariela.

With that said there were two pieces of the separation agreement that we felt vitally important.

1. We felt that having this agreement confidential would likely only perpetuate rumors and second guessing that does not work for a plan to move ahead.
2. We also felt that not having a non-disparagement clause could give the impression that something is covered up or hidden as to the terms of the separation. Working providing as much transparency as legally possible will give us all closure to this chapter of FSC.

I will walk everyone through a summary of the separation agreement.

1. First there are three segments that need to be completed for execution of this agreement: Signature of Rev Mariela – Dated 2/20/2021, Passage from the GB, The GB Chair signature. The effective date will be 2/8/2021 which is the first written notice of Rev. Mariela wanting to separate from FSC. This is working with our bylaws 7.2 which states that the SM can give the congregation 90 days' notice of his/her resignation or retirement.
2. Per Item #2 of the agreement: Rev Mariela is deemed to have resigned as Senior Minister of Fountain Street Church, effective February 8th.
3. Per Item #3: Rev Mariela will be deemed an inactive employee until May 9, 2021, not requiring her to work for the church. Her pay will continue for those 90 days unless she obtains other work. Her health coverage will also continue during this period. There are no other payments or compensation. She has provided a letter to the congregation we have agreed to release within 7 days of the separation being fully signed. She also agrees that there will be no communication with members of FSC. If you do wish to send her any communications, they can be sent to the church and will be delivered to her. The only person that has an open line to Rev. Mariela is me as the chair of the GB. This is consistent with the UUA guidelines for their ministers after leaving a congregation under ANY circumstances.
4. Per Item #11: A release is included that forever discharges FSC, from any known or unknown grievances, disputes, actions, claims.

Rev. Mariela had the opportunity to review this agreement with colleagues and her legal counsel. There is also a 7-day clause to revoke this separation as it relates to any potential claim that could be brought or filed under the Age Discrimination in Employment Act.

In closing I want to express that we all need to continue being Fountain Street Strong! Your staff, your Ministers, your governing board and your leaders need the full support of our congregation. This has been a difficult situation, and we have spent countless hours working on this situation with a lot of sleepless nights worried about the outcomes.

I personally want to call out a special thank you to Bryan Walters for working with me on the legal aspects of this agreement and to your officers and GB who have had an unbelievable number of updates and communications and hours spent on Zoom calls. I appreciate the hours they have worked on these issues and a thank you to your families for allowing you to take important family time to do this, it's greatly appreciated! Thanks to husband Jon. to fellow Fountain Streeter: we have much work ahead of us, let's not spend time on he said/she said, but do the hard work we need to do to come together to chart the bright future of Fountain Street. It's not going to be easy, but we have the right team in place, the right people, and I think we can all come together to make our dreams come true.

Chip read the letter written by Rev. Mariela:

February 14, 2021

Dear members and friends of Fountain Street Church:

I write to you with a broken heart, grief-stricken. Exactly a year ago (Feb 14, 2020) I came to visit Fountain Street Church, and I fell in love with it. A few months later I moved my family here, and we planned to stay for 15-20 years until retirement. However, after seven months in this position, I have asked the board to release me of my contract because the hostility toward me has made it impossible for me to do my work here, and it has taken a toll on my health.

Beloveds, we know that racism and sexism exist; what many of us don't know is the devastating impact that they have on the health of those who face it every single day in the workplace, as I have. I am not leaving this position because I have another job or a better offer. I'm leaving because Fountain Street Church has work to do on dismantling the systems that allow for women and people of color to be disrespected and treated poorly. And I trust that Fountain Street Church can do this work, but that is not my work. While I'm devastated (as I'm sure you are too) I have faith in your three gifted ministers (my beloved colleagues Rev. Christopher, Rev. Matthew, and Greta Jo). I also have faith in your lay leaders (Chip and Amy have been by my side throughout this whole process, and they are also gifted leaders.) And I have faith in you! I encourage you to engage in the process of healing, of growing the "S-I-Z-E" of your soul by doing this work of anti-racism. This is holy, sacred work.

I want to thank those of you who welcomed me and supported my ministry here. I'll be forever grateful!

Please know that I will not be able to stay in contact with any member of Fountain Street Church, even on social media. I will have to unfriend you once this letter goes out. This is sad but necessary for various reasons; for one, the ministerial association I'm a member of recommends this action; and two, I respect the work of your current ministry team too much, and so I intend to be fully out of their way so they can continue doing their amazing, powerful ministry. If you would like to say good-bye to me, you can do so via regular mail to the church; your cards or letters will be forwarded to me. Thank you!

I also want you to know that I understand that this is hard news to hear, on top of everything else the last 12 months have brought. That is one of the many reasons why my heart hurts.

Please take good care of yourselves, and please be kind to one another, to your ministers, to your wonderful hard-working staff, and to your lay leaders. This work is hard, and they are working extra hard for Fountain Street Church and will continue to do so during these difficult times. They need your support.

*Believing you can do this,
-Rev. Mariela*

Motion to adjourn was made by James and seconded by Kristen. The meeting adjourned at 8:15 pm.