

Unity of Central Minnesota Board of Directors

Meeting Minutes June 9, 2022

Opening

The working meeting of the Unity of Central Minnesota Board of Directors was called to order at 4:30 pm June 9, 2022 by President Carol Laudenbach. It was a hybrid meeting, both on Zoom and in person. After a prayer by Rev. Jim, the Board Pledge was read.

Present

Present were Terri Duncan, Susan Holmen, Carol Laudenbach, Beverly Mallgrave, Mary Paulson, Cristina Seaborn, and Rev. Jim Ernstsens.

Reports

Secretary's report

Minutes for 5/24/22 were sent ahead for review and are accepted as written.

Treasurer's Report

Terri reported that the year-to-date (YTD) reports just came out and show that for the year, we are showing a deficit of less than \$300--better than expected. She also says she will work on sending tithes to the organizations designated by the Tithe Policy (10% of our income is given to specified entities quarterly).

“Moving Forward” Discussion

This meeting was set for us to discuss “Where do we go from here?” after taking it to prayer and consideration. First, Carol asked everyone to share thoughts and feelings after the last discussion. Everyone was open with their words, and this led to an in-depth and honest conversation.

On everyone's mind is the issue of low attendance and its causes. All agreed that we need to really get to the core of what Unity of Central Minnesota means and where it is going from here. Getting clear and specific information from our community is vital. We want to understand if not having a designated space is the primary reason for lower attendance, or if there are other reasons.

The “double whammy” of selling the building and Covid has challenged our ability to connect with one another. It is agreed that social time after services, and special social events have been a fundamental part of our history and draw us together. Is this as important as getting spiritual needs met, or more so? There is also a question of whether UCM is “about spiritual growth or socializing,” and most agree that both are valued equally, since the socializing is made rich and rewarding because of the shared spiritual beliefs and practices. Our previous practice was to “have the service, then have a community center.”

Another concern is whether people are getting their spiritual needs met. We acknowledge that since Covid we have been Board and Minister-led, meaning content and direction have come from the top. Is that what our community wants, or could they want it to be more congregation-led—having congregants participate more, by giving talks or planning services? It is noted that the interfaith and non-religious aspects of Unity drew many of us (like John Denver Sunday) along with the sharing of alternative spiritual practices. Mentioned were the Earth Journey activities, the Unity Healers, classes/workshops led by congregants, and all agree at the vital contribution these make to our community. Being virtual has hampered that, but how we do restore that when we haven't found permanent space?

For now, it is essential that we understand what the community wants (or is missing) by connecting with them in various ways. This could be through social activities that add in an intention to have conversations to answer these questions. We know that not all activities, events or classes will meet everyone's needs, so having alternative ways to connect is important. Suggestions include a regular "tea party," house concerts, kayaking, monthly potluck socials or fireside chats. Other options to connect to the community include phone calls to individuals, a town hall, a "world café," focus (structured groups) groups, and surveys.

There has been feedback that suggests concern about being able to afford both a permanent space and a minister. Along these lines, some people may be interested in a lay-led church, citing that we did well for 2½ years without one, but others don't think we did that well. This option may also create an absence of leadership and continuity.

Most Board members agree that having a permanent space seems essential to our future, for the reasons mentioned, and it is agreed that the search for permanent space needs to continue. The options can be expanded and go in different directions (e.g., look for a house that could serve our needs).

Another area of concern is communication with the community. With low attendance at classes and events, it is suggested that we take more time ahead to announce and build up interest in these offerings. Also, it is agreed that there should be a regular way to communicate with the congregation, such as a Board report monthly in the newsletter and at a Sunday service. We have discussed this but need to commit to it. Certain decisions may not be understood by the community (or the Board, for that matter) and they may want more clarity and communication about them (e.g., Prayer Ministry being halted).

In the past a heavily attended event was the annual Volunteer Appreciation dinner. Everyone has generally volunteered in some way, so this pulls in the entire community. Musical events and using our own and other local musicians are valued by all. SSAM has been successful engaging members in community events and interest is growing. We will be hearing more about a "Small Group Ministry" idea that Cheryl Perry is working on for her LUT, with a helpful PDF document. These all may help connect us more.

Finally, we looked at next steps.

1. We want our community to know "we are listening." It is agreed to take advantage of the potluck social on 6/19 to get some feedback. We will have paper tablecloths with markers and ask everyone to discuss and jot ideas for us to track. Beverly and Susan (with Mary's help) will work on getting this set up. We will review this information at the next Board meeting. Rev. Jim will capture photos of the tabletops and prepare a slide show.

Some of the questions we want to ask the community are:

- "What do you love about Unity?"
- "What would excite you going forward?"
- "What have you missed most these past two years?"
- "What direction do we want to go?"
- "What activities do you want to do?"
- "Is having a permanent space essential?"

2. Another plan is to have monthly Board member reports in the newsletter and in Sunday service. Carol agrees to do this, as President, with something for the 6/24 newsletter and a report on Sunday, 6/26. This report will be about what the Board is discussing and working on right now.
3. We will revisit this and review the first pieces of input from the congregation at the June 28th Board meeting. Then we will think about what we have learned and what emerges and go forward from there.

Next Meeting

The next Regular Board Meeting is on Tuesday, **June 28 at 4:00** at the office and on Zoom.

Adjournment

Carol adjourned the meeting at 6:30 pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by: Susan Holmen

Approved by: Board