

The Eliot Chapel Board of Trustees Annual Meeting

Draft meeting minutes

May 21, 2023

- I. President Claire Wyneken called the meeting to order at 12:20pm and welcomed the congregation, acknowledging the growth of the community by welcoming 14 new members.
- II. Toni Saunders read the congregational covenant.
- III. Kalen Ponche read the statement of Quorum, and noted that we have 103 members present, which is more than the 45 or 10% required.
- IV. Adopt Meeting Rules
The meeting adopted meeting rules by unanimous consent. Jan Chamberlain noted that speakers should be sure to use a microphone so that they may be heard on the livestream at home.
- V. **The Consent Agenda approved by unanimous consent.**
 1. Approval of Agenda
 2. Approval of Minutes of 2022 Annual Congregational Meeting
 3. Election of Bob Becker to Board of Trustees – 3-year term beginning July 1, 2023
 4. Election of Rebecca Taylor to Board of Trustees – 3-year term beginning July 1, 2023
 5. Election of Sue Bell as Treasurer to the Board of Trustees – 2-year term beginning July 1, 2023
Claire raised the issue of a typographical error in meeting packet and noted that it should say that members of the nominating committee will serve for 3 years. The packet inaccurately said they would serve 1 year.
 6. Election of Ann Marie Hutson to Nominations Committee – 3-year term beginning July 1, 2023
 7. Election of Dr. Toni Saunders to Nominations Committee – 3-year term beginning July 1, 2023
- VI. **Statement of Outgoing Board Chair – Claire Wyneken**

Claire Wyneken thanked everyone for allowing her to serve as president of the Board of Trustees, noting that she was able to grow both spiritually and as a leader while connecting with more people in the congregation.

Wyneken thanked previous board chairs for lending their expertise when questions arose and thanked them for their efforts. She acknowledged Rev. Dr. Doug and Rev. Krista for their collaboration and communication and thanked the staff for their gracious and professional attitudes and hard effort. She reminded the congregation to greet the staff and be kind to them at this time of uncertainty and change.

Wyneken told the congregation that the board explored leadership and governance this year and has selected a mission-based governance model. She said the board formed a wonderful search team. Recently the board hired Rev. Krista as contract-to-call minister as we continue our exploration of who we serve.

The congregation is smaller than it was when these challenges began. Wyneken said she believes the church is on a path to stability after years of being buffered by events out of our control.

She asked us to consider the year at Eliot, and remember the energy and joy of the fall, and to mentally hold the people and meaning and growth we benefit from in our left hand. In our right hand she invited us to put our dreams for the church. She noted that we have a bit of an economic valley in between our two hands, but encouraged us to use our vitality to build a bridge to the future.

"It's our engagement and our energy that will attract people to and back to Eliot," she said.

VII. Minister's statement – The Rev. Doug Wadkins

Rev. Doug thanked us for the opportunity to be an interim minister this year. He said many ministers are feeling depleted. Wadkins said he came here having had some internal struggle about whether he wanted to continue to be a minister. He said his time here has renewed his commitment to ministry. He shared that, as a congregation, we have kept a deep sense of perspective, a sense of humor and a sense of purpose. "You should be deeply proud of who you are as a community," Wadkins said.

Wadkins noted that he will continue to serve the congregation until July 31. He said an essential part of ministry is determining what is at the heart of who we are. Wadkins said there will be another chance to explore this together on June 4 after the service. "That will help us know better what sort of leadership we need going forward," he said.

Rev. Doug also offered a recap of what he has heard from us as a congregation. We told him that we value how inclusive, caring, welcoming and curious we are in nature. We also have been able to share that we have the potential for some cliquiness and a propensity for homogeneity.

We aspire to greater diversity especially around age and economic diversity. In terms of who we serve and whom we seek to invite to our community.

Themes that come up include:

1. We want to do a better job of taking care of the congregation as it exists now– in particular ministering better to the families in the congregation. We know that's an important ministry.

2. We aspire to renew our partnerships and forge new relationships and partnerships with area congregations around us.

3. What is the world asking of us: themes include that we are a good community to help us address some of the polarities that are so epic in our world right now. We know how to have conversations in spite of and in celebration of difference. We can create space to do that more often. Want to welcome youth and young who struggle to find a sense of hope and acceptance. We want to do what we can to support democracy.

“Remember that if you lean into the strength and the vision and the perspective we already have we will be one of the leading Unitarian Universalist congregations in the US,” he said.

Doug also reminded the congregation that we will lose at least 20 hours a week of clergy service alone that we have been receiving over the last year. We also will see potential reductions in staff hours. He reminded us to have the discipline to keep a sense of kindness, partnership and boundaries.

“We will remain a strong congregation but only if we do not have unfair expectations of staff,” Wadkins said. “We have to work together to be creative, dynamic and caring and partner in ways we have never done before.”

Rev. Doug warmly welcomed Rev. Krista and gave her the key to the lead minister’s office.

Rev. Krista spoke to the congregation noting she was blessed to continue serving this year. She mentioned that she served at the UU church in Alton at a time in which they were in transition.

Rev. Krista shared some thoughts about what will help us be most successful this year. She noted that the interim work is not finished because the congregation needed to make a change do to a financial reality. Some of the work yet to be done belongs to us. She said we have an exceptional Board of Trustees, noting that the board has all the tools we need to continue the work.

“One thing we need to do next year is that we are going to have to do church in a new way,” she said. “We are shifting from a large church model to a program model. We are going to have to form many teams. We really, really, need you at this time. We are transforming into a smaller church. There are ways to organize ourselves and be stronger. I’m going to encourage us to anchor proudly in who we are now. Move into the new size, take hold of it as if it is a prized possession and do it well.”

Rev. Krista shared that she has reached out to the other UU churches in the region and plans to create an online program open to all UUs in the area so that we can learn and grow together.

VIII. Presentation of Budget Information – Treasurer Susan Bell offered a presentation of the budget, “Moving Toward a Stronger financial future for Eliot Chapel”

We received pledges from 232 “pledging units” or families, which is a reduction of 17 people from last year. However, those 232 pledging units or families contributed more this year than last year.

Non Pledge sources of income include fundraising, a second ask, rents, etc.

Operating expenses are remaining about the same next year.

Payroll expenses are the largest portion of the budget. If we kept staff the same except for letting go of Dr. Rev. Wadkins and retaining Rev. Krista as our contract-to-call minister, it would give us a \$120,000 deficit, which the board felt was too high.

The Board decided to do a staffing study to help us determine the right number of staff for a church of our size. We plan to make cuts to staff to get the payroll total down to \$465,500, which would give us a deficit of \$45,000 next year.

For the 2022-23 church year we had a budget that included a deficit of \$200,000.

However, we are ending the year with a deficit of closer to \$80,000 to \$90,000 this year.

We filled the deficit with savings, and were able to avoid spending down the endowment.

We have approved a budget that includes a smaller payroll in anticipation of the staffing study.

IX. Transfer of the gavel to the new Board Chair

Claire Wyneken transferred the gavel to Sara Fleming who will serve as the Board Chair for the 2023-24 church year.

X. Statement of Incoming Board Chair – Sara Fleming

Fleming noted the way that she serves: Coffee volunteer, recycling volunteer, RE volunteer, coordinator of trivia night, played the queen and the unicorn in various plays. Fleming said the board will start to develop a strategic plan, and work on developing our missional identity. She thanked Claire for her leadership and example, and for the rest of the board for our hard work.

“Friends, I am excited for our future here. Eliot Chapel is not the building we are in, it is not the properties and our assets or our ministers or our staff. Eliot is our congregation and Eliot is our mission and those things are strong and unwavering and I believe in both of them with all of my heart.”

XI. Comments/Questions from the Floor

Claire opened the floor to questions.

Anne Marie Hutson: With this budget it really concerns me that we may lose some quality people. I consider Camille and Christy the engine of the church. I wish there were a way to change this budget to not lose those positions. Did we consider the sale of 222 and what is our plan going forward with that.?

Claire’s response: Three considerations- the sale of assets has to be considered by this entire congregation. We would have to shift gears from our interim dialogue to the sale of assets. We felt that would be a lengthy process and one we couldn’t conclude in time for the budget this year. We also felt the congregation conversation around strategic assets belongs in a strategic plan. How do these assets support our future together? As we think about a longer view of the congregation and frame the assets with how do they support this

If we did sell an asset it might help us temporarily. We felt it was time to confront the brutal facts that we have more expenses than we have revenue coming in. That issue is not off the table but we want to frame it in a more strategic perspective.

Steve Mennerick: I’ve been at Eliot since 2002. I’m picking up in the spirit of Anne Marie’s comment – It seems like some other gap filling might be on the table. I remember one interim period that we had a second ask that raised \$100,000. Is there any thought to using that as a stopgap?

Sue- Most of the second asks have fallen in the range of \$10,000 to \$35,000. We had budgeted \$60,000 and we only received \$32,000, so I think if anyone is willing to change their pledge card up?

Claire- as we look at choices ahead we can always go back and look and have conversations. If the board hears there is more energy behind that we can certainly factor that in.

Carolyn Burke- Coming since 1987 I have a question about the shared collections donations. Is there a way to find out what actual is— is it half of the shared collection?

Sue- The shared collections we are estimating we are going to receive \$60,000 here, less than half of that is contributed out. The net amount is \$33,000.

Mary Meihaus- At the end of the budget it says, the estimated payroll expenses without a staffing study is \$535,000. Budgeted payroll expenses went from \$614,000 We backed into it to come up with a deficit of roughly \$45,000. I want to voice my concern. If we have volunteers taking over integral duties from highly qualified staff by cutting hours drastically. The reason I feel that way is that if our volunteer efforts amp up into promotions, facility rentals and fundraising, couldn't we make up an \$82,500 difference in this coming year? Can't we put our efforts toward that and keep the staff hours? I feel like Rev. Krista deserves to have as much of our experienced and cohesive staff as possible. I don't want to eliminate a position and regret that later. It's an astronomical amount of talent if we lose our staff over \$82,000.

Claire commented that the actual decisions won't be made until after the staffing study is complete. David Pyle is doing that without a cost. This is a marker in time as far as holding a budget amount and certainly if there are strong indicators that we can be confident in then we can make those decisions but we have to have some strong indicators that that is actually coming.

Ann Lemon- Been here since 2002. I've been trying to do the math. It's \$82,500 to keep staff as it stands. We have 232 pledging units. That is \$332 per pledging unit. I am happy to do that much to keep staff on staff. If we haven't made it clear we have to cut staff- it feels like we should be able to do that. It would be so sad to lose any of the staff.

I think people would come if we got out some good marketing.

Sara- we are going to get the word out.

Ahmed Eldarrat - Family have been coming for about 5 years now. I hear a lot about trying to reach the youth, I know that is one thing that brought me here. I don't know how it would work but I do think that presence on social media is lacking and marketing in general is a good way to reach out. The one thing that we might consider that doesn't cost as much is visible action. Being out in the community visibly and loudly. As someone being active in social justice movements. We have a beautiful church but there are lots of craft fairs, People are looking for booths and music events. I'd be willing to be part of a group of people willing to work on that. Modern ways of reaching out and expanding.

Kathy Becker- Husband and I have come for 15 years. I worry about protecting the benefits of the people who are working here. I think can help. If we have to cut their hours, I hope we don't have to, but protecting their benefits is essential.

Paula Fulks- Member since 2016. My question is about the process for securing a settled minister. Rev. Doug would lead us through a 2 year examination of who we are and who we want to be and then we would have . What are we going to do to fill that gap and how does that relate to the fact that we have a contract to call? How does that affect the search for a settled minister?

Claire- Our work will continue. The search team will guide the process. We will lean on the UUA and others who can help us with those conversations. We are fairly well equipped here - we have facilitators. This year is a chance for us to continue that work together. Its' also a time for Rev. Krista to stand back and observe and discern. There will be discernment as to whether the next step will be a calling. It is not an automatic but it is an option.

Fulks- timing for the appointment of the called minister vs the consideration of contract to call.

Claire- we have all of the fall and into the winter to consider the work. We wneed to make a decision as to whether or not to consider Rev. Krista next winter. If not, we have time to begin our search process and she has time. If we decide to go forward then we move forward on that process.

Rebecca Schuder- since 1987 attendee– when is the study of our staff going to take place, how long will it take and will the person be in the state? Or is he doing it remotely? How will you disseminate that information?

Claire- David Pyle is the midwest lead for the UUA. We sent him a lot of information. He will interview staff who are interested in participating in the process. He may engage congregation, they have a process they use. We spoke Friday and he still seemed to believe we could have that buttoned up by mid-June. We both board and David have a real interest in moving forward quickly because the staff deserve quick answers and don't need to linger. We will get some things in TWAE, figure out some communication.

Lynn Murphy - Coming since the 1980s. First, the budget and staffing I'm very concerned if we cut our nursery. When we go with families that may have needed a nursery. The other is as Rev. Doug is leaving, with us, what I'd like the board and minister to consider is needing a true mission statement. OUR mission statement is words- what do we want to do? What do we want to achieve? Have a true goal for our church. I think that would be really wonderful.

Cayla Suter- Been a member since 2015. My question. Love marketing love strategic plan Along the lines of communication is part of the strategic plan communicating. I'd love more transparency. My skill set isn't this. I'd love to know where we are at on a regular basis. I'd love to be able to learn so I feel more empowered. That could shift our perspective.

Steve Jarrett- member since I don't know. The thing about bergfried. That's 11,000 worth of the budget. I'd like to see the bergfried committee reconvene. We could probably work on that and get that sum down a little bit. We have some ideas we'd like to share. Bergfried it always comes up and it always seems like a sale item.

Michael Hennon- Around Eliot Forever literally. I have a comment more than a question. I want to praise the board and our ministerial leadership for focusing on leaning into the future because I think that is terribly important. We don't know what the future will bring. You are always going to have to lean in. Rev. Krista asked me about our past and the origins of the past. I tried to answer the question as best as I could. Talk to Jackie Turner and Julie Triplett. Two remaining charter members of Eliot Chapel AND also there's a video tape called Eliot Chapel charter members remember made with John Robbins interviewing people. I discovered that video tape is missing. Unclear where it is since 2013. It is a terrible loss for our church and keeps us from leaning into the future.

Rob Van Alstyne- the church future is going to be determined by volunteer efforts as much as budget. If we spend as much time
We had some reduction in staff led scott to do reach out. I've been a member of 2014, it's the best year of RE that our kids have had.

Ann Ruger - Flower communion service- I am the prickly thistle. I have felt for a long time that we have overextended ourselves in a congregation. I voted against the purchase of 222. I love our staff but when I hear you all saying we have to do everything to keep them. We have to come up with 355 each one of us each year. I think we are overstaffed if we dont address this problem but we are staffed at thee level we were when we were a church of 550, we are now 350 and it would be extremely painful to cut any of the staff but I applaud the board for having the courage to ask us to consider this.

Lou Salvin - I wanted to add a comment. I've been coming since I was a teeanger. There was a huge amountf of volunteer work. I have grown increasingly fond of this congregation. Part of development of giving should include the amount of time we are willing to give on a volunteer basis to make this church thrive

Gary Gray- Pat and I have been members for a long time. Comment- I'd congratulate the board for setting a budget that will focus our attention on the right issue. We've had deficit budgets for a few years. I would congratulate them on doing the right thing. This is where we can be unless we do something different.

I do have a question. My question is - assuming it comes with recommendations? Who will implement it? The board? Vote of the congregation?

Claire- what we have discussed is that the path forward the governance path forward we want the board and minister to be working collaboratively in this past year. Typically the minister has sole authority over the hiring and dismissal of staff members but we have spoken with Rev.

Krista and we do believe in the next year particularly the board and the minister work collaboratively together on those decisions. That's as far as we've gotten there Gary. I will echo back to Becky's request that we communicate often and as transparently as we can.

Chuck Schuder- member since 1987. One of the things the board has been wrestling with for a couple of years is there is a distinction between the ends and the means. The ends are like goals, the means are how we achieve the goals. There has been a brick wall impenetrable between the people who set our goal and the people who implement the goals. There's even in our policies is there any time that the board has interfered with the day to day operation of the church. We are working on making that more penetrable but until that happens.

Carole Glauser- Member since 2016. We will work as a board on more transparency and communication and we will think outside the box. BUt as a congregation we have to read stuff. Communication is a two way street.

XII. Adjourn

The annual meeting of Eliot Unitarian Chapel was adjourned at 1:58pm.