

Unitarian Universalist Church of Bloomington, Indiana

Seeking the Spirit, Building Community, Changing the World

Approved Board Minutes

February 21, 2018



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Board members attending: Von Welch, Michelle Monroe-Cook, Steven Gilbert, Sandra Churchill, Sharon Wiseman, Hans Kelson (Youth Liaison)

Not attending: Helmut Hentschel, Pat Brantlinger

Present by invitation of the Board: Arzetta Hulst-Losensky

Ministers attending: Reverends Mary Ann Macklin, Scott McNeill

Submitted by: Steven Gilbert

Appended Documents:

- A. Senior Minister's Report (Reverend Mary Ann Macklin)
- B. Chair's Report to the Board for December (Von Welch)
- C. SPF Quarterly Report, Oct – Dec, 2017 (Sandra Churchill)
- D. Annual Operating Budget Process (Sandra Churchill)
- E. Questions of Legality of SPF Committee Structure (Von Welch)
- F. What to Do... Vision Eludes You (Reverend Scott McNeill)

I. Call to Order (Von Welch)

Von Welch called the meeting to order at 6:59 p.m.

II. Chalice Lighting and Reading (Sharon Wiseman)

III. Check-in (All)

IV. Approval of the Minutes (Steven Gilbert)

Motion to approve the minutes by Von Welch was seconded by Sharon Wiseman and approved by the board.

V. Senior Minister's Report (Reverend Macklin)

Reverend Macklin presented the Senior Ministers Report including updates on the pledge campaign, partnering with the Columbus UU Church, VALE and the End of Life Task Force, monthly surveys to the congregation, snow removal and cancellations, budget creation and the current budget, future budget from the MidAmerica region, and Gun safety and policy. Details are included in Appendix A, attached.

VI. Old Business

1. Visioning and Strategic Planning (Rev. McNeill)

Based on the reading for the board entitled *What to do When the Vision Eludes You* (Appendix F), Rev. McNeill proposed discussing the topic of seeing the church from a fresh perspective. Nonmembers see the UU in various lights: as an unknown, as a social club, as an open and welcoming place, and as a socially active community asset. Rev. Macklin pointed out that UU is not for all newcomers: some will leave because it is not right for them. Most initial inquiries appear to begin at the church website rather than newspaper ads, although print ads have been used. It was suggested that member testimonials might be a good way to add to the effectiveness of recruitment efforts. Rev. McNeill closed by suggesting the board continue the discussion of what we do well and how we communicate this to potential members in future meetings as part of its visioning process.

VII. Monitoring (per Board Policies, Section IV)

1. SPF Report (Sandra Churchill)

The SPF quarterly report for October-December, 2017 (Appendix C) was presented to the board by Sandra, who also reviewed the process of creating the Annual Operating Budget (Appendix D).

2. Budgetary Requests and Compensation/Benefit Levels for Next Fiscal Year (Rev. Macklin)

Rev. Macklin identified fair staff compensation levels and investment in the physical plant/grounds as areas deserving emphasis in the upcoming budget. The aging physical plant, including HVAC systems and sewer systems may soon require large expenditures but the need for funds for unexpected breakdowns should also be anticipated. While gains have been made in moving some staff toward UUA recommended compensation, the gains are uneven. Continuing efforts are needed.

3. Board Position Descriptions (All)

Von reiterated his request for revised position descriptions to be sent to him.

4. Report from Coffee with the Board (Sharon Wiseman)

Sharon reported a highly successful “coffee with the board” session. She attributed the success to chocolate and to a nearby signup board expressing sympathy/solidarity with the Lafayette UU. Lesson: dark chocolate and having things for people to do/look at could make CWTB more successful.

VIII. New Business

1. Prior Board Work on Weapons Policy (Von Welch)

This topic was discussed early in the meeting (See Notes to the Board, Appendix B, under New Business for background). Michelle will spearhead a revisit of prior work on a church gun policy, with the goal of this board taking action on such a policy in time to present it to the congregation in June.

2. Question of SPF Committee Legality (Von Welch)

The question of SPF Committee Legality under the conditions of incorporation and Indiana Code has been raised as discussed in Appendix E, attached. Von moved *that the board approve the President soliciting professional legal advice on this matter using funding to be requested from the SPF*. The motion was seconded by Sandra and approved by the board.

3. Beloved Conversations (Rev. Macklin)

Rev. Macklin reported that further work with Beloved Conversations this spring has been postponed in favor of continuing participation in local racial justice training.

4. Board Signup for Pledge Cards (Rev. Macklin)

Board members were asked to sign up to help with pledging activity between services beginning in March.

5. Donations with Staff Salary Designations (Von Welch)

Von moved, Michelle seconded, and the board approved the motion to: *Endorse the creation of an operational endowment, and empower the Board President to take steps, in consultation with the SPF Committee and the recent donor, to create such an endowment, with the expectation that the President will propose Board Policies changes to support the endowment at the next Board meeting.* See Reports to the Board, Appendix B for a full explanation of the proposal.

IX. Executive Session

Board entered executive session at 8:40 p.m.

X. Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made by Sharon and seconded by Sandra. The board adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

APPENDIX A

2018 February Board Report Reverend Mary Ann Macklin February 21, 2018

Pledge Campaign

As mentioned earlier, Pledge Day—Community Day will be April 14th. There will be four Sundays, March 25th, April 1st, April 8th, and April 15th where we will have Pledge Cards available and an invitation to Pledge. Sign-up sheet for one or two Board Members for a slot after each worship service. There will also be a staff member present to help with logistics. (Pass around sign-up sheet).

Partnering with Columbus UU Church

During the presidency of Kathy Sidelli, our board visited the Columbus Church as part of an outreach effort, hoping for more partnership opportunities in the future. I will be preaching at Columbus in early May, at the invitation of their minister, Reverend Nic Cable. My sermon will focus on our Chalice Circle program. We will be inviting members of the Columbus congregation to join us for our Facilitator Training in mid-August. This is a way that we, a larger congregation with many resources, can make a difference for smaller congregations. Of course, we will benefit in many ways from this partnership as well.

End of Life Task Force and VALE

Will be hosting the Interactive Theater with Diane Kondrat on March 3rd. The VALE (Vigiling at Life's End) program will be training with IU Health Hospice in April for 12 hours so we can start volunteering at IU Health Hospice House.

Monthly Surveys to Congregation

As part of our efforts to connect with congregation members in different ways, we will begin sending a monthly survey to members. It will be very short and informative. Reverend Scott McNeill and Connections Coordinator Ann LeDuc will oversee survey topics and connections.

Snow Removal and Cancellation

On Youth Sunday, all of our procedures were followed. Reverend Scott McNeill and Reverend Leite determined to cancel the 9:15am service (due to weather conditions, particularly in rural areas). In future we will strive to have all announcements out by 8am. If you would like a copy of our Emergency Snow Procedures, please contact our Church Administrator.

Sunday Security Article

In the recent UU World Magazine there is an article regarding Sunday Security. After reading the article, I found we are far more prepared than most congregations. Kudos to John Summerlot and our Usher program.

<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/sunday-security>

Budget Creation

In terms of budget creation it is important for you to know that my strategy is to create a rather conservative budget. I believe this is a key factor to our current financial situation--- running in the black instead of the red, which was not always the case when I first began to serve here. We have a decent operational reserve at present and I hope to see that increase. The Operational Reserve does give me flexibility for budget overrun. Our bylaws state “Congregational approval is required for an expenditure in any budget line that is projected to exceed the budgeted amount by more than 5% or \$3,000, whichever is greater” *. So in any case when I perceive, with the aid of Treasurer, CFO and Church administrator, that we will overrun by 5% or \$3,000, the Board Leadership will be immediately notified in writing.

The bylaws also state if total expenditures during the fiscal year are projected to exceed the budget by more than 5% congregational approval is required. When Kathy Sideli was the Board President, she interpreted this to be not an individual line, but the entire budget section. I continue to interpret as so.

Current Budget (2017-2018)

Our building is aging. Budget lines that are stressed right now are all in our PLANT budget. **Plant:Building Maintenance** is likely to go over budget for the year by about \$3,000 due to unanticipated expenses for tree removal, stair tread replacement, gutter repair, and a sewer backup on Christmas Eve. **Plant:Grounds** is likely to go over budget by around \$2,000 because Jason McCord, the member who donated half the cost of mowing as his contribution to the church for the last several years, sold his business and the new owners will be charging full price. **Plant:Housekeeping** (paper products) is running over budget because of increased attendance at the many events held in our building. **Plant:Snow Removal** will go over budget if it snows again before spring. Each visit to salt our lot or plow it costs about \$250, and we have \$154 remaining in that line.

Future Budget from MidAmerica Region (Received today, February 21, 2018)

Some changes are afoot regarding our Fair Share contributions to the Region and the UUA. This spring we will receive a single pledge form, which requests ONE Pledge in support of the Region and the UUA. Our single request for support will be based on a MidAmerica per member rate of \$26, and the Annual Program Fund per member rate of \$60. All funds will go to the UUA, who will process our contribution on behalf of us all—see the details below for upcoming changes.

From the MidAmerica Region and Unitarian Universalist Association:

What will remain the same for Fiscal Year 2019 (July 1, 2018-June 30, 2019):

- You will be asked to pledge to support both the Region and the UUA based on the number of voting members you reported during certification. Your congregation will be asked to pledge your support of our Region and our UUA on the same form.
- The UUA Annual Program Fund rate will remain the same, \$60 per member (this rate has remained unchanged since 2014), or 4.3% of certified expenditures if your congregation has 550 or more members.

What will be different for Fiscal Year 2019:

- Your congregation will no longer be asked to make separate pledges and payments to the MidAmerica Region and the Annual Program Fund. In March, you will receive your 2019 pledge form which will list the amounts

requested for the Region and the UUA. These figures will be combined to provide your total 2019 Request for support.

- You will make your FY2019 contributions by sending checks only to the UUA, payable to **UUA-MidA**.
- This move to a combined single payment reduces duplicate administrative work, and, most importantly, your *combined payment helps make clear the reality that we are all the UUA*. We are in this together.
- The Regional request for support increases from \$25 to \$26 per member. We last increased this amount in 2016, and we all know that costs have increased since then.

Gun Safety

With the current rising awareness regarding gun violence and safety, we have been contacted by members regarding our church's gun safety policy. While our Board has studied the possibility of a policy in the past, it seems timely to revisit this issue again. I ask that a member of our Board contact Amy Jackson from Congregation Beth Shalom who recently went through the process to adopt a prudent gun policy for a faith community. Also questions: Does UUCB have a public stand on guns in church? Do other churches in Bloomington?

From an article today from Indiana Public Media--- "Current law allows guns in churches but largely bans them on school property. That means licensed gun owners are barred from carrying into church if it shares property with a school. Current proposed legislation would change that, legalizing guns in churches on school property during worship services if the house of worship allows it."

APPENDIX B

Reports to Board

Von Welch, President

February 21st, 2018

Old Business

Visioning and Strategic Planning

Please read “What to do When Vision Eludes You” by Susan Beaumont, January 8, 2018.

<http://www.congregationalconsulting.org/vision-eludes-you/>

Monitoring

SPF Report (Sandy Churchill, Helmut Hentschel)

Report for July-December 2017.

Email from Chris Haynes, SPF Chair, to Von Welch:

At the SPF meeting this week there was brief discussion of Board awareness of the role and function of SPF. We resolved to draw the Board’s attention to the SPF Overview document: <https://goo.gl/mk6ST8>. This is intended to be the “public face” of SPF, created initially to inform potential donors. It also provides roughly the level of knowledge of SPF that we feel Board members should all have. Presumably there is a set of documents that new Board members are expected to review, in which this should be included.

There is a companion [SPF Policies](#) document. It contains the additional SPF policies, with which the SPFC and church admin should be familiar, and anyone can access as a public document. (It’s linked from the Overview document.) Finally, there’s a SPF Procedures document, which is of concern only to the church admin, bookkeeper, and SPF chair.

Budgetary requests for next fiscal year (Rev. Macklin)

As the Board and the Finance Committee begin the process of constructing a budget for FY19, what major changes does the Senior Minister propose?

Compensation and Benefit levels (Rev. Macklin):^[L]_[SEP]

As the Board and the Finance Committee begin the process of constructing a budget for FY19, what major compensation and benefit changes does the Senior Minister propose?

Religious Education update (canceled):^[L]_[SEP]

We just had an update in January, so this update is canceled and we will resume our normal schedule with the next update in May.

Board position descriptions. (All)

Please review the Board [position descriptions](#) (primarily your own) for accuracy and be prepared to discuss proposed changes. The goal is to have accurate descriptions so that prospective candidates can have a good sense of what they are committing to.

New Business

FYI: Prior Board Work on Weapons Policy

A senate committee approved a bill that would allow for the carrying of firearms in a church even if it's on school property ([link](#)). The UUCB Board in the timeframe of January-March of 2015 did task a committee with researching a weapons policy. The committee suggested a policy banning weapons, but noted there could be complications with members who were required to carry a firearm as part of their professional duties and members who might feel the need to carry one for personal safety due to active threats against them.

Question of the SPF Committee Legality

The Special Purposes Fund committee has raised the question of its own legality under Indiana Code - see [attached report](#) for details.

Motion: The Board approves the President soliciting professional legal advice on this matter using funding to be requested from SPF.

Operational Endowment

A recent \$30,000 donation to UUCB has been received with the instructions: "I have no specific requests as to how the money is used except for adequate salaries for all those serv[ing] the Church and keep it functioning spiritually and physically."

Large donations such as this would normally go to the Special Purposes Fund (SPF). However SPF funds cannot be used for operations, and the staff salaries are paid out of the operational budget. Hence if the donation goes to SPF, it cannot be used for staff salaries as instructed.

The gift has been temporarily entrusted to the SPF Committee. They request that if it is not going to be permanently managed by them, it be moved out of their care by the end of March so it does not complicate their quarterly reporting.

In addition to the recent gift, there exists today a small (about \$70,000) operational endowment accrued over time (starting prior to 1991). This fund is invested at Vanguard and referred to in monthly financial reports as "Vanguard Wellington-UU." It is not controlled by SPF.

I propose we should officially create, via Board Policy, an operational endowment that would provide ongoing income to the operational budget. This endowment would be created using the existing endowment plus the recent gift. The SPF committee would manage such an endowment in parallel to the SPF, leveraging their existing policies, and procedures (including reporting). The endowment would be initially funded with some portion, perhaps all, of the recent gift and the existing endowment based on future discussions with the SPF Committee and the donor.

Motion: The Board endorses the creation of an operational endowment, and empowers the Board President to take steps, in consultation with the SPF Committee and the recent donor, to create such an endowment, with the expectation the President will provide a proposal of Board Policies changes to support the endowment at the next Board meeting.

APPENDIX C: SPF QUARTERLY REPORT

Special Purposes Fund Quarterly Report: October 2017 through December 2017 FINAL

	Beginning Balance	Earnings Distribution	Distribution	Transfers	Deposits	Expenses	Ending Balance	Notes	% All
Accounts									
Endowment									
Vanguard ...4291 Wellington Fund Inv	118,838.92	6,443.75	-1,039.86				124,242.81		30%
Fossil-fuel Divested Accounts	50.00%	12,108.59	755.42				12,864.00		
Endowment Accounts Totals	130,947.51	7,199.16	-1,039.86				137,106.81		
General									
Checking register	10,161.28				39,924.10	-4,779.00	45,306.38		11%
Hilliard Lyons: Canada precious metals	3,491.53	203.53					3,695.06		1%
Vanguard ...4291 I-T Investment-Grade Inv	70,387.20	133.66					70,520.86		17%
Vanguard ...4291 S-T Investment-Grade Inv	68,604.19	-33.81					68,570.38		17%
Vanguard ...0780 Wellington Fund Inv	73,599.69	2,306.94	1,039.86				76,946.49		19%
Fossil-fuel Divested Accounts	50.00%	12,108.59	755.42				12,864.00		
General Accounts Totals	238,352.48	3,365.74	1,039.86		39,924.10	-4,779.00	277,903.17		

All

All Totals	369,299.97	10,564.90			39,924.10	-4,779.00	415,009.96		
Fossil-fuel Divested									
Hilliard Lyons: Parnasus (PARNX)	12,597.69	593.97					13,191.66		3%
Hilliard Lyons: S&P 500 ex-Energy (SPXE)	11,619.48	916.86					12,536.34		3%
Divested Accounts Totals	24,217.17	1,510.83					25,728.00		

	Beginning Balance	Earnings Distribution	Endowment Distribution	Transfers	Deposits	Expenses	Ending Balance	Proportions	Endowment	Equities	Divested
Funds											
Endowment											
e - General Endowment	99,628.39	5,477.32	-791.15				104,314.56				
e - C Robertson Endowment	12,104.25	665.46	-96.12				12,673.59				
e - Lundin Social Justice Endowment	19,214.84	1,056.38	-152.59				20,118.64				
Endowment Funds Totals	130,947.49	7,199.16	-1,039.86				137,106.79				
General											
i - General Fund/Endowment Income	11,863.14	167.52	791.15			-329.12	12,492.69				
i - C Robertson Grounds Income	93.57		96.12				189.69				
i - Lundin S.J. Grant Fund	5,331.86	75.29	152.59			-3900.00	1,659.74				
R - ARE John Dessauer	2,045.20	28.88					2,074.08				
R - Campus Ministry	7,784.16	109.92					7,894.08				

R - Cap Improvement - Lynches bequest	559.18	7.90	-549.88	17.20
R - Comctns - E Auer	1,242.63	17.55		1,260.17
R - Conference Leadership Fund	745.21	10.52		755.73
R - Grounds Beautification - Jane Burnett	542.20	7.66		549.85
R - Habitat for Humanity - Schwegman	209.75	2.96		212.71
R - Lundin Reserve-Pchse Belcher - Prop	28,964.22	409.00		29,373.22
R - Music - Bill Lynch, UU Choir	312.61	4.41		317.03
R - Music - Clarke Dewey Wells	9,273.59	130.95		9,404.54
R - Music - Swaney Composition Fund	0.00	0.00		10,000.00
R - Robert Bent - Music or - Religious Ed	1,446.16	20.42		1,466.58
R - Robert Carter - History, Archives, FormerR -	485.52	6.86		492.38
R - Sabbatical Fund	1,424.21	20.11		1,444.33
R - Social Justice - Dan Quilter	2,047.78	28.92		2,076.70
R - Special Projects Fund	570.50	8.06		578.55
NR - Legacy Fund	163,410.91	2,307.50		195,642.51
General Funds Totals	238,352.39	3,364.41	-4,779.00	277,901.76

Checking Detail

Old National Bank	Beginning Balance	Ending Balance
	10,161.28	45,306.38

Date	Description	Amount
	Transfers	
	Checking Transfer Total	0.00
	Deposits	
12/20/2017	Legacy Fund: sale of stock-gift of Von Welch and Ruth Aydtt	11,275.50
12/20/2017	Legacy Fund: from estate of Kathie Lazerwitz	18,561.28
12/20/2017	R Swaney Composition Fund - from anonymous donor	10,000.00
10/11/2017	Income dividend from Proshares	52.32
10/25/2017	Income divided from Proshare	35.00
	Checking Income Total	39,924.10
	Expenses	
10/18/2017	UU Church: SJ funds for nuclear clocks	879.00
11/29/17	UU Church: SJ funds for 2017 Fall grants, round 1	2,000.00
12/7/17	UU Church: SJ funds for 2017 Fall grants, round 2	1,900.00
	Checking Expense Total	4,779.00

Allocation of Endowment Assets and Endowment Income Distribution

Quarter	Endowment Total	Fund Balances		Distribution		Distributions		
		General	Grounds	Soc. Just.	Total	General	Grounds	Soc. Just.
15Q3	101,748.90	39,390.33	23,786.42	37,804.51	767.63	299.43	180.82	287.38
15Q4	98,604.08	38,139.22	23,030.92	36,603.77	830.17	323.83	195.55	310.79
16Q1	93,736.27	36,218.53	21,871.08	34,760.40	886.25	345.71	208.76	331.79
16Q2	95,840.56	68,663.01	10,503.62	16,673.92	944.62	676.75	103.53	164.34
16Q3	97,560.71	69,895.37	10,692.14	16,973.18	1,002.36	718.12	109.85	174.39

16Q4	89,517.13	64,132.72	9,810.60	15,573.80	1,051.03	752.99	115.19	182.85
17Q1	101,000.28	72,359.58	11,069.10	17,571.59	1,111.08	796.01	121.77	193.30
17Q2	104,367.48	74,771.94	11,438.12	18,157.40	1,171.79	839.51	128.42	203.86
17Q3	105,884.25	75,858.61	11,604.35	18,421.28	1,234.04	884.10	135.24	214.69
17Q4	127,741.78	97,189.40	11,807.93	18,744.45	1,012.22	770.13	93.57	148.53
18Q1	130,947.49	99,628.39	12,104.25	19,214.84	1,039.86	791.15	96.12	152.59
18Q2	20,118.64		104,314.56	12,673.59	972.56	0.00	5,042.68	612.65

Notes

Key e = Endowment, i = Income from endowment, NR = Non-Restricted fund, R = Restricted fund

APPENDIX D

Annual Operating Budget Process:

Senior Minister and CFO develop draft annual operating budget (February to early March)

Board sets Senior Minister's Salary in Executive Session

CFO and Treasurer work together to present draft budget to Finance Committee for their review and analysis (mid-April).

Recommendations from the Finance Committee go back to the Senior Minister. These discussions may go back and forth several times until the operating budget is finalized.

Treasurer presents to Board annual operating budget for their approval.

Treasurer represents the Board approval justification at Congregational Meeting in June. Answers questions, etc.

(info taken from UU Policy Manual)

APPENDIX E

On the Question of the Legality of UUCB's Current SPF Committee Structure

Von Welch, Stuart Yoak and the SPF Committee
February 3rd, 2018

Background: UUCB Bylaws and the SPF Committee

The Special Purposes Fund (SPF) Committee is defined by Section 7 of the bylaws of the UU Church of Bloomington Indiana¹ and is composed as follows:

The members of the SPF Committee shall be five in number; three elected by the Members of the Church, one member of the Board of Directors of the Church elected by the Board, and the Treasurer of the Church.

The bylaws give the SPF Committee broad powers in independently managing the SPF:

“The SPF shall be administered by a Committee chosen in the manner here specified, which shall serve without compensation. The Committee members shall receive all contributions to the Fund; provide for their safe-keeping, management, preservation and investment as required; collect all income from investments and make disbursements from the Fund for its expenses and for Church purposes determined in the manner specified below. In managing and investing the assets of the Fund, the Committee, which shall serve without bond, exercising the judgment and care which prudent persons exercise in the management of their own affairs, shall have the power to sell, assign, transfer, lease, pledge, mortgage, and convey property of the Fund, and to invest or reinvest the assets of the Fund, and to exercise all the powers of ownership of securities or any other assets held by it.”

The Question of SPF Committee Legality under Indiana Code

The question has arisen if this arrangement of the SPF Committee managing UUCB assets independently of the Board is legal under Indiana Code (IC) 23-17², covering Nonprofit Corporations. Specifically IC 23-17-2-4 defines a nonprofit's Board of directors as the “group of persons vested with overall management of the affairs of the domestic or foreign corporation.” Further, IC 23-17-12-1 goes on to state that “(1) corporate powers shall be exercised by or under the authority of; and (2) the business and affairs of the corporation managed under the direction of; the corporation's board of directors.”

IC 23-17-12-1 does provide for an organization's articles of incorporation to “authorize a person or a group of persons or the manner of designating a person or a group of persons to exercise

¹ <http://www.uubloomington.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/2016-06-BYLAWS-6-12-2016.pdf>

² <http://iga.in.gov/legislative/laws/2017/ic/titles/023#23-17>

some or all of the powers that would otherwise be exercised by a board of directors.” However, UUCB’s articles of incorporation do not mention the SPF or SPF Committee.

Need for D&O Insurance for the SPF Committee?

One possible, unvetted interpretation is that the SPF Committee, being elected by the congregation, is acting as directors. This interpretation raised a second question: should UUCB have Directors & Officers liability insurance (D&O insurance) for the SPF Committee? Such insurance is standard practice for an organization to have in place for their board of directors

It has been established that our current D&O insurance³ covers the SPF Committee members:

“[O]ur policy for Directors and Officers Liability covers the Board and all other elected or appointed members, so it covers the Board and SPF as well as the elected members of the Leadership Cultivation Committee. The limit of coverage is \$500,000 per occurrence, and \$500,000 aggregate for related incidents.”

Proposed Next Step

It is suggested that UUCB research and answer the question raised in the document “Is the current arrangement of the UUCB SPF Committee operating independently of the Board of Directors legal under Indiana Code?”

The proposal is for the Board to approach Paige Freitag⁴, a lawyer previously arranged by the UUCB board to serve our congregation. The SPF Committee has indicated that a proposal to cover expenses for resolving this issue would be welcome.

³ Per correspondence between Carol Marks, Church Administrator, and Amanda Hanzel, Account Manager, Church Mutual Insurance Company.

⁴ <https://www.bloomingtonlaw.com/>



What to do When Vision Eludes You

by **Susan Beaumont** on January 8, 2018

The change of a calendar year suggests inspiration. The old year with its depleted reserves is behind us. For leaders, a new year calls forth optimism and imaginative beginnings—or it should. But what if you just feel empty? What can you do when fresh vision eludes you, when you have lost capacity to dream on behalf of the congregation you serve? Is it time to leave, or is there a way to recapture the passion and vigor of a new perspective?

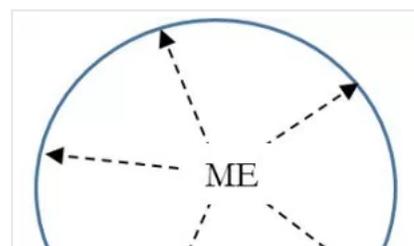


Undoubtedly, in the old year you read at least one book on church vitality. *Ten Critical Steps Forward*, or *Three Things Every Church Must Do*, or *Five Mistakes All Leaders Must Avoid*. You've heard of powerful transformations taking place in other congregations. Maybe you even tried some of their ideas. Inevitably, disappointment followed when something that worked elsewhere failed for you. You can imagine new ideas for ministry in other places, but a fresh vision for your congregation isn't forthcoming.

Vision is a Way of Seeing

Figuring out what to *do* with your organization is not as critical as figuring out how to *see* it. Most of us picture ourselves at the center of the organization we lead. We understand how things work based on how people have responded to our past initiatives. This is a form of perceptual bias: If I say this, they will do that. If we try this, they will expect that.

David only sees a donor base interested in maintaining the status quo. Deborah only perceives a governing board clinging to an outdated building. Matthew only notices the crotchety group of parents who won't entertain new ways of structuring a youth group.



We tend to believe that others are internally responsible for their own

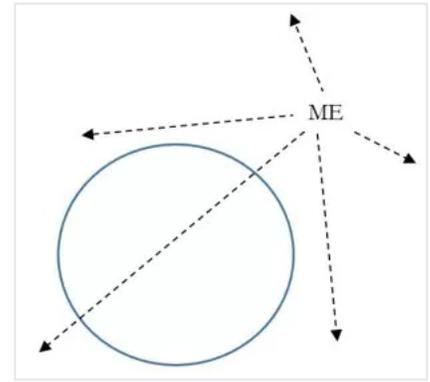
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Furthermore, because it is impractical to learn everything about the internal reactions of every congregation member, we make sense of our experience by using stereotypes.

Seeing with a fresh perspective requires removing ourselves from the center of the equation and noticing what other people actually say and do without letting our own attributions, stereotypes, and habits distort the picture. It requires adopting a broader, more impersonal perspective, unencumbered by the learned responses that the organization and the leader have taught each other.



Vision Starts with Unknowing

Many people believe that organizational vision depends mainly on the imagination of its senior leader. The leader articulates the vision, defines pathways forward, and convinces others to come along.

This is one way organizations generate vision, but effective leaders often start not with their own imagination, but with unknowing. As leaders, we can rest in the assurance that a Presence is at work in the organization, a divine spark larger than our lived experience. When we set aside ego and personal agenda, a way forward emerges. However, the divine spark won't reveal itself if we are too focused on one specific, predetermined way forward.

In her essay "Making Not Knowing," visual artist Ann Hamilton defines unknowing this way:

One doesn't arrive ... by necessarily knowing where one is going. In every work of art something appears that does not previously exist, and so, by default, you work from what you know to what you don't know....

But not knowing, waiting and finding—though they may happen accidentally—aren't accidents. They involve work and research. Not knowing isn't ignorance. Not knowing is a permissive and rigorous willingness to trust, leaving knowing in suspension, trusting in possibility without result, regarding as possible all manner of response.... Our task is the practice of recognizing.

Hamilton is writing about art, but she speaks truth about leadership. The unknowing leader is suspicious of her own experience. She doesn't leave her knowledge at the door, but she is cautious about her own certainties. She invites the organization on a journey of discovery. She adopts a discerning mindset and invites others to join the expedition.

It is not the leader's job to know the vision, or to bring it to fruition. The leader's job is to nurture a state of wonder. It is the leader's job to notice and articulate the collective yearning that emerges in response to wonder.

Releasing Fear, Cynicism, and Judgment

In *Theory U*, Otto Scharmer, writes about the perceptual biases (blind spots) that keep us trapped in tired ways of seeing. Scharmer identifies three internal voices that prevent a leader from living with open mind, heart and will: the Voice of Judgement, the Voice of Cynicism, and the Voice of Fear. Setting these voices aside is central to discovering fresh vision.

The Voice of Judgment is intellectual. It seals off the leader's mind from imagination and creativity. This is the voice chattering incessantly about everything you know. It protects your mental status quo. "When I say this, they will respond with that. This is how my congregation works. What we really need to do is that."

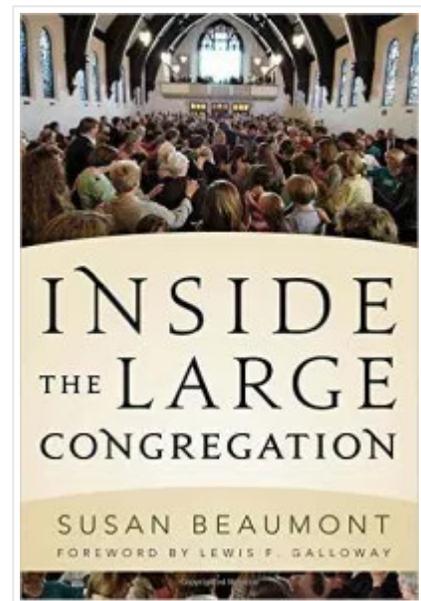
The Voice of Cynicism is born of mistrust. This voice wants you to believe that people act only from self-interest, which is always opposed to the interest of the organization. The voice of cynicism tries to protect you from vulnerability and doubt. It assumes the worst in others. "She will never support this idea. He always responds like that. What can you expect from a group of people who believe as they do?"

The third voice, the Voice of Fear, blocks the gateway to new possibilities. Fear wants to prevent you from letting go of what you have and to protect you from suffering any further losses. The voice of fear is instinctively suspicious of new ideas and risky ventures. "We don't have the resources to pursue that. We can't risk losing any more members. Our people just don't have the energy to take on anything this bold."

Releasing the voices of judgment, fear and cynicism requires listening with respect to what each of them has to say, then prayerfully releasing what is not helpful. Moving beyond fear, cynicism and judgment frees you to adopt a spiritual stance of wonder—an open stance that lets new possibilities emerge.

Finding yourself devoid of energy and vision in the new year isn't a sign of failure. It doesn't have to mean that you are used up and ready to move on. It is an invitation to examine your perceptual bias, to practice the art of unknowing, and to release the inner voices that keep you trapped in malaise. Discovering a new vision for your tired context may be as simple as swapping the lens through which you view your world.

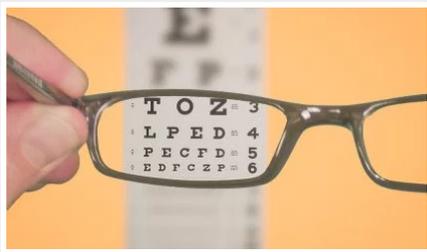
Susan Beaumont specializes in the unique leadership needs of large churches and synagogues. Her areas of expertise include staff team health, strategic planning, size transitions, pastoral transitions and adaptive leadership. She is the author of the Alban book *Inside the Large Congregation*.



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