

First Unitarian Society in Newton  
**OPERATIONS COUNCIL MINUTES**  
Tuesday, September 20, 2016  
Alliance Room, 7:00 P.M.

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 pm.

**Present:** Susan Bartlett, John Brennan, Judy Curby, Laurel Farnsworth, Andrea Kelley, Kate Mason, RE Rowan Van Ness. **Guests:** Josie Green (Board of Trustees), Dan Brody (Financial Oversight Committee/FOC), Jacki Rohan (FOC).

~ **Invocation / Chalice Lighting:** Josie Green

**Covenant**

As we, the members of this Council and staff, gather to serve this congregation in leadership, we commit to ourselves and to each other: to be present and prepared for the work of this meeting; to listen well and contribute respectfully; to balance both our short and long-term visions with fiscal responsibility; to support the decisions of the Council; to uphold the democratic process; and to lead with goodwill and faith in the work we can accomplish together.

~ **Elect Chair and Vice-Chair**

Judy Curby nominated Susan to be Ops Council Chair. Seconded. Approved.  
Judy Curby nominated Laurel to be Ops Council Vice-Chair. Seconded. Approved.

~ **Approvals:** All

- Minutes:
  - June - approved pending comments already submitted.
  - August - also approved pending comments already submitted.
  
- Sunday collections: Rowan reported that Erin had recommended that special collection funds not go to individual FUSN restricted budget lines, in general. However, a motion was made to approve a special collection for Music Sunday in November, and that the funds be allocated to the music budget. Seconded. Approved.

~ **Staff update:** Rowan

- Rowan reported that the Youth Room was repainted over the summer.

- One item concerned where materials might be stored.
- She provided an update about youth and Coming of Age. There was a desire that the service aspect of COA be changed to local vs. Boston projects, such as, possibly the Newton Food Pantry. The Ecclesia project, though having a powerful impact on the kids, did not tend to provide an ongoing response. A local project has the potential to be more enduring.
- Rowan mentioned a request for a place children could play during Coffee Hour, when they can't go outside. Julia Huston and Brook Welles submitted a proposal to use the HeadStart room, and that restrictions, which, if followed, would be appropriate. Laurel said there must be supervision, organized and implemented by parents.
- CORI forms: This is the first year that all who work with people under 18 be checked for criminal backgrounds. People under 18 who work with children are excluded from the process.
- The Adult Faith Formation Task Force is up and running and will start to collect information shortly.
- Fran, Anne and Rowan are all using the FUSN online calendar, making scheduling and planning easier and helping to avoid conflicts.

~ **Report on the BOT meeting:** Judy

- The Board approved the allocation for John Nichols' salary, a *pro forma* requirement.
- Josie added that the Board is endeavoring to focus on stewardship issues, such as healthy finances, volunteerism and further development of the Welcoming Congregation.

~ **Journey Songs (JS) proposal:** All

Journey Songs requested permission to offer a short service the second Thursday each month at 7:30 pm in the Sanctuary. Laurel asked for Ops to review this request, to see if it helps promote FUSN's mission, or if it adds one more activity to a busy schedule. This would be in addition to the monthly Vesper service.

Laurel mentioned that heating the Sanctuary on Thursday night will be an additional cost, whereas the Sanctuary is already somewhat warm on Sundays. She asked if JS could do it on Sundays. Kate said JS has a major rehearsal on Sunday afternoons and that having the smaller group in addition on Sunday would not be optimal. Laurel also pointed out that this would be an event on Thursday night and so would compete with other groups' meeting times. John pointed out that this is an add-on in the context of trying to reduce how much is going on. Judy liked the idea of having something spiritual going on during the week; if there's a way to make it work, she supports it. Kate mentioned that they anticipate small attendance - a handful and that only about 25% of members of JS are FUSN people. Concerns were raised about if non-FUSN people would know how to get in, etc.

Rowan suggested the Chapel might be a better space. Susan offered to share this option with Joan Caplan, with a suggestion that she discuss the calendar with Fran. Laurel said heating the sanctuary costs a couple of hundred dollars each time for a small group of people. Kit Ryan uses the Chapel every other Thursday for the sewing group, but it's not clear if this is scheduled through Fran and on the calendar. There was general approval for the activity but not in the Sanctuary. JS will need to check with Fran for scheduling.

~ **Financial Oversight Committee (FOC) -- database:** Dan, Chair

FOC includes Greg DiBiasco and Jacki Rohan. They have been reviewing how FUSN tracks members, pledges, payments, etc. The FOC reported 2 problems.

- 1. The pledge and payment system manager (Peter Farago) is a member of congregation. At this time, he's the only one who fully understands how it operates, which is a concern. Another person needs to be found.
- 2. FUSN has a number of systems that track overlapping information. An individual's email address may be in seven separate systems. There is currently no process for changing such information in all the places it appears. The FOC recommends eliminating duplication. If it is necessary to have duplication, it should be as smooth as possible to make changes, versus having to check all systems separately.

A discussion of database systems followed:

The ICON database, currently in use for pledges and payments, has limitations and is cumbersome and unwieldy. Ash spent considerable time and effort last year evaluating the database needs of RE, membership, and finance and researching other databases used by various UU congregations. This included talking with congregations that used different systems. Her efforts resulted in recommending that we switch to the REALM system. FOC is concerned as to whether ICON may, in fact, be able to meet all of FUSN's needs and wondered if a full effort was made to try that, based on specs provided to ICON representatives. Dan has no opinion on whether to stick with ICON or abandon it or whether it is necessary to add another system. Rowan said that each new ICON task we add costs additional money. Judy said that when they realized Ash was leaving, they decided to stick with ICON for financial monitoring for the time being.

Laurel asked if FUSNites could make ICON work for us, or if we need someone else to do it. Rowan said it's not user-friendly, which others have also reported. Peter Farago was the primary contact with ICON.

John pointed out that other UU congregations are using REALM. We should ask both ICON and REALM to demonstrate that their system can meet our needs. We need to find out which will be better in the long run. Perhaps we can check with other users for their input.

Dan pointed out that transitions between systems are always difficult, including financial, human, and anxiety factors. He wonders if we have done enough investigation to know which system is better.

The consensus was that there are currently no “fires” to put out, so we should take the time to do the necessary research.

Dan said we should list complete requirements for a system that would meet FUSN’s needs. Then we should go to both ICON and REALM and ask if their systems can do so. He also suggested talking with other congregations about the systems.

Rowan said we need to find out if there is a system that can meet all our needs. It may be that there is not a single system. Andrea said two systems may not be compatible and that they might have to exist separately.

John asked who could evaluate the systems. Peter Farago was suggested, but he might have an inclination toward ICON, based on the work he’s already done. Dan said someone needs to be identified as the person to oversee the transition. Judy said she would have some role, in her capacity as treasurer. Judy suggested waiting to see if REALM works for RE and membership, since ICON doesn’t, and then see if it would also work for finance.

Laurel asked if we need to budget a certain amount to do this research. Or do we invest a certain amount to make changes in a system and hope it works. Jacki said the companies will want to demonstrate that they can fulfill the requirements, in order to sell us their system, at no cost.

A Membership Coordinator will be hired soon and s/he would have database responsibility in the job description.

Susan suggested adding this issue to the Ops Council retreat schedule.

**~ Draft record retention policy:**

Rowan said she would like materials, such as permission slips, registration forms, the code of ethics, etc., to FUSN’s official records. Some material is confidential and should be kept private. Decisions must be made about how long to retain various information. Judy suggested we not keep any information longer than we need to. We should retain background checks, so we can prove we did them. CORI checks are required every 2 or 3 years. Sensitive information must be password protected. John suggested getting rid of “normal, routine” data and keeping anything that is out of the ordinary. One question was, are we keeping data for liability reasons? Susan will ask the Personnel Policy Committee and legal for their input, especially the Human Resources related info.

Jacki provided a list of UUA retention recommendations, available at <http://www.uua.org/interconnections/129759.shtml>

Each organization needs to decide on its own. However, the general recommendations are to permanently keep agendas and minutes, year-end treasurer's reports, audit reports, and background checks.

IRS returns and bank and investment statements should be kept seven years. Employee files should be kept for three years after termination.

~ **Faithify**

Jacki reported on the choir's Faithify campaign, designed to raise funds to buy several hundred teal hymn books to send to Germany for the joint EUT retreat. The campaign will kick off in February and be of limited duration. Susan asked for more information and timing.

~ **Updates:** All

- Social Action needs to provide a list of its multi-project fundraising activities.
- The fire safety plan and other updates were tabled until the next meeting.

~ **Scheduling:** Susan

- The Ops Council retreat will be Sunday, October 2, 12 - 3 pm.
- Scheduling Ops Council contributions to FUSN newsletter: Judy and Andrea agreed on upcoming dates, so the schedule is set for a while. The rest of the schedule can be discussed later.
- The joint Ops-Committee chairs meetings proposed dates: Saturdays, 11am - 1pm, November 19, 2016 and March 18, 2017.

~ **Thank yous:** All

- Summer services - Kate Mason and Curt Lamb

Respectfully submitted,

Wendy Schwartz,

Assistant Clerk