

Winchester Unitarian Society

Minutes of a Special Meeting: Sunday, January 7, 2018

Moderator Martin Newhouse called the meeting to order at 12:18pm.
With a show of hands by members, Martin established that a quorum was present.

Reverend Heather Janules started the meeting by noting, as the chalice was lit, that:

We often have discussions after worship, on the first Sunday of the month. We suspended today's discussion for this meeting. But I recall that in our last discussion, a participant said that she finds great meaning in our time of silence in worship. She does not get along with everyone nor does she like everyone in the congregation. But this silence is symbolic of the covenant we have made to travel together throughout our lives.

So, instead of me offering words, I invite us into a time of silence – to be present to one another, to our covenant, to our spiritual home.

Martin reminded the congregation to have copy of the warrant in hand during the meeting.
Martin outlined the procedures for the meeting, reminding the group that civility and fairness are a hallmark of the Society and our debate. Focus on the merits of the issues rather than motives leads to better outcomes, he noted. Procedures for the meeting are per Roberts Rules of Order. Interestingly, Roberts was a Massachusetts native who having experienced a contentious congregational meeting at his own church in New Bedford, went on to create the Rules of Order with which we are all so familiar. We will not be receiving reports as this is a special meeting. Debate and discussion only occurs when there is a motion before the group. We will only deal with the items in the warrant, in fairness to members not in attendance.

The moderator noted that By Law change requires a 2/3 vote. All other articles are simple majority votes. Martin clarified that abstentions do not count toward the total when calculating votes.

There is no limit to time for debate, however reasonable length is requested as a courtesy.

Article I

Sheila Puffer moved that the minutes from the annual meeting be read and accepted as read. Phil Coonley seconded and the vote to accept was unanimous.

Article II

Liz Linz moved to accept the recommendation to amend By-Laws and the motion was seconded.

To hear and act on the Standing Committee's recommendation that Article 5, Section 4.2, of the Society's By-Laws be amended as set forth in Attachment 2.

Marilyn Mullane explained that this article deals with an oversight from last May's annual meeting. The article recommends that the Social Action and Outreach Committee be included under the experimental clause, allowing the committee a trial period for functioning with a smaller number of members. Unanimous approval by show of hands, along with an arm stretch by John Russell, causing momentary confusion.

The motion passed.

Voting Clarification

In the lead up to articles 3,4 and 5, Moderator Newhouse asked if paper ballots were acceptable. John Loewy objected. A vote by raised hands was held. Judy Murray reported 42 in favor and 17 opposed to paper ballots. Majority in favor, therefore paper ballots will be used.

Article III

John Loewy moved and it was seconded, that we immediately become a level two sanctuary support congregation per the warrant article. (Please see background in Attachment 3.)

Marilyn Mullane spoke on behalf of the sanctuary task force, thanking the committee for their work, reviewing the work done by the group and the events hosted by the task force. The Bedford UU church has already voted to become a level one sanctuary. 30 people from our congregation have volunteered to help support the Bedford Church. There is not currently anyone being protected at the Bedford Church. There has been one person, however their status was resolved in one day. Questions were asked and answered. Financial obligations are minimal. It might be that CORI checks would cost a nominal amount and perhaps some groceries. People are only accepted for sanctuary status if their legal case is a strong one – applicants will have been vetted prior to being accepted at the church. Youth asked how they could help, though no answers were readily available, their interest in helping was gratefully acknowledged and will be explored with the First Parish of Bedford. Marilyn clarified that sanctuary is a long time legally accepted standard - that sanctuary status is public and law enforcement would be aware that people are in sanctuary. To date there have been no challenges to this status by ICE.

Paper ballots were handed out and collected by Sara Delano, Vicki Coccoluto, Rebecca Keller and Kate McPhee. Ballots were counted by Judy Murray and Don Landing. Moderator Newhouse reported the results: 69 having voted in the affirmative and 1 having voted in the negative, with 1 abstention, the motion passes.

Article IV

Maggie Russell moved and it was seconded that Winchester Unitarian Society adopt the Black Lives Matter statement of purpose as set forth in attachment 4.

Gordy McIntosh referred to the process that has unfolded over the past nine months, capably lead by the Black Lives Matter Banner Process Group and outlined in the background attachment. Gordy, reminding us the spirit of the second principal, read a passage by the Reverend Emily Gage. Gordy referenced white privilege and unintended racism or bias and then requested favorable action on articles 4 and 5.

John Russell asked for clarification regarding the mention of a banner in article 4 and 5. The moderator clarified that article 4 mentions a banner or sign, but without specific wording. Article 4 can be voted down and article 5 can carry, or vice versa. Article 4 is about the statement that includes the term Black Lives Matter but does not specify the language. Article 5 is specific about the language of the banner, stating that it would read BLACK LIVES MATTER.

Clarification was requested regarding how long or how often a banner would be displayed. Steve Forcucci moved and it was seconded that the standing committee banner policy be applied to the Black Lives Matter banner. Steve Milt pointed out that the SC banner policy relates to the frame and that perhaps this is not relevant to the BLM banner. A lively discussion ensued and vote was taken. 17 in favor and 39 against, amendment was not approved.

Many questions were asked and answered and many statements made. The vote was taken via paper ballot. 62 having voted in the affirmative and 1 in the negative, with 1 abstention, a simple majority being required, the motion carried.

Article V

Donna Reed moved and it was seconded that WUS show our support of racial justice by displaying a banner that reads **BLACK LIVES MATTER**.

Patty Shephard said that, "The bottom line for me is the importance of honoring those who came up with the phrase, BLM, in the first place. As you may know, in 2012 after Trayvon Martin's killer, George Zimmerman, was acquitted in Florida, three black lesbian women responded, not with violence, not with hatred, but with the simple inspirational statement "Black Lives Matter." I really don't think it gets any better than that. I have some challenging questions for you:

1. Who are we to edit those inspirational words and appropriate them for our own purposes?
2. Clearly the authors of BLM took the high road. Is changing their words to make ourselves or our neighbors more comfortable the high road?

Phil Coonley read a quote from Martin Luther King's letter from a Birmingham jail, 1963:

"I must make two honest confessions to you, my Christian and Jewish brothers. First, I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Council or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to "order" than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: "I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action"; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a "more convenient season." Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection. "

John Lowey moved an amendment to the banner text:

Our faith calls us to affirm that Black Lives Matter.

The motion was seconded. A lengthy debate ensued. At one point the question was called, but a vote to end debate failed, not having garnered the 2/3 support required. Comments continued and eventually 17 voting in favor and 36 against, the motion to amend did not pass.

Shortly thereafter, the vote on article 5, the main motion, was taken. The paper ballot vote on the Black Lives Matter banner, as written: 54 in favor, 4 against, 2 abstaining, a simple majority being required, the motion carried.

The moderator asked for any new business, per **Article VI**, there being none, a motion was made to adjourn. The motion passed unanimously and the meeting was adjourned at 2:30.