



SPECIAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING Minutes | April 2, 2023 | 12:30pm

In the Parish Hall, to approve Bylaw Amendments

The First Church in Belmont, Unitarian Universalist

Presiding Officer: Laurie Graham, President

12:30 Laurie Graham called meeting to order, requested the quorum count. Over 100 in attendance, quorum confirmed..

Rev Chris, Welcoming Prayer – “Thanks for each & every circle, building on a beautiful legacy...”

Laurie: There will be 2 votes: 1. To approve proposed amended Bylaws, except for Covenant, Article 2; 2. Vote to replace the current “Ames Covenant” with a placeholder until congregations votes on new covenant

12:34 Laurie introduced Sam James, Immediate Past President, who started the process to review Bylaws .

Sam James: Introduction to Bylaws revision process.

- Process started 15 months ago.
- Bylaws Task Force approved by PB in Nov ‘21
- Task force members: Roger Read (chair), Anne Stuart & Martha Courant
- Charge to Task Force:
 - 1. To change legalese to common language
 - 2. Incorporate an elected Committee on Ministry (“COM”)
 - 3. Look for anything left out.
- Task Force conducted 6 community meetings to review elements of Bylaws.
- Without the structured governance of the Bylaws, a President could take the church in various directions, despite the interests of the Congregation.
- The Bylaws provide long term stability and limit authorities.

95-98% of intent unchanged, but breaks down long paragraphs and sentences into understandable components.12:40 Sam introduced Roger Read, Chair of Bylaws Task Force

- Task Force approved by Parish Board November 2021.
- 1. Updating Bylaws
- 2. Including elected COM
- 3. Technical Corrections
- Thanks to members: Anne Stuart & Martha Courant
- Publication of documents, posted to website: March 15th

Key elements

- Now 14 Articles
- Notice rules for Meetings
- Added COM
- Terms of office
- Ames Covenant placeholder (heard a consensus that Ames no longer adequately or accurately represented the Congregation)
- Used modern language of inclusion (not male dominant)
- Clarified membership process
- Clarified Parish Board (“PB”) election
- President & Treasurer “Ex Officio” roles in Finance Cte are voting roles.
- Committee on Ministry (“COM”) elements:
 - Members elected for staggered, overlapping 3 year terms
 - Produces an annual report to a. Parish Board, and b. Annual Meeting
 - Engages and interviews the Congregation
 - Chair of COM responsible, jointly with PB President, for annual review of the Called Minister
- Covenant is why we gather, Section 2.01 propose placeholder, with History Cte to lead process for new covenant by Annual Meeting 2024. PB to formally appoint a Covenant Task Force to shepherd this process.

12:50 Laurie calls for Motion #1, to Approve the Bylaw Amendments.

- So Moved by Mark Rosenstein
- Seconded by Richard Waring

Open for Discussion:

- Q: Is there an MRC (Ministerial Relations Committee)?
- Ans: it is moribund, not active. The COM is a different committee from the MRC with a different format and purpose
- Q: What are the ministries of the church
- Ans: We minister in many ways, not just the Minister. We are all ministering to each other. Including supportive ministries (eg Social Action), beyond our walls.
- Q: Question of Remote (or Hybrid) Meetings, why not in amended Bylaws?

- Ans: There is MA enabling legislation signed 3/29/23 allowing non-profits/ churches to hold remote meetings. Laurie raised the issue of impediments to access. We want to go beyond what the law allows; this is a topic for future discussion and consideration by PB.

12:58 Charlie Hamann Move the Question

- Voice Vote for Motion #1 called by Laurie – Unanimous “Aye”, all opposed? (Silence).

1:02 Laurie calls for Motion #2 , to approve a placeholder for a new Covenant

- So Moved by Eloise McGaw
- Seconded by Mark Rosenstein
- Discussion Slide reviewed by Roger Read, Steps:
 - Placeholder Vote today
 - Spring '23 appointment of Covenant Task Force
 - Report to 6/11/23 Annual Meeting on process plans
 - Goal: present & approve new Covenant at '24 Annual Meeting
- Laurie: early discussions reveal consensus that the new Covenant be incorporated into the Bylaws
- Questions and Comments:
 - 1. Process & religious aspects – how do we make our community less “Jesus focused”. Will there be things addressed other than wording of covenant?
 - 2. Ask that we move cooperatively toward Annual Meeting '24 for new Covenant
 - 3. What do we tell “them” we stand for. Laurie: UUA discussion elevator speech; 7 Principles & Purposes
- History: Ames Covenant promulgated in the 1880's
 - 1927 Adopted by FCB
 - 1980's – Bylaws Committee expected Ames to be revisited
 - Lingering concern about tax exempt status if we have no Covenant of Purpose. Suggest that we call a Special Meeting rather than waiting until Annual Meeting of '24
 - Many in congregation unaware of existence of Ames Covenant

Laurie: we are not taking out the Ames Covenant forever, just removing it from the Bylaws. It remains our Covenant until replaced.

1:20 Susan Kobayashi – Move the Question

Laurie - Call for a Voice Vote to Move the Question. “Ayes” unanimous; opposed (silence)

1:23 Voice Vote for Motion #2 to insert a placeholder, “Ayes unanimous; opposed (silence)

1:25 Rev. Chris' Closing Words

Motion to Adjourn made by Eliose McGaw, Seconded by Mark Rosenstein