North Universalist Chapel Society
Woodstock, Vermont
Annual Meeting, January 26, 2020

1. 2019 Moderator, Kevin Geiger, opened the meeting at 11:54 a.m.

2. Welcome from the Board of Trustees: Richard Waddell, Co-Chair, began with a reading from Returning from Afar by Benson Bodrick.

3. Election of 2020 Moderator – Deb Rice from Nominating Committee nominated Kevin Geiger (seconded by Neil Marinello). The vote in favor was unanimous.

4. Election of 2020 Clerk – Barbara Abraham from Nominating Committee nominated Hope Yeager. The vote in favor was unanimous.

5. Election of 2020 Treasurer – Deb Rice from Nominating Committee nominated Ann Wynia. The vote in favor was unanimous.

6. Election of Board Members for a three year term– Barbara Abraham from Nominating Committee nominated Mary Blanton, Laird Bradley, and Clara Gimenez to join the NUCS Board of Trustees. The vote in favor was unanimous. Denise Lyons and Anne Macksoud are rotating off of the Board. Clara served a partial term beginning in 2019. Richard W. thanked Anne and Denise for their service.

7. Election of Nominating Committee member – The Board represented by Marcia Peterson, nominated Akankha Perkins. The vote in favor was unanimous.

8. Election of Finance and Trustee of Funds – Deb Rice for the Nominating Committee nominated Chris Lloyd, Jack Nelson, Wayne Speyrer and Chris Bartlett. The vote in favor was unanimous. Jim Swift noted that some of these nominees are filling in to complete terms and some are beginning three year terms.

9. Presentation of Annual Report –Peggy Kannenstine motioned to accept the report and Joby Thompson seconded her motion. The vote in favor to accept the Annual Report was unanimous. There was no discussion.

10. Amendment to the North Chapel By Laws Article X – Section 5 Endowment Fund. Peggy Kannenstine made a motion to accept the By Law Amendment as warned, and Richard Waddell seconded her motion. The proposed amendment to the By Laws would be an addition to Article X, called Section 5: An Endowment Fund shall be established and maintained for the benefit of the operations and mission of the Society. The Endowment Fund shall be separate from the Reserve Fund and shall be managed by the Finance and Trustee of Funds Committee. Up to a maximum of 5% of the total value of the Endowment Fund may be expended for Society purposes annually. Any withdrawal of more than five percent (5%) of the total value of the Endowment Fund in a single year.
requires a recommendation from the Board of Trustees and the approval by a two-thirds (2/3) vote at any legally called meeting of the Society. Jim Swift as a member of the Finance Committee spoke about the need for the By Law change. There is a need to increase income. Chris Bartlett is spearheading an effort this year to raise money for an endowment fund: we could take a maximum of 5% per year to enhance the operations of the church for years to come. This is the reason for the amendment. Lora Coble asked about the current reserve fund. Jim Swift responded: The reserve fund is currently unrestricted (Wells Fargo account holds $77,757.61; and Vermont Community Foundation account - $116,139.92). Richard Waddell spoke about the endowment: The goal for the endowment is to raise $500,000. The amendment to NUCS By Laws Article X passed. Jim Swift noted that more than two thirds of the membership present voted in favor of the change in the By Laws.

11. Presentation and Action on 2020 Budget

   a. 2019 Stewardship Drive report – Rick Fiske spoke as Co-Chair of the Stewardship drive: He thanked the other members Kathy Fiske, Laura Foley, Polly Forcier, Ann Wynia, Denise Lyons. They raised over $144,000. The goal was to raise $160,000. Everyone is encouraged to make a pledge if you have not already done so. Neil Marinello pointed out that 5% of the proposed endowment would close the current gap in the Stewardship Drive.

   b. Discussion of North Chapel’s current and future finances: Opportunities and Challenges in our changing environment – Richard Waddell spoke about the financial difficulties facing North Chapel’s budget. The Board balanced the operating budget to keep the church running despite not meeting stewardship goals. One modification made to the budget is in the SE program: the current cost is $100 per week. The change the Board made is to ask for volunteers to run the SE program weekly. Ann Wynia mentioned bringing down the cost of the maintenance of the church. This was brought down because some maintenance issues were covered in the renovations. It was thought that improvements might be made to the parsonage but were not done. Radek and Agata keep the parsonage in good shape. Leon spoke about the changes in the SE program: how to structure the year and lessen the costs, and at the same time respond to the needs of young families. J Kelly suggested cutting the use of postage and paper for letters because we don’t need mailings from the church or Orders of Service. J asked why the grounds cost $6000 annually. Ann Wynia responded that the $6,000 pays mostly for the plowing the salting and sanding of the sidewalk, driveway and parking lot in the winter. Anne Dean noted that all of the gardens are taken care of by volunteers. Bob Williamson asked where the $25,000 shortfall came from. Richard W. said there were unexpected expenses in the renovations of the parlors, and there were reductions in the amounts of pledges that were coming in. Vassie Sinopoulous asked how many children are enrolled in SE this year. Geraldine Fowler said there are about 10 registered and an additional three or four coming,
so about 14 children in grades K-6 using SE total. Sandy Anderson suggested that people who don’t feel able to pledge could give specific amounts as they feel they can to help with the operating expenses. Richard W. said the Board is working on developing more rentals of church spaces to create income. Carol Egbert asked about actively pursuing the wedding trade and charging for the renting of the space (separate from using the services of our minister). Geraldine mentioned that the number of weddings dropped. J mentioned that she is volunteering her services as a house painter to raise money for the church. Marcia Peterson spoke about the Rental Task Force and clarified that there are already guidelines in place in how much to charge and what is included in space rental. Amy McElroy asked does Pentangle rent the backyard for the Music By the River? The answer was yes, they pay rent. J mentioned the idea of holding a Health Fair at North Chapel to raise money for the church. Mary Blanton mentioned at the back of UUWorld there are always home rentals and she wondered if anyone at North Chapel would be willing to do that to raise money. Peggy Kannenstein mentioned an initiative at the UU church in Brattleboro. She suggested that the Board look into what they do. Richard W. mentioned that North Chapel is also thinking about asking the Dorothy Byrne Foundation for a grant to support the Social Justice work.

c. Finance and Trustees of Funds Committee report from Jim Swift. Jim gave background that it’s only been a few years since we hired Leon as our settled minister and expanded Geraldine’s job to pay her more. Money has been raised for the Social Justice initiatives. The Social Justice Fund has been covering the deficits in our operating budgets. There is still $96,963.85 in the Social Justice Fund. The idea is that we will develop other initiatives to raise money. Jim commended Chris Bartlett, Richard Waddell and the Board for rethinking how and where the operating budget can be trimmed. Jim mentioned the pursuit of partnerships with other organizations that can help North Chapel do good work in the community while not having to bear all of the costs. The endowment that will be created this year will help offset future shortfalls in stewardship drives. The Reserve Funds did very well this year. The Trustees of Finance and Funds took 5% from the Reserve Funds totaling $9,000.

d. Discussion of the 2020 budget and vote to approve the 2020 budget. Peggy Brightman made a motion to approve the budget which was seconded by Anne Dean. Lora Coble asked about the Reserve Funds accounts. Is there consideration about taking money raised for the endowment to create a separate reserve fund? Wayne Speyrer said that if the endowment campaign works and the endowment grows, then the church could use more than 5% from the endowment rather than creating another reserve fund. Amy McElroy asked where the Social Justice costs are shown on the budget. Ann W. said that part of that goes into Geraldine’s salary, partly Leon’s salary, part in the use of the building. Chris Lloyd asked about the Vermont/Quebec grant. Ann W. said it is listed under Grants in the
budget and it was $960 last year. Deb Rice mentioned that she spoke with the engineer who was in to assess the space. He said there are plenty of improvements that could be made for heating efficiency. The budget was passed unanimously.

12. Strengthening Families, Building Community Update and Woodstock Community Vision

a. Key accomplishments – Geraldine Fowler spoke about the Strengthening Families, Building Communities Initiative. The Vision: One community where all can thrive. North Chapel works with other organizations and partner networks. Partners include Mt. Ascutney Community Health, Ottauquechee Health Foundation, Artistree, and Norman Williams Public Library. Geraldine has been actively involved in the Mt. Ascutney Health Foundation, the Woodstock Community Visioning process. Geraldine was asked to be a co-leader for the Collective Impact Group for the Community Health Improvement Plan: Strengthening Families - led by Mt Ascutney Hospital. Geraldine also joined the Board of Directors of the Woodstock Community Trust. Finally, Sustainable Woodstock awarded her the Community Resilience Award: “For extraordinary efforts to strengthen the Woodstock community by working to lift up, and meet the needs, of Woodstock’s children and families.” Geraldine has also started new programs such as ParkRun at MBRNHP and a North Chapel playgroup for young children. She spoke about working on community issues related to social connectedness versus social isolation.

b. Woodstock Community Vision: Our Woodstock/Our Future – Anne Macksoud spoke about the Community Visioning process. Geraldine spoke about reaching out into the community to collect feedback and comments about living in Woodstock. She mentioned that affordable housing repeatedly came up in the comments they gathered. The Woodstock Community Vision states: “Woodstock will be a welcoming and creative community that balances the best of small town living and world-class opportunities for all. We commit to sustaining our unique character and quality of life – now and tomorrow. A community for all, a healthy environment, a thriving local economy.” J made a motion for North Chapel to support this community statement and Peggy Kannenstine seconded the motion. Peggy Brightman asked what “Healthy Environment” means. Anne Macksoud said that means having green spaces and green buildings. It was a unanimous vote in support of the Woodstock Community Vision.

13. Facilities for the Future Update – Michael Stoner asked for questions about the renovations. Richard W. mentioned that in the parlors the walls were not insulated. What would it take to insulate them? Michael mentioned that the spaces downstairs were well insulated. The work upstairs in the parlors did not include insulation because of the cost. Anne Macksoud mentioned that she and Anne Dean have been working as Board members to rectify the lack of insulation upstairs. The experts they have consulted have
mentioned working first on insulating the sanctuary with treatment on the windows. Carol Egbert asked for there to be effort put into the sanctuary to make it more accessible for people who use wheelchairs, canes, and walkers to get around, get up to the altar, etc.

14. Remembrances. Richard W. said these remembrances are going to be a part of an upcoming Sunday service instead of being included in today’s Annual Meeting.

15. Unsung Hero – presented by Anne Dean on behalf of the Board to Polly Forcier for all of the many tasks Polly quietly takes on around the church to offer support to others such as cooking delicious dinners for Committee Cafe.

16. Closing – Leon presented a gift to Anne Macksoud and Denise Lyons for their service on the Board of Trustees. Leon quoted from a David Wilcox song, “Show the Way,” to close the meeting.

17. Joby Thompson made a motion to adjourn at 1:17 p.m.

   Respectfully submitted,

   Hope Yeager