

# Chair's Report

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**Subject:** Chair's Report to the Board of Trustees  
**From:** Mark de Solla Price, Board of Trustees Chair  
**To:** Board of Trustees  
**Date:** December 17, 2008

As my last Chair's Report to the Board of Trustees for 2008, I want to take a moment to be thankful for the opportunity to serve our important congregation, to be happy for our friendships and for all that we're accomplished together, excited that by our next regularly scheduled board meeting, Barack Obama will be the 44<sup>th</sup> President, to be hopeful that in 2009 our congregation will find renewal and improved collaboration.

As a matter of philosophy, I believe in being forward looking and proactive, but there are a number of topics that I think it's important to be reactive and respond to:

As I mentioned in my report last month, our Senior Minister wrote his own letter (against the board's vote) to **Paul Godlin**, our legal council where he incorrectly stated facts, so the resulting legal opinion is irrelevant. Unfortunately, the Senior Minister has been persistent in "educating and informing" the congregation with this correspondence. Many members have therefore become misinformed and believe that the board is acting improperly.

At the September 24 board meeting, we adopted an "**Action Only**" **minutes policy**, which is the format used in Roberts Rules. This was in response to a period over the summer where the word-smithing battles on the minutes got unmanageable and at one point we had proposed minutes for a single meeting were at 24-pages. Another part of this policy was to record **vote outcomes ONLY** (passed, failed) and only the actual vote counts when a vote count is ordered. This is again in keeping with Roberts Rules. My perception is that the Senior Minister makes our conforming to these policies seem like the board is hiding things.

I think the response to both of these issues is **better communications with the congregation**. The minutes are only a small part of our communications. The Chair's report is another part. The Clerk's "Community Connections" and mailing are a third leg of trustee

communications. Trustee Forums are a fourth leg of the table of good communications. We need to do a much better job moving forward to ensure that collaborate and help each other do better here.

### **Nominating Committee**

On Wednesday, December 10, Nominating Committee published their slate of nominations, as is required by our bylaws. As we will discuss at tonight's board meeting, Both Winifred and Jennifer had been asked by the Nominating Committee to serve and had accepted, and then these nominations had been withdrawn. I think this shows disrespect for the volunteers lay leaders that are the life blood of our congregation, and shows a dysfunctions in the Nominating Committee that needs to be addressed for next year. I am further concerned that their change of mind may have been brought about by undue influence and participation by the senior minister.

So far, Winifred is running by petition to be Treasurer, Jennifer is running by petition to be Clerk, and Vinny Allegrini is running by petition to be on the Nominating Committee.

### **Winifred Zublin running by petition for Treasurer**

The role of Treasurer is a vital one, and the Nominating committee had great difficulty in finding a qualified candidate who was willing to serve. This reflects a broader problem in our congregation where we don't have enough people to share lay leadership roles, as would be preferred.

This led me to careful reading of the bylaws, and I noticed a quirky bit of language...

In section 7.2: A person elected as trustee-at-large shall not be eligible for re-election after two consecutive terms until after the expiration of two years after their second consecutive term.

In section 6.2b: A person elected as Chairperson of the Council, Treasurer and Clerk shall not be eligible for re-election after two consecutive terms until after the expiration of two years after their second consecutive term.

Now, here's the quirky part. There doesn't seem to be a prohibition or ANY waiting period if one moves from one of those categories to another.

My reading of this doesn't prevent someone serving two terms as Chairperson of the Council, Treasurer or Clerk and then (without hiatus) serve as trustees-at-large -- or the reverse, serving two terms as trustees-at-large and then (without hiatus) serve as Chairperson of the Council, Treasurer or Clerk. It's difficult to know what the original intent was, but it does seem to be a legal loophole. The next question is if this legal loophole serves the best interests of the congregation.

Winifred's second term of Trustee-at-large (and also board chair) expired on January 2008 when she became a regular member of the Finance Committee and non-voting advisor to the board. She was later appointed by the Board (at the Finance Committee and Treasure's request) to be Finance Committee Chair. She volunteers almost ten hours a week supporting the financial operations of the Congregation, and is uniquely suited to the job of Treasurer.

### **Personnel Committee**

Monday, December 15, many members of the Board (Mark, Peter, and Mary) and Finance Committee (Winifred) met with the **Personnel Committee** to further discussion of why the board changed the reporting structure of the Business Administrator. I think it was a very powerful and productive meeting.

### **Strategic Planning and Congregational Self Assessment Team**

As part of the Senior Minister "educating and informing" the congregation, the Senior Minister has repeatedly quoted our current consultant, Rev. Stefan Jonasson out of context, especially in regard to the reporting structure of the Administrator. Rev. Stefan Jonasson presented a diagram at UULTI where the usual best practice was that all staff report to the senior minister. This was never a RECCOMENDATION for Community Church of NY UU. Rev. Stefan Jonasson also said most UU Congregations were suburban, non-racially diverse, and without significant endowments. He also made it very clear that we were one of the most non-standard Congregations he had worked with and our unique status made our process more difficult.

As vitally important as the Strategic Planning and Congregational Self Assessment process is, I think that given loosing Natalie and perhaps Jennifer (leaving me as the only Voting Trustee on the team), and given the contentious nature of the process so far, the board vote to suspend this until we are able to recruit new resources from newly elected board members and begin again (with love).

### **Finance Committee**

At the Wednesday, December 10 of Finance Committee, Walden Asset management updated us on our investments and Bruce Prince presented a first-draft of a Guest House Business Plan. It was sobering information that drove home the importance of some serious belt-tightening both for the current year, and to not over-spend in future years, which is something we've been careless with in the past. I know various actions from this will be presented at this evening board meeting.

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### **Bruce Prince, Business Administrator**

Finally, our Administrator has been on the job for 1/3 of a year (four months) as of tomorrow. I'm very happy with the level of progress he is reporting on in his report and exciting about where we're going together. Website, wireless Internet that just works, Guest house Operations, improved space optimization,

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