A Sample Format for a Committee Charter in a Unitarian Universalist congregation.

The Reverend Kenneth Gordon Hurto, District Executive
Florida District Unitarian Universalist Association

All Unitarian Universalist congregations have committees of one sort or another. Yet, most are vaguely defined, often with no job description or clearly stated set of expectations around outcomes, money-management, staffing and accountability. Below is a suggested model for congregational leaders to consider as they seek clarity in how the congregation functions.

Congregational committees typically are of this sort:

- ***An ad hoc task force*** is a small body, usually appointed by the Board of Trustees, to explore a single issue at depth. The expectation is that the team will report by a specific date with a set of recommendations and then disband. Common examples include a team to review the congregation's investment policies or by-laws.
- ***Standing committees*** are working groups that are core to a congregation's functioning. These are often mandated by a congregation's by-laws, such as a *Nominating* or M*inisterial Search Committee*. These committees typically function at specific times within the annual calendar or in the seasons of a congregation's life. Some, such as an *Endowment* or *Ministerial Search Committee,* may be staffed by an election of the congregation's membership. Otherwise, the board appoints the chairperson and approves the roster of team members.
- ***Management committees*** are created by the Board of Trustees to serve a specific administrative need. These typically are those devoted to institutional maintenance, such as the *Finance* or *Property* teams. Typically, the Board appoints the chair who is then free to recruit a team with which to work.
- ***Program committees*** are those focused on one of four arenas of congregational life — *worship*, *spiritual discernment* or religious education, the *beloved community* [internal pastoral concerns], and *witnessing* to Unitarian Universalist faith in the community [social service or justice work]. Again, the Board appoints a chair who then recruits interested persons to fill out the team.

One might hope that a clear name would be sufficient to describe a committee's function and duties. However, often there are symbolic or historic reasons for a team to be named in a less than immediately clear way. For instance, the "*Prudential Committee*" has meaning to those in many New England parishes, but is baffling to others elsewhere. Or, what is the "*FUUN*" committee about?

But apart from clarity, one of the most important challenges facing a congregation is to get its work done in a way consistent with its mission, its annual budget, and its strategic planning or vision. An effective charge also can go a long way to ensure accountability and minimize discord over who is empowered to act in certain areas of congregational life. To that end, consider the following model as you strive for clarity in your congregational management.

An effective charter will follow this general format:

- Name of Committee:
- General Purpose:
- Leadership and membership:
- Specific duties:
- Annual objectives:
- Outcome Measurements:
- Annual budget and spending authorities:
- Reporting requirements:
- Authorities Reserved to the Board:
- Relationship to Professional Staff:

Here is a hypothetical illustration:

Name:

The Hospitality Committee

General Purpose:

As Unitarian Universalists, we seek to promote respect for one another and to create a congregation of love and acceptance. The Hospitality Committee serves to create an inclusive, caring environment throughout the congregation.

Leadership and membership:

The Board of Trustees appoints in even-numbered years a chairperson or convener to serve for two years. The chair is authorized to recruit a team of no less than three, no more than seven persons to serve on the committee. Members serve co-terminously with the Committee chair.

Specific duties:

1. The Hospitality Committee shall host quarterly by-invitation receptions to guests attending the congregation in the preceding three months.
2. The Hospitality Committee shall see that at least two persons are on hand prior to and immediately after worship to welcome guests to services and the social hour.
3. The Hospitality Committee shall prepare literature introducing the congregation to guests.
4. The Hospitality Committee shall introduce guests to the professional staff whenever feasible.
5. The Hospitality Committee shall inform the office of names and addresses for guests who desire to receive congregational mailings.
6. The Hospitality Committee shall host an "*Introduction to Our Congregation*" information session on the first Sunday of each month. .... Etc.

Annual objectives:

For the Congregational Year September — June 20XX, The Hospitality Committee seeks to:

1. Establish a "buddy" mentor/sponsorship program where current members host at least one guest for three months.
2. Arrange for the creation of a photo-display of current members.
3. Create a new members display with a photograph and biography.
4. Prepare monthly new member introductions for the newsletter. .... Etc.

Outcome Measurements:

1. The Hospitality Committee shall report quarterly to its Board liaison and annually to the Congregation on its progress toward meeting the annual objectives.
2. The Hospitality Committee shall report quarterly to the Board how many guests were directly contacted by someone from the Committee, along with observations or recommendations resulting from these contacts.
3. Each month, the Hospitality Committee shall seek feedback from every guest on the quality of his or her reception by the congregation. .... Etc.

Annual budget and spending authorities:

The Hospitality Committee is permitted to spend up to its budget-defined limit without further review. To the extent, the Committee may exceed its budget by more than $100, or seeks additional funding, it must apply for permission through the Board's Finance Committee. The chair shall provide in writing a rationale for such requests.

To the extent The Hospitality Committee offers income-producing events, these monies shall not supplement the Committee's spending limit. All such monies shall be deposited to the general operating fund.

Reporting requirements:

1. The Hospitality Committee shall report in writing annually to the congregation in conjunction with the congregation's customary annual reporting process.
2. The Hospitality Committee shall report monthly to its Board-liaison in a manner convenient to the chair and the Board member.
3. The Hospitality Committee shall submit an accounting of its expenses quarterly to the Finance Committee.
4. The Hospitality Committee shall submit a detailed budget request annually at the date designated by the Finance Committee.

Authorities Reserved to the Board:

1. The Board of Trustees approves the Committee's charter and annual working budget.
2. The Finance Council will provide oversight of expenses.
3. The Board will promulgate appropriate congregation-wide policies with regard to the Committee's work. Additionally, the Board will decide whether to submit by-law revisions in accordance with the congregation's structure and by-laws.
4. The Board may remove any member or disband the Committee at its discretion. .... Etc.

Relationship to Professional Staff:

1. The Minister is an ex-officio member of the Committee.
2. The Hospitality Committee will work with the Minister to ensure the worship, education, and pastoral services of the church are truly inclusive and caring.
3. The Hospitality Committee will advise the Minister with regard to the Minister's personal outreach to guests.
4. The Director/Minister of Religious Education is an ex-officio member of the Committee.
5. The Hospitality Committee will work with the DRE/MRE to ensure the educational offerings for adults and children are truly inclusive and caring.
6. The Hospitality Committee will be mindful of how the congregation reaches out to children and youth in its welcoming activities. ... Etc.