Funeral Consumers Alliance

Board of Trustees Videoconference Meeting Minutes

December 15, 2020 7:30 pm EST

AGENDA

**I. Approval of minutes from October 20, 2020 video meeting**

**The Executive Director’s Report accompanies this packet. The ED Report uses the same Roman numerals and topic items as this agenda.**

**II. Finances and Fundraising**

1. Income v Expenses, Balance Sheet for Jan. 1, 2020 thru Dec, 4, 2020, plus three years prior for comparison
2. Paycheck Protection Program, $26,300, forgivable loan, forgiveness application complete
3. Fundraising results by category/campaign year-to-date (see ED report)

**[All topics below addressed in Executive Director’s Report]**

**III. Online Workshops/Webinars/Classes**

* 1. Green burial webinar
  2. The new one-step registration for online classes is live at funerals.org (details in ED Report)
  3. Future topics (Slocum is working on a preneed presentation for an upcoming); add topics and speakers you would like to see

**IV. Affiliate Relations**

a. Board check-in—report on conversations with affiliates from assigned

check-in and coaching calls

b. Problems at the Greater Buffalo Memorial Society— (see ED Report)

c. FCIS of Michigan now defunct

d. Tri-County Memorial Society (Southern California)

e. Affiliate dues

f. High Conflict personalities and FCA groups

**V. Projects**

a. Rolling out Slack for FCA affiliate networking and file-sharing

b. 5 Tips Campaign with Consumer Federation of America— (see ED

Report)

* 1. Updating state funeral and burial laws nationally

MINUTES

**Members in Attendance:** Ruth Bennett, Katherine Ortiz, Kristin Mouton,

Dianna Repp, Rod Stout, Marjorie Focarazzo

Josh Slocum, Executive Director

**Members Excused:** Sarah Jane Lambring

I **Call to Order** by Executive Director Josh Slocum for President Sarah Jane Lambring at 7:38 pm EST

II **Quorum** established.

III **Minutes** of the October 20, 2020 Board of Directors meeting were

unanimously approved as presented.

IV **Finances and Fundraising**

1. Finances
   * Income v Expenses: shows a $30,188 deficit as of Dec. 4, 2020

* Received unexpected revenue of $26,300 in the form of an unforgivable grant from the government, which does not how in the income and expense report, but on the balance sheet, so the deficit would be closer to $3,889
* Balance Sheet: $20,000 more in assets than 2019 with a total of $180, 175
* Have not had to liquidate any assets
* Vanguard investments continue to do well
* Fundraising
  + Considerable number of donations
    - Headquarter fundraiser brought in $57,015, $10,000 more than last year
    - Affiliates have given $19,232
    - The appeal on December 1st brought in $850
    - Year end letter, mailed day after Thanksgiving, went out to 10,000 households
    - Mailing in mid-December to 1000 households
    - Urgent mailing to donors to be mailed before the end of the year

**V.** **Online Workshops/Webinars/Classes**

1. Green Burial Program with Lee Webster had 100 participants, 60 were non-members; brought in over $1000 in donations

* Program was well received
* Registration was efficient

1. Suggestions and ideas for programs and speakers should be sent to Josh

VI **Affiliate Relations**

a. Board Check-in: difficulty in connecting with some affiliates

* Marjorie held a zoom meeting with FCA Central NY and FCA Finger Lakes; another is scheduled for late February

1. Greater Buffalo Memorial Society, email sent on Dec. 31, 2020  
     
   After the holidays, my associates in our local FCA cause may request that the FCA Board **disaffiliate** the **Greater Buffalo Memorial Society** (GBMS) for a number of valid reasons, not the least of which are their lack of communication, transparency, and accountability, and their Board sitting on $35,000, **doing essentially nothing** to promote the cause, mission, and purpose of the Society during a national/global crisis which involves many additional funerals.  Ted cancelled the annual meeting and elections, and did not even send the annual "newsletter" (sic) by

mail.

1. Funeral Consumer Information Society of Michigan has dissolved
2. Tri-County Memorial Society, Southern California may return as an affiliate. Josh met with president and vice president to rewrite bylaws; suggested they do a cost comparison survey.
3. Affiliate in arears: Josh has corresponded with those affiliates who are behind in their dues; response only from a few; will follow-up with a phone call
4. High conflict personalities and risks to FCA: read posting in slack from Dec. 8th
   * National can provide leadership training
   * Each board member has a moral obligation to run the organization in a positive, productive, and non- confrontational manner
   * Bylaws may want to include a means to expelling a board member
   * Affiliate can ask National for assistance
   * Zoom meetings: host has the ability to mute perpetrator

**VII**. **Projects**

1. Slack needs to be promoted more among the affiliates
2. Campaign Tips with CFA
   * FCA and CFA will hold a press conference in January to release the new brochure
   * Affiliates will be contacted about the new brochures, cost $.40/copy; a PDF version will be provided for affiliates to put on their websites
3. Updating state funeral laws, last done 10 years ago

**VIII Next meeting is February 16, 2021 at 7:30 EST.**

**IX Meeting adjourned by consensus at 8:53 pm**

**Funeral Consumers Alliance**

**Executive Director’s Report**

**Joshua Slocum**

*October 20, 2020*

*(Note—Roman numerals below correspond to agenda items. If this ED report leaves out a number in this sequence, that means the ED report has nothing to say about that numbered agenda item.)*

**II. Finances and Fundraising** a. The following total for our fundraising income this year is calculated by adding the following line items on our profit and loss report: Conference, Gifts from Affiliates, and Headquarters Fundraising. Total: $**62,493.38.**

Our balance sheet shows our total assets at **183,935.32.**

b. Here are the fundraising totals in detail, by specific campaign:

—Spring 2020 Newsletter: $4,795.00

—Emergency email appeal March/April: $3,710

—Summer 2020 Grim Reader: $1,790.00

—August 2020 stand-alone fundraising letter: $3,340.00

—Gifts from affiliates (unsolicited): $13,342.36

—Uncategorized (includes: donations of all sorts where it’s not possible to know which campaign triggered the gift, carry-over from end-of-years 2019 campaign, unsolicited donations, etc.): $32,735.02

—Post-conference email appeal: $2,781

c. Board personal gift pledges and fundraising commitment forms—It is important in nonprofits that each board member is also a donor. Our constituents expect this, and we need to be able to say, “Yes, our board cares enough about our mission that they donate money in addition to their volunteer time.” This is why I seeded the pot with a $50 gift of my own that I mentioned in the post-conference fundraising appeal; it works.

Raising funds for the nonprofit they serve is a primary responsibility of board members. In practice in this sector, most of the fundraising is done by staff, but what happens in the real world is not a best-case scenario. The FCA staff have improved our fundraising take with a more professional and consistent direct mail program. But our efforts cannot close our budget gap, and there’s not much room to add more duties to the staff. So, we need you! Let me know what I can do for you that will make fundraising easier and more successful. This might include a special Zoom session to coach you on how to ask, and who to ask. You may have other ideas.

Some suggestions for you:

—If you’re still employed, does your employer offer matching gifts for charitable donations you make?

—Have you taken a friend or colleague out for coffee to introduce them to FCA and ask them to invest in work that protects the rights of grieving consumers? The personal ask to someone who respects you and the work you do is *very* effective.

—One former board member secured us a $4,500 grant from a hospice organization she had a professional connection with. Her personality and enthusiasm for the cause made a convincing case that FCA was a good investment. Do you have such connections? If not hospice, what about grants from your state’s AARP chapter, or your state’s Community Foundation (nonprofit aggregators of donor money that is then dispensed to charities on behalf of donors)?

—Have you asked your **home FCA affiliate** to make a gift to FCA National beyond dues? If not, this is probably the easiest low-hanging fruit. This statistic is useful, and your local affiliate probably doesn’t know it: *Dues from FCA affiliates provide no more than 25 percent of our annual operating budget.* That’s a lot of money to make up! Local groups may believe that the aggregate amount of dues pays for what we need, but it doesn’t. If a local group has extra funds and values national’s work, a gift would be very welcome.

—Have you asked your home FCA if it is willing to share its mailing list with national so that we can send fundraising letters to the local consumer members? Some facts you and they will be interested in:

* Unlike most other national nonprofits, FCA doesn’t have a central mailing list of all the local consumer members. There are more than 100,000 consumer members among our national federation. Other national nonprofits people may donate to and who they are familiar with have central databases and meet their budgets through direct mail. FCA National is uniquely disadvantaged this way, which is why we have to ask local groups to voluntarily share their mailing list with us.   
    
  There are common objections that we have answers for about member mailing list privacy, the effect on local fundraising (short answer: when national does direct mail to a local group, it does NOT result in less donations to that local group. I can provide details). Let me know what information I can get for you.
* All local consumer members of “FCA of Anycity” are *also* members of FCA national, by default. All of them get service from us when they contact us. This includes answering questions, offering expertise a local group may not have or may not be able to quickly offer when a member has an immediate death, connecting members to new affiliates for transfers when the member moves, etc.   
    
  When we ask local groups to share their mailing lists, we’re asking them to help us help ourselves in fundraising to pay for the service FCA national gives to their members (even if the local group is unaware of this service) and to the public at large as our charter directs us.

**Please complete the accompanying forms and return them (either by scan and email, or by post) to the national office.** Board member gifts can come in several forms. Some donate a significant amount from their own pocketbooks. Not everyone can do that, but every board member can and should make a personal financial gift at a level that is meaningful to them (you decided this based on your own budget). Those who can’t make substantial personal gifts can find other ways

d. Fundraising goals and task assignments for board members for 2021—I would like to have a discussion about setting goals and deadlines. We can’t do it all in this October 20th meeting, so let’s set up some fundraising-specific Zoom meetings for the near future.

e. Proposed 2021 Budget—self-explanatory. Line-item detail is in the budget spreadsheet.

**III. Online Conference**

a. Between 128 and 142 attended our three live sessions.

b. Attendees donated [total] in response to our post-conference fundraising pitch

c. Attendee feedback was very positive overall. Several affiliate leaders said they appreciated the online format as they would not have been able to travel to an in-person conference. They described our online conference as an opportunity to participate in national’s work in a meaningful way that they wouldn’t have known about if we hadn’t put this on. We have an opportunity to think about what kinds of online conferences we want to offer in the future in addition to, in conjunction with, or instead of, in-person gatherings.

**IV. Affiliate Relations**

a. Board check-in and coaching calls—Thank you for the contacts and notes you have entered on the spreadsheet! This is helpful information.   
  
 There are many affiliates for whom there are no entries, however. Board members who have not completed their check-in calls: This is an important and ongoing effort, and we need your help. Please be prepared to make a specific commitment to complete your assigned affiliates this year.

*General Note—*Thank you for noting changes to the board contact information on the sheet. When affiliates report such changes, **please be sure to request full contact information from them that includes postal mailing addresses.**   
  
 The most efficient way to ensure that national has complete and up to date contact information is for the affiliate to send us, directly, a complete board roster with **all** contact information for each board member.

b. Greater Buffalo Memorial Society—Marjorie Focarazzo and I had a Zoom meeting with former GBMS member David Swift, who has raised concerns about the iron-fisted control of all society information and activity by its 30-year president, Ted Bieniek. We agree that Ted’s long tenure and practices are a problem that is hobbling that group and insulating the board and membership from contact with FCA national or any new people who might offer a fresh perspective. I believe that if this doesn’t change, Ted will take the organization and all its information to the grave with him and the society will fold. It has happened before more than once.   
  
 However, Marjorie and I agree that David Swift, though correct in his identification of problems, may be too personally invested in seeing this as a conflict between himself and Ted as personalities, rather than focusing on the broader good of the organization. We suggested that it may be best to start a new, competing FCA from scratch. It’s not clear whether David or other concerned society members will take this path.

c. Declining affiliate dues—You can see from the finance reports that dues are down substantially. It’s not clear why. We can guess that some groups have declining memberships/donations because of the pandemic.   
  
 You’ll also see that there’s a group of affiliates substantially behind on their dues. San Diego, for example, is at least two years behind. We need to decide on a protocol to get these groups current again.

**V. Projects**

a. Rolling out Slack for affiliates; possibility of also opening a private Facebook discussion group for affiliates since many are already there and may need to be “met there.” Sarah Jane has some more thoughts on this.   
  
 b. In this meeting packet, just after the ED Report you’re reading now, you’ll find a draft of the new 5 Tips for Controlling Funeral Costs, a joint project by FCA and Consumer Federation of America. Consumer Fed. has paid the designer for the brochure; I wrote the copy and Steve Brobeck of CFA edited it. Once it’s finalized, FCA and CFA will likely put out a press release. It’s a very general campaign to get people in the door to FCA affiliates and thinking about funeral planning. We will notify the affiliates before the press release and provide them with copies. They’ll be able to order them from us. Some may want to customize it with their local contact info.

c. FTC Funeral Rule—There’s not any more to say than what the agenda notes. It will likely be early summer 2021 before the FTC announces whether they propose to update the Rule.

d. Zoom workshops—I’m offering a live workshop on direct mail fundraising based on the canned presentation released at the conference. This will have taken place by the time we meet. It’s paid at $10 a person. I’ll offer this one repeatedly as long as there’s interest, and we should all promote it. Affiliates truly need this system and education, even if they don’t find the topic of fundraising immediately appealing. It is the solution to their budget problems.

I’m working on a new presentation, “Prepaying: Why Does FCA Say It’s Not Usually Wise?” to inform the affiliates of the problems with preneed that aren’t apparent. We’ll go through a sample contract, explain terms, and list the most common misunderstandings and difficulties consumers face. This will become a Zoom session soon.

Another Zoom presentation is in the works with Lee Webster of the Green Burial Council, sort of a “what’s the state of play in green burial, where can I find it,” etc.

Marjorie Focarazzo

December 16, 2020