

First Religious Society Parish Board

Meeting Minutes

March 10, 2021

via Zoom

Present: Maureen Adams, Juliana Beauvais, Rebecca Brodish, Rev. Rebecca Bryan, Holly Cashman, Micah Donahue, Vernon Ellis, Sadie Fountain, Art Henshaw, Tom Himmel, Rich Johnson, Michelle Kimball, Forrest Speck, Renee Wolf-Foster

Absent: Judy Fayre

Guests: John Mercer, Tina Benik

Call to Order

The monthly meeting of the First Religious Society Parish Board was called to order by Rebecca Brodish, Parish Board Chair, 6.50 pm on March 10, 2021.

Opening Reading and Chalice Lighting

Rev. Rebecca Bryan lit the chalice, followed by a reading from the hymnal "To Worship".

New Business

Minister's Report & Staffing Update

Rev. Rebecca asked for questions or comments about her report.

The sense of a lull in engagement was discussed. There are about 100-125 devices logged in on Sundays, but a lot of the people are new. Many FRS members are not joining the Sunday services. Rev. Rebecca discussed the new opportunities for engaging in person but outdoors, such as meeting up after church and going for walks on the rail trail together.

Rev. Rebecca underscored that she is always open for ideas from everyone, including the Board. There was conversation around "what is church?" and "what will it look like going forward?"

Rev. Rebecca highlighted the need to care for the staff, get creative about the spring and summer, and reach out, as well as the need for a stewardship chair and annual giving chair(s) for next year.

The new multimedia specialist hire is doing well. The process for business administrator position hire is going well. Jim Supple screened candidates. Two candidates have had first interview, and second interviews on Friday. Rev. Rebecca is hopeful.

Rev. Rebecca added about the possibility of a ministerial intern. Rev. Rebecca and the student from New Hampshire had an exploratory conversation, including disclosing that the funding for the ministerial intern was not included in the budget for this year. The next step would be for the potential intern to talk with Tom Stites, Judy Fayre, Julie Parker Amery, and Justin Murphy-Mancini. There are other ways to fund the position outside the operating budget (donations,

funds, etc.). There was discussion around the benefits of the intern position and our commitment to being a teaching congregation.

Reopening Team Update

Rev. Rebecca shared that things feel like they are moving along. They are anticipating the next big shift/movement in terms of reopening. It is not a simple one.

Governance Committee Update:

Art Henshaw joined the meeting. Maureen Adams welcomed Art Henshaw as the interim Finance chair because there needs to be a separation with Tom Himmel acting as the interim DFO. Members of the Governance Committee have pointed out that best practice would be for the DFO interim and the Finance chair to be separate people. Tom Himmel will take a leave of absence from the finance chair position. The board does not need to vote, but it is good for there to be a record of these changes. Art Henshaw will be serving as interim Finance Chair and attending PB meetings.

Finance Update

Tom Himmel shared the Finance Update, referring Board members to the packet and talking through some highlights. Pledge donation/collections for February were below budget, perhaps due to a reporting delay because February is a shorter month. Income YTD is approximately \$9,000 below budget. YTD expenses are below budget, which means that income exceeds expenses, and that is with PPP netted out and not including income from the endowment. The largest gap is the assumption of there being some kind of spring fundraiser; we are faced with a need to replace the income that would have come from a fundraiser. Art Henshaw added that the Finance Committee discussed this and that Kim Kenley is going to try to follow up to see what can be done with the fundraiser.

Salaries have continued below budget, as expected, due to the vacancies and the difference in benefits. Facilities costs are running over, including the snow removal, which has been excessive as late. Donny Rogers approached Tom to let him know that the Parish Hall furnace might need to be replaced after the person doing the annual furnace servicing noticed that it was leaking. Donny will get estimates while not making any commitments. These “second opinions” will help to diagnose the situation.

Campaign Update

Forrest Speck shared an update from the annual campaign. There are six team captains managing the campaign stewards. The process is working pretty well, but imperfectly. The current total is 127 pledges, but it's probably a bit higher than that. The current pledge total is \$365,000 (including continuous pledges), so quite far from \$520,000 goal. Stewards are reporting back that people seem to love the church and seem quite pleased to pledge. Juliana Beauvais shared that the continuous pledges are a bit of a challenge in terms of bookkeeping. John Mercer shared that we need 315 households to pledge; if we reach that number, the dollar amount of the goal will follow.

Open Issues/Strategic Thinking

Mission Vision Update

John Mercer and Tina Benik (in their roles as members of the VME core team) joined the meeting to discuss the VME update. Forest and Renee from the Board are also members of the core team, as well as Judy Fayre, who is not present tonight.

Rev. Rebecca shared the timeline and goals from the staff and core team. They seek the PB support to taking the next step and bringing them to the congregation.

John Mercer led the Board in reading through the Values, Mission & Ends together. Renee Wolf Foster reviewed the following timeline:

- 24 February – staff meeting discussion
- 25 February & 5 March core team meetings
- 10 March (this evening) – update at the Parish Board meeting
- 18 April – Rev. Rebecca preaching on the process and the goals
- 18 April through 16 May – core team coordinates congregational input and dialogue on goals (send goals to congregation and groups, hold dialogue groups on each goal)
- 23 May – annual meeting; congregation receives and votes on endorsing the goals

Core team members took turns sharing the goals for advancing the ends:

- Goal One (Rev. Rebecca): Create a diverse congregation in all expressions that is centered around transformative and diverse worship and music, a congregation of those who care for one and another, and a congregation that is strengthened by the differences of its members.
- Goal Two (Renee): Create a vibrant, growing intergenerational congregation deeply engaged in the communities and world around us. This includes expanding the children and youth programming and the intergenerational ministries and programs.
- Goal Three (Tina): Engage in justice work in partnership with others beyond the congregation and who are directly affected by one, two or all of these three lenses: climate justice, racial justice and gender justice.
- Goal Four (John): Create a 300th anniversary celebration that advances all of our ends.
- Goal Five (Forrest): Renovation of Parish Hall, built in accordance with climate justice policy, into an asset of our congregation and the community at large. It will be a community center that furthers all of our ministries and programs, pulls people into the campus, and increases vitality in downtown Newburyport.

Parish Board members joined in and shared ideas about these goals.

Consent Agenda

- Parish Board Minutes February 10, 2021
- JAM Minutes February 11, 2021
- Program Council Minutes January 19, 2021
- Program Council Minutes November 17, 2020
- Finance Committee Minutes March 3, 2021

- Parish Board Minutes - Executive Session - February 10, 2021

The following motion was made by Sadie Fountain and seconded by Rich Johnson:

Motion: "I move that all items on the Consent Agenda be approved."

Vote: The motion passed unanimously.

Closing words

Members were reminded everyone to do the process check (link was copied into the chat) and emphasized how helpful it is that everyone to fill it out.

Rev. Rebecca Bryan shared closing words of reflection encouraging us to reflect on the one-year anniversary of covid, of moving virtual, and so many changes.

Adjournment

Rebecca Brodish moved to adjourn the meeting at 8.53 pm, Rich Johnson seconded and it was approved unanimously.

Minutes submitted by Holly Cashman, Parish Clerk