

## **First Religious Society Meeting – December 14, 2021**

**Call to Order** Holly Cashman called the meeting to order at 6:33 PM. Attending: Reverend Rebecca Bryan, Vern Ellis, Lucy Litwin, Michelle Kimball, Tom Himmel, Tina Benik, Holly Cashman (chair), Tim Fountain (treasurer), Jim Supple, Annie Maurer, Juliana Beauvais, Micah Donahue, Renee Wolf Foster, Christine Doherty, Bill Clary, Minnie Flanagan, Kathy Desilets (clerk)

**Check-in/Opening Reading and Welcome** - Reverend Rebecca shared a passage describing a calm, clear place where we can put aside our clutter, join community, open our hearts.

### **New Business**

#### **Minister's Report**

- The minister's report was included in the Board Packet.
- In response to a question, Rev. Rebecca stated that she was liking the engagement of our youth member Lucy and sees that she is getting a lot from her engagement and is pleased to be engaged.
- There was interest in how we can engage people who may be missing the announcements. Various ideas were brought up including an insert in the Order of Service, having online coffee hour hosts note upcoming events, having a static screen in the online service.
- Reopening team – grappled with proof of vaccination. We will require showing of cards for Candlelight. At regular services, people will be asked if they are vaccinated. At this point their answer will be accepted on faith. Minnie noted that at the Firehouse, people who are present frequently are given a sticker.

### **Finance Update, Budgeting, and Annual Campaign Roadmap**

Rob reviewed the financial reports. The fiscal team is currently working to close out fiscal year '21 regarding the end of the year figures, and clarity about what funds are part of the operating budget and which are not. Art Henshaw has been very helpful with this process. We froze our phone rate the year before it went up. Several building issues have been resolved in part through the work of staff including Donny. An upcoming capital need is to make roof repairs. Rob met with Helen Murgida this week to discuss improving accessibility. Some changes will be challenging, but others are much simpler. We have some constraints on the changes we can make because of an Historical Preservation Agreement. However, we may want to consider looking at the brick walkways. Rapid Test kits are now on hand for speakers at service. Plumbing leak in Parish Hall was repaired. Corrosion in a water heater was identified and will need repair. The heating in the main building had a problem. It turned out that a supplier had a pump on hand that we had requested in the past and repairs could be made quickly.

We are anticipating a winter surge for the virus. This will have some impact on how we do things. We are anticipating proposals for salaries. A question is how well we will do with

this year's pledge drive. There are ongoing issues with the AT&T lease and other pieces of the cell tower. Jim, as a representative of the Human Resource Committee, spoke about our commitment to equitable compensation which, given our current size and complexity, suggests we may need to consider a significant ramp up to salaries. UUA will issue recommendations on salary in January.

Reverend Rebecca noted that we need to look at projected budget figures so that we can begin to prepare promotional materials for the annual campaign. We also want to look at how we can align our budget with our Values, Mission and Ends (VME). We need to be able to justify and describe our achievement of the VME. Tina noted that we may need to add time to meetings to deal with the many complex issues which need to be dealt with in the budget and annual campaign processes.

**Safety Policy** - Julie Parker Amery brought Holly's attention to the need to complete an ongoing review of this policy and update or improve as needed. We need a committee to work on this. We could consider looking at other policies. We need to decide if we want to set up a Safe Congregation Response Team.

**Action:** Kathy made the following motion, which was seconded by Juliana. **I move that we name a committee to work on the development of the safe congregation policy and those two FRS members be appointed as soon as possible to the "safe congregation response team" as required in the "Safety Policy for Children and Youth."** The motion passed unanimously.

**Note for action: We need two more people to serve on the committee and two members for the response team.**

**Consultant for Gender Issues** - The Welcoming Committee is concerned about how to deal with issues related to gender identification and feels a need for help. A group including Rev. Rebecca, Christine Doherty, head of the welcoming committee, and Tina met with a consultant, CB Beal, recommended by Julie Parker Amery to work with the congregation on this issue. CB can provide help with sermons on gender issues, and with a workshop and coaching.

Discussion centered on the issue of discomfort with issues of gender identification and how this relates to the covenant work being done. This work is relevant to the work of many groups, and it is important that we have unity and clarity about how the overlaps are managed. CB showed understanding of this issue and was glad to hear about the covenant work we are doing.

**Action:** Jim made the following motion, which was seconded by Michelle. **I move that we grant authority to Rev. Rebecca, Holly Cashman, and Tina Benik to contract with an outside consultant at the cost of up to \$7,000 to work with FRS on the topic of gender.**

Tim asked where the money would come from. There was agreement that we would be able to find funds. The motion passed with 9 yes votes and two abstentions (Tina and Holly)

**Note for future action: We will try to look at where funds are coming from as we prepare motions for actions with a cost in the future. We will review this when we have a clear budget for the consultant.**

**Parish Hall/International Institute New England (IINE) Temporary Housing** - Annie Maurer and Ann Haaser have helped organizing the response to arriving Afghan families and we have been supporting St. Paul's, the host church, and IINE. Currently, IINE is looking to locate 4 families in this area for temporary housing. This includes 2 families of 9, one of 11 and one of 13. St Paul's has raised significant funds. Rev. Rebecca is looking for approval to keep exploring the possibility that we could help with housing by using space in the Parish Hall. The expectation is that we would be a backup and we could work with St. Paul's. Anything we do would be part of a shared project with St. Paul's, IINE, and possibly others in the community. Both Annie and Reverend Rebecca expressed their belief that working with this project to the extent we can is an expression of our mission. To provide support with moving ahead, we need to plan now. Things will likely occur very quickly.

**Action:** Michelle made the following motion and Vern seconded.

**I move that we endorse an exploration of the possibility that FRS will provide backup housing support to St. Paul's/IINE using the Parish Hall for Afghan evacuees.** The motion was adopted unanimously.

**Follow up: Annie asked how public this would be. After discussion, we agreed that there should be information from the board saying that this is an exciting project that we are exploring. It was also suggested that the project should be described during the services. We should invite people to get in touch with board or staff.**

### **Open Issues/Strategic Thinking**

Action Board meeting duration & start time - Holly suggested that we look at longer meetings. Preferences from the survey were for an earlier start rather than a later ending. Possibly 6 – 8. Tim asked if we could move the Board meeting to the third week of the month and this was approved. **Next meeting on January 18.**

**Change to Annual meeting Date** The current date conflicts with graduation at local high schools. Because of this and other factors, it would be best to change our dates.

**Action:** Tina moved that **we move the annual meeting to June 12, 2022.** Minnie seconded. This was passed unanimously.

**Website** - Right now we have \$2,000 to improve the website. It is not completed. We were relying on volunteers. We are likely to need funds to pay to complete this work. We need to get a web master and reorganize the site. There will need to a vote on this. It needs to be funded ASAP and included in the budget moving forward.

**The Daily Muse** – A calendar with quotes for each day of the year has been produced. \$20 each. We have printed a batch of them and will begin selling them for \$20 each. Copies were available at the meeting and will be available at Sunday's service.

### **Consent Agenda**

Parish Board October 13, 2021 minutes (revised)  
Parish Board November 16, 2021 minutes  
Governance notes 10/5/2021  
Governance proposed by-laws changes (November notes)  
Trustees meeting notes 11/17/2021

**Holly moved that the board accept all items on the consent agenda.** Tina seconded the motion which passed with a majority vote.

Note: Vern asked for a minor change in the October notes. The first bullet on the last page is incorrect in that there are no plans currently for an auction – and the bullet has been removed for the final copy of those notes.

### **Closing**

**Closing words** -Rev. Rebecca Bryan offered a prayer for unfinished business. Holly made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Tina and approved unanimously.  
Process Check Forms were distributed and collected by Tina Benik.  
The chalice was extinguished, and the meeting ended at 8:00 PM.

Notes prepared by Kathy Desilets, Clerk