

First Religious Society Parish Board Meeting – April 19, 2022

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order by Holly Cashman at 6:05pm.

In attendance: Rob Authier, Juliana Beauvais, Tina Benik, Rev. Rebecca Bryan, Holly Cashman, Micah Donahue, Vern Ellis, Minnie Flanagan, Tim Fountain, Michelle Kimball, Lucy Litwin, Jim Supple, Renée Wolf Foster

Absent: Kathy Desilets, Annie Maurer

Opening Reading & Chalice Lighting:

Rev. Rebecca lit the chalice and said she would do something a bit different – a Naomi Shihab Nye poem about self-kindness (from the book *The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion*)

Minister's Report:

Rev. Rebecca opened up conversation/Q&A about her minister's report.

There was conversation around what ways that the Board can respond to members' concerns about engagement and being heard.

Annual Campaign update:

Tina Benik shared that we are \$57,000 short (\$479,000) on our goal with approximately 40 households who pledged last year not having pledged this year. A congregational letter will be sent out on Thursday of this week. There is a multi-prong approach to making up the gap. There was a campaign meeting this morning to go through the list of households that have not pledged and specific follow-up strategies were identified. About three quarters of the list are either not well known or are long-time members that have drifted away. Juliana Beauvais shared that there are pledges that are still coming in. Jim Supple asked whether following up with the other quarter of the list will make a big difference in the gap. Juliana expects we might get another \$15,000 or so with those follow-ups, maybe another \$15,000 through the congregational letter. This would leave a \$30,000 gap still to be filled, which will be targeted through an effort by Lark Madden and John Mercer to seek out folks who might be able to make a bigger difference.

Rev. Rebecca shared a note of optimism about how quickly the bulk of pledges came in and how much engagement and enthusiasm that demonstrated. Renée Wolf Foster asked how much was contributed to the matching project last time and Juliana said about \$15-20,000 was pledged and then others matched that amount. Juliana said it was implied that people should increase their pledge by 10-11% because we are 10-11% behind.

Finance Committee & Budget 2023 FY:

Tim Fountain shared that every year where the annual campaign ends, the hard work of budgeting begins. FinCom is working on a revised budget aiming for where they think the annual campaign effort will end up. They need that budget in front of the parish board for the May meeting and in front of the membership for a vote at the Annual Meeting. They are working

with the figure of \$500,000 at present, which would involve cuts to the budget we looked at and approved previously (prior to the annual campaign).

Rob Authier has put together a proposal for a FinCom Facilities Team that will be under FinCom. A lot of people want stuff to happen to the building and usage of the building, etc., so it is important for all of this to be considered in a thoughtful way.

There are P&L overages on consulting and bookkeeping; we might want to think about imposing “guard rails” around that kind of spending in the future. Yes, we all know that this work is important, but we do need to find ways to keep within the budget. Tim talked about other things that might need to be looked at on the money side of things that don’t show up in the P&L, such as the endowment quarterly distribution.

Rob talked about the improvements to the Parish Hall and shared that the plumbers’ union was shooting an ad at FRS (while not identifying the exact location) to highlight the work that they have done pro bono for the Parish Hall in order to welcome the Afghan family. They are exploring a 6-month extension to 7/15 limit to the move-out deadline for the Afghan family because finding housing in Newburyport has proved very challenging. They want to stay here and the mayor supports this, too. There needs to be a creative, generous solution that would bridge between now and a potential longer-term Habitat for Humanity solution.

Tim shared that there was a need to make up for payments to the retirement investments for some staff members due to a misunderstanding of the language around when these payments should begin. There is a hit to the budget not only for the payments but for the interest they would have made if the payments had been invested when they were supposed to have been.

The question was asked about whether a new rental agreement with Dish would help address our budget gap problem in 2022-2023 FY. Tim answered that we probably will not know about any Dish lease prior to the Annual Meeting and, even if it goes forward, we might not see the money until the end of the 2022 calendar year.

It was asked if we should talk now about the options for cutting back the budget if we don’t meet our goal. Tim answered that yes, now is the time to do that because waiting until May will be too late. Salary/compensation is the easiest thing to look at to cut because it is the majority of the budget, but that is a problem in terms of the morale of the staff as well as our values/commitments to fair compensation. Tina Benik suggested asking the FinCom for two options – (1) a budget with the needed cuts without touching the compensation increases, and (2) a budget where cuts to compensation are included. Juliana Beauvais mentioned that other areas that have been “squeezed” in the past for budgeting when the annual campaign did not meet the budget we had aimed for included our contribution to the UUA, our loose plate collection, and options related to the endowment contribution.

Governance conversation update:

FRS member Tom Stites joined for a brief update about governance. Tina Benik introduced the issue, giving context to the document about Governance.

Tom shared that “heroic work” was begun ten years ago and finished eight years ago to update the governance structure of the church. The old structure was “primitive” and adequate for a church of 85 people or so, not 400. (Tom added that we used to be only 85 people not that long ago and on chilly Sundays they would worship in the choir practice room, so they didn’t have to heat the whole church!)

Tom mentioned that Marie Murphy, Annie Madden, and others put two years of hard work into this overhaul and restructuring of the FRS governance structure. The congregation voted to approve the new structure and then things began to roll, but at that point Rev. Harold Babcock decided to retire, then we had an interim minister, and then Rev. Rebecca was called, but as soon as she/we had gotten our feet under use, the COVID pandemic hit. Therefore, we have never taken a step back to assess whether the new structure is working, whether there are any tweaks needed, etc.

If we wanted to do an assessment, the next step would be to appoint an ad hoc committee with members from the Board and others not on the Board. Tom shared that he would be happy to be involved in the work and bring his expertise to the process, as someone who has worked for the UUA, been a member at several churches, and seen a lot of different things that work and a lot that do not work. Juliana Beauvais shared that she does not see that as an attempt to interfere with the work of the Governance Committee; in contrast, it would support their work and it makes sense to evaluate.

Rev. Rebecca added that she thinks this is an important thing. Maybe the Board could consider at the retreat how this work would fit into other priorities.

Annual Meeting preparation update:

Juliana Beauvais shared the conversation around planning for the May 1 conversations about the bylaws changes. Rev. Rebecca shared that the annual report part is underway. The hybrid format will be a challenge, but we now have members who do not live locally and who will need to participate online. The question was raised about Lea Pearson as moderator and whether she will attend in person or online. It was agreed that there needs to be a meeting with Juliana, PB Exec, and FRS staff for logistics for the Annual Meeting.

Stewardship - Auction update:

Michelle Kimball shared that members of the planning committee for the auction did a walkthrough of the space and everyone was pleased. They talked about layout for the auction and shared that they have a logo for the “tipping our hats to love” theme, which they debuted at fellowship time. Now the focus is on soliciting donations. The possibility of having fellowship in the LMH to take advantage of the time and avoid the weather issues was discussed because it is

hard to get attention for the auction table when the social time is outside and the weather has been challenging. Renée Wolf Foster shared how hard Vern Ellis is working, that Michelle is amazing, that Michelle's husband did great with the logo, and that Sarah Spalding came to the last meeting and did a great job. Renée's greatest concern is how to create energy and make it fun and how to bring in more people.

Stewardship – Gift Acceptance Policy:

Vern Ellis shared about new policy in development, including identifying different "buckets" and trying to make the gift acceptance process clearer for all parties.

Process check:

Vern added the link to the process check form to the chat in Zoom and everyone was encouraged to fill it out immediately after the meeting.

Closing:

Rev. Rebecca closed the meeting with a brief reflection and extinguished the chalice. The meeting was adjourned at 8:05pm.

Respectfully submitted by Holly Cashman for Kathy Desilets, Parish Clerk.