

First Religious Society Parish Board Meeting – September 20, 2022

Call to Order: Tina Benik called the meeting to order at 6:10pm.

Attending: Rev. Rebecca Bryan, Rob Authier, **Tina Benik, Jim Supple, Kathy Desilets, Michelle Kimball, Holly Cashman, Renée Wolf Foster, Annie Maurer, Minnie Flanagan, Tom Stites, Laurie Evans-Daly, Tom Himmel, Vern Ellis, Marissa Dewey,** Forrest Speck.

(Note: Names in **bold** are voting members.)

Check-in/ Opening Reading and Welcome: Rev. Rebecca lit the chalice and offered a blessing for peace and health. She followed with a reading that raised the question of what symbol or gesture brings us to a place of holiness.

New Business

Minister's Update:

Year is off to a great start. Summer was good, and congregants have commented on how valuable summer services were. This Sunday was also good. Justin Murphy-Mancini, Donny Rogers, and Cynthia Walsh are the staff members who have contributed to the summer activity. Rev. Rebecca shared her reactions to the changes in the congregation. While the congregation has lost some people—through death, relocation, or other reasons—we have also gained new members and friends. The staff is doing well and are excited for the new year. 125 people attend services in person on Opening Sunday. Also, typically 30-38 attend online. In spring, we had approximately 80 people. This shows that overall attendance continues to grow.

Appointment and Charge to Facilities Team:

Forrest Speck said he is requesting that the board to vote to officially appoint a Facilities Team. The origin of the team is the fact that requests for facility changes are often made without needed detail. The committee would hear and catalog facility requests from congregants and committees and encourage them to think of cost, and the reasons for the changes. The Task Force will review requests and report to the board. This process will make requests more visible and will lead to a better understanding of needs and costs. The significant issues with the Parish Hall building are only a part of the list of issues and projects. The Facilities Team will help to organize the needed work and to develop ways to prioritize and plan for this work.

Action: Jim Supple moved that the Parish Board authorize the establishment of a Facilities Task Force that will work with FRS staff to accept congregational proposals for facility improvement projects, work with project proponents to develop and improve such proposals, and report its activities and recommendations to the Parish Board. The Task Force will work in concert with the Finance Committee.

The following members will be appointed to the Task Force: *Reverend Rebecca, Rob Authier, Micah Donahue, Tim Fountain, Doug Latham, Annie Madden, Donny Rogers (sexton), Susan Thorne, and Karen Young.*

Kathy Desilets seconded the motion, and there was discussion about how this would work. There are ongoing maintenance projects as well as new projects. At least six projects are pending now, including the bricks in front of the church. An aim here is to

have a planful way to approach the need to budget for work on the facilities that will be needed. The Task Force will need to develop its operational plan as it moves forward.

A member suggested that the Facilities Team should look at the Capital Needs Survey completed about five years ago.

Also, the planners proposed that if/when the motion passes and the Task Force is appointed, the following language should be added to the policy manual:

4. Management

4.5.4 Care for Facilities

The Facilities Task Force, appointed by the Parish Board, will work with FRS staff to accept congregational proposals for facility management projects, work with project proponents to develop and improve such proposals, and report its activities and recommendations to the FRS Finance Committee and the Parish Board. *Adopted by the Parish Board, (September 20, 2022)*

After some discussion the motion passed without objection.

Action to Extend the Stay of the Mirzayee Family in Parish Hall:

Annie Maurer outlined a proposal to hold a special meeting of the congregation on December 4 to extend the use of the Parish Hall to house the Mirzayee family for added time not to exceed nineteen (19) months until June 30, 2024. During this time, the Board will make quarterly reports to the congregation on the status of securing permanent housing for the family.

A wide range of housing experts are currently seeking housing for the Afghan families currently in town. The goal is to establish permanent housing for refugees in Newburyport. The hope is to get the city to support the permanent housing for approximately 40 refugees. There was discussion focused on the ability of our church to do the needed work. We have volunteers and are working both in conjunction with other churches and independently with the Mirzayee family and this is going well. At the same time, the family is becoming more independent.

Action: Minnie Flanagan moved that the Parish Board hereby authorize the issuance of a notice for a Special Congregational Meeting of FRS on December 4 for the following purposes: (1) To submit a vote to the congregation to extend the use of the Parish Hall as housing for the Mirzayee family through June 30, 2024. (2) To vote on spending \$7K+ for the brick project provided that a project plan is in place at the time of the vote to complete and fund the project.

Annie seconded the motion which passed without opposition.

Gift Acceptance Policy:

Annie and Lark Madden, Rob Authier, Bill Clary, and Vern Ellis are working on a Gift Acceptance Policy. This is critical to encourage gifts to the church, to support Legacy Circles for Giving, and to clarify how gifts can be directed. Vern asked for volunteer(s) to review the policy for clarity and to suggest any changes that might streamline the process. Kathy Desilets, among others, volunteered to do this.

Affirm Governance Committee Members:

Tom Himmel noted that the By-Laws require a vote to officially appoint the members of the Governance Committee.

Action: Tom moved as follows: “I move that the Board re-authorize the Governance Committee for the 2022-2023 church year, members of which shall be Tom Himmel (Chair), Maureen Adams, Lori Clark, Kathy Desilets, Bob Higgins, and Tom Stites.”

After being seconded, the motion was adopted without objection.

Human Resources Committee:

The Human Resources Committee revised the personnel policies during the past year and the policy now reflects current Massachusetts law. Further additions are needed, including the development of a Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity statement.

Action: Jim Supple offered the following motion for the reauthorization of the committee.

“I move that the Parish Board reauthorize the Human Resources Committee for the 2022-2023 church year. The Committee is responsible for supporting the Board in setting human resource policies, setting salary and benefit levels, and addressing ongoing employment issues. Members for the following year will be Leslie Lawrence, Chair; Hugu Martinez; Julie Menin; and Jim Supple, Board Representative.”

Michelle Kimball seconded, and the board adopted the motion without objection.

Financial Report:

Renée Wolf Foster gave a written report which outlines the Finance Committee’s close review of the financial status of the organization, and reports on their collaboration in the organization of the Facilities Team. Notes on the creation of and charge to the committee appear above.

Rob Authier’s financial report shows we are currently ahead in both past and current pledges, resulting in overall income being ahead of budget both YtD and Annually. Salaries and consultant fees are higher than budgeted amount. In the case of salaries, this is a timing issue. Rob reports that fees paid to the consultant for improvements needed for steeple rental, which put that item over budget, will potentially be recouped (at least in part) from the lessee. Work is ongoing on accessibility improvement in front of the church, including exploration of what help the city may provide. The Afghan Project and the vestibule painting project appear separately.

Strategic Matters

PB Goals Discussion 2022 -2023:

Rev. Rebecca, Jim Supple, and Tina Benik led discussion of the ongoing planning work to set specific goals for the board and for the church. This builds on the work done in the two board planning meetings held over the summer. Jim offered a summary of FRS Board priorities as they were ordered through the survey the board completed last month. The priorities are delegated to groups, and results will be reported to the board. Also, for each priority there was a determination of whether it should start this year or not. All items except for Budgeting (program-based), Parish Hall Planning, and Name Change were assigned to begin this year.

Four topics are assigned directly to the board:

- Developing a Covenant of Right Relations
- Board-Membership Engagement
- Rev. Rebecca Mission Support
- Operationalize Values, Mission and Ends (VME)

The presenters suggest that a small group should be set up for each of these topics and should develop a plan for what can get done this year. This will allow the board to take responsibility for these topics and measure our success. It is a new thing for the board to do this at FRS.

Three priorities are delegated to existing teams:

- Budgeting Practice (program-based budgeting) – Finance Committee
- Anti-Racist Congregation Vote – Anti-Racism Work Group
- Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity (DEI) Statement – Human Relations Committee

The rest are to be delegated to new teams:

- Planning for 300th Anniversary Celebration
- Communication Strategy
- Policy Governance
- Parish Hall Planning
- Name Change

Rev. Rebecca presented a draft plan for the next four years. It includes projects that we have discussed, and that we now need to begin to concretely plan (and budget for) since their achievement will take considerable time and effort. These include the 300th Anniversary, Planning for Long-Term Use of the Parish Hall, hiring a Second Minister, and preparing for Rev. Rebecca's sabbatical, which was part of our agreement when we called her, and which will begin in January 2026.

Tina Benik committed to contribute to Board-Membership Engagement by sending a monthly letter to the congregation to update them on the board's work.

Action: Renée Wolf Foster moved that the board commit to developing measurable outcomes to measure its performance against. Laurie seconded the motion which passed without opposition.

Charge to Create 300th Anniversary Committee:

The 300th Anniversary of FRS is in 2025, and it is an opportunity to recognize the church and its role in the community through a variety of activities and events. To be ready to do this, we need to start the planning process now, including considering budget implications.

Consent Agenda

- June 22 Meeting Notes
- Finance Committee Report

Action: Jim Supple moved that the board accept all items on the consent agenda. Renée Wolf Foster seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Closing

Closing words: Rev. Rebecca led an activity to help board members consider why we are here and offered a prayer for peace and rest in our lives.

Action: Renée Wolf Foster made a motion to adjourn, and Laurie seconded. The board unanimously approved. The meeting adjourned at 8:10pm. The chalice was extinguished.

Jim Supple reminded members to sign Process Check Forms.

Notes prepared and respectfully submitted by Kathy Desilets, Clerk