

First Religious Society Parish Board Meeting - December 19, 2022

Call to Order: Tina Benik called the meeting to order at 6:07pm.

Attending: Rev. Rebecca Bryan, Rob Authier, **Tina Benik, Jim Supple, Kathy Desilets, Michelle Kimball, Renée Wolf Foster, Annie Maurer, Laurie Evans-Daly, Marissa Dewey, Tom Himmel, Vern Ellis, Minnie Flanagan,** Julie Parker Amery, Mara Flynn. **Note:** Names in **Bold** are **voting members.**

Absent: Holly Cashman

Opening Reading and Welcome: Rev. Rebecca lit the chalice in honor of the 2nd week of Hanukkah. All present shared something that gives us joy in this season.

Young Church Discussion: Rev. Rebecca, Julie Parker Amery, Mara Flynn
Young church has been a topic of discussion for a long time. Mara's plan to resign and sentiments expressed by congregants about missing the youth choir renewed this discussion. Rev. Rebecca wants the board to consider what the future of young church should be. We generally turn to parents for this, but it is a policy-driven consideration. There needs to be a connection between the board and young church.

Julie presented and discussed the fact that the number of children and youth in UU congregations peaked in 2002 with a diminishing trend through 2020. Adult attendance also dropped but much less so than youth. Youth enrollment at FRS peaked in 2009 with 207 children enrolled. In 2019 we started the year with 49 kids enrolled. To accommodate changes in numbers, various models of instruction were used. At peak enrollment, we had age groups, with two volunteers in each class. In 2016 we moved to a rotation of workshops, and in 2019, we adopted the current model, a one-room program across age groups. In 2018 Julie reported to the board on issues with the youth program including numbers of children, safety issues, and difficulty getting volunteers. A Gen FRS Task Force formed and wrote an extensive report. Continuing attention to this was proposed, and some additional programming was suggested, but the work did not reach a satisfactory solution. The pandemic required a different set of solutions and youth church and groups continued both online and in outdoor settings.

Mara reported on what has been happening recently with young church. Challenges have included the need to adapt due to Covid, loss of space, and loss of the staffed youth music program. Recently a new group of young parents have become involved.

Accomplishments and needs:

- The program has focused on exploring social/emotion skills and UU goals. Stories, crafts, and games help build relationships. There is a strong sense of community. 1-17 children attend weekly.
- In 2021 OWL was offered in conjunction with other UU Churches and will be offered again this year.
- Multigenerational community events (Indigenous Peoples Day, Climate Action Day, and Sign Making) built opportunities for connection.
- Little Free Diverse Library was initiated.
- Mara believes we need additional staff hours for the youth programs.
- We could offer more children's music. Build a volunteer base. Continue community engagement.

- All of this is difficult with the losses in space and personnel.

Tina Benik agreed that the board needs to look more closely at Young Church. We need clear information on demographic trends and on how currently enrolled children came to the program. Discussion followed on including area demographics and the impact on demand, youth whose time is very scheduled and who may not have a strong interest in church, the fact that the cost of housing here makes our area cost prohibitive for young families, and the relationship of youth activities to the goals of the church as a whole. Rev. Rebecca suggested we look at the documents that have been produced in past efforts and take time to consider what we need to do about Young Church. Marissa Dewey, the youth member of the board, said that the high school age group and the Pine Ridge service trip have been well received.

Minister's Update:

Rev. Rebecca shared information about Mara's plans to resign.

Holidays are going well with a variety of activities: Holiday Tea; Sanctuary open this week, Christmas Eve, and New Year's Eve. Rob Authier and Diane Carroll are taking the week after Christmas off and therefore the office is closed.

Jim Supple was sad to see Tom Stites resign from the board. This was health related. Tom is very sad and was grateful that he was asked to serve. Vern Ellis said Tom is interested in working with the communications group.

Governance Update – Open Board Position: Tom Himmel reported that Tom Stites was filling the final year of a three-year term of a departing board member. Tom was not able to commit to regular meetings but is happy to serve as a consultant. The board has the option to appoint a new member for the remainder of this year.

Financial Update: Renée Wolf Foster, Rob Authier (written report submitted)
Rob reviewed variances in the budget.

Discussion focused on the budget development process that is starting for next church year. Rev. Rebecca and Rob are working on the management/operating budget. The current year's management budget is now corrected to establish a clear distinction between operating and capital funds. The finance team is looking at how we can move toward a program-based budget. Renée noted that the board is not usually involved in initial budget planning and suggests that we start at what we feel like we need and what we expect to happen. We should consider how we feel about having part-time staff. We need to have an understanding about what the church faces with costs and income projections. Jim Supple noted how inflation will impact the budget both in salaries and other costs. Deferred maintenance issues are also impacting on the budget. We will have to deal with the realities of how much income we can raise or generate and our needs.

Celebration/Debrief on Special Congregational Meeting; Issue of Longer-term Housing: Tom Himmel, Annie Maurer, Rev. Rebecca.

The extensive preparations made for this vote were an excellent model of the importance of congregational education/involvement in issues coming up to be voted on. It was exciting to have 100% support with good attendance at the meeting.

Discussion on long-term housing included the hope that adequate housing might be found in Amesbury that could be rented under Section 8. There is one house that still may be possible. On Friday, it was

decided that FRS and the other churches involved in this project would form a non-profit with the YWCA as fiscal agent to keep working on the housing issues.

Renée noted that she believes that turnout for this vote was a direct result of people wanting to have a successful meeting. Others noted that the project of supporting the Afghani families has elicited large contributions of time, goods, and money from church members and others in the community and is generally seen as a good thing.

Update on Teams: Tina Benik, Jim Supple, Rev. Rebecca, Lead Conveners

Tina indicated that we plan to check on the teams regularly at our monthly meetings. She assured the conveners that the board is aware that they are just getting started. By checking in we will be able to see how the process is developing, for example to hear from conveners about who they have approached and how that is going.

Discussion included the perception that “we seem to be all drawing from the same well.” Tom Himmel spoke with two people who had been asked to serve on other teams. Rev. Rebecca, Jim, and Tina are working on a model charter for each team which will list members, purposes, goals, and intermediate steps. This will be a formal way to share information. It was also agreed that we may need to circle back and expand our roster of candidates.

Stewardship Report: Vern Ellis

The Cookie Walk went well, and we raised about \$2,000. We had 150 dozen cookies. This was also a feel-good event and it could be built on in the future. Paula Renda was a great volunteer.

Annual Campaign Kickoff Meeting – The campaign team hopes that all board members and more church members will be involved. Last year we were short on stewards, and we prefer to have less work for more people. Jim Supple and Mary McDonald will be leading the team. They want to highlight the programming that we do and work to ignite the passion of friends. Captains and stewards will have a bit more information on the people they are approaching (status – ongoing donors, long term, new members, etc.). The church will send out the annual appeal soon.

Fellowship dinners are a topic of interest, and the stewardship team will look at organizing a team to get this started.

Also looking for some people to be leaders in “**legacy circles**” and how people can give to the church to help build the endowment to be ready to meet capital needs. Current needs are to complete the Giving Policy and to start to build a list of people who have given to the church from inheritance, etc.

The Auction is coming up in May. There was discussion of the pros and cons of hiring a professional auctioneer. The committee who worked on this last year has ideas for improvements. Rev. Rebecca and Tina Benik, backed by the rest of the board, thanked Vern Ellis and Michelle Kimball for their efforts.

Update on Response to PB Monthly Letter: Tina Benik

Tina has heard that people are grateful to get the monthly letter. There was an inquiry about when decisions would be brought to the full congregation. The example given was offering to hold the LGBT dance in the Lower Meetinghouse. Tina explained that this is not the kind of issue that would come to the board. Rev. Rebecca reminded us that when we voted to be a Welcoming Congregation the board gave authorization to the staff and CEO. This is an example of how policy guidelines are the work of the board and day-to-day operations are in the hands of the CEO (Minister) and staff. Tom Himmel plans to talk with Tom Stites about how things changed when we moved to policy-based governance.

Someone also asked about how to find Board Minutes. We need to let people know how to locate the minutes on the website and to keep the website up to date.

Consent Agenda:
Minutes for November

Action: Jim Supple made a motion seconded by Tom Himmel that *the items on the Consent Agenda be approved.*

The motion passed without objection.

Closing:

Rev. Rebecca offered closing words and wished all good experiences over the holidays.

Action: Tom Himmel moved, and Minnie Flanagan seconded a motion that the meeting be adjourned.

The motion was unanimously approved.

At 8pm the chalice was extinguished, and the meeting was closed.

Notes prepared and respectfully submitted by Kathy Desilets, Clerk