

First Religious Society Parish Board Meeting – March 21, 2023

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

Attending: Rev. Rebecca Bryan, Rob Authier, **Tina Benik, Jim Supple, Michelle Kimball, Holly Cashman, Renée Wolf Foster, Annie Maurer, Laurie Evans-Daly, Tom Himmel, Vern Ellis, Kathy Desilets, Marissa Dewey, Minnie Flanagan,** Bill Clary, Annie Madden, Doug Latham (members of the Green Team)

Note:(Names in Bold are voting members)

Opening Reading and Welcome:

Rev. Rebecca lit the chalice and dedicated it to everyone's intentions. She recognized departed congregation members and the arrival of Spring and read an environmental piece by Joanne Macy.

Green Team Presentation and Discussion: Annie Madden, Bill Clary

Annie began a report on a draft policy which the team is proposing. An environmental stewardship policy passed in 2020 and takes a big picture view of agreeing to stewardship. Now the Green Team looks to having an environmental policy that looks at actual actions toward net zero carbon emissions. The team believes that action is needed urgently, and that FRS should take a leading role in modeling what can be done to move toward net zero carbon emissions quickly. What is suggested in the policy is supported by the UUA.

The report outlines action to date (recycling, monitoring of greenhouse gas produced by our systems and analyzing and pricing options for change, reducing electricity use by installing high output LED lights), and pending projects such as improving the energy efficiency of our heating systems. This is the largest impact we can have on our carbon consumption and the time is now opportune due to government incentives and the pending need for repairs both to the roof and to the heating systems in both buildings.

A copy of the policy draft is included in the report. Questions arose about costs and how this project fits with other needs of the congregation. Rev. Rebecca stated that as we do things to change our carbon footprint it is important to celebrate our accomplishments.

Minister's Update: Reverend Rebecca presented a written report to the Board.

Tina Benik stated that Rev. Rebecca has raised some key issues that need to be considered and which impact all the work. Renée Wolf Foster asked if there was a way to deal with the issue of staff feeling like they are not heard when working with staff groups. Would it help the staff if they paired with board members? We need to look at how staff members who are present in meetings are listened to and treated in meetings with committees. Staff have said that they feel there is a power differential which makes it less attractive to join the board as ex-officio members.

Important study: Trends indicate 2023 is a pivotal year for most faith communities which some may not survive. How can we help Rev. Rebecca to get through this. It might be worth looking at what there is within the church that does not have a body of members who work with the staff to get jobs done. We also need to attend to our own communications with the staff.

Fundraising for Afghan family: There is a house in Salisbury that is for sale. The family who lives there has been there since 1970 when it was built. It is a combination of family and commercial space. Renovations could increase the living space and the cost of the property is \$550,000. Right now, the family has \$100,000 available in various places. We could go back to people who have already given. The family owning the house would like to move in June. The kids can continue in Newburyport schools wherever they live. The school has received funds to support them in meeting the educational needs of these families. To purchase the available house, we would be looking to come up with \$450,000.

- Questions raised were:
 - Who will own the house? The family or the church?
 - Would church ownership allow reduction or removal of property tax?
 - How does this fit into the question of having dedicated refugee housing?
 - Rev. Rebecca wants the support of the board to continue to look at the possibility of this purchase. We have some people who have given money before who are not congregants, and she could initially approach them. We would need to get a buyer's agent, put up earnest money and get an inspection to see if the house makes sense. We would also seek a path that allows us options. Next step after that would be a purchase and sale agreement. The owners of the house are aware that there is interest in purchasing the house. It was determined that there was no need for a vote at this time but that the board was supportive of Rev. Rebecca further exploring possible funding for the housing of the family currently in residence in our Parish Hall with funders who are not currently members of the congregation.

Finance Update: Renée Wolf Foster, Robert Authier

- Financial notes have been distributed. DCO Authier reported that future statements will compare actual figures to the Management Budget rather than to the original Annual Budget.
- Betsy Latham recommended increasing the proposed 2023-24 Repairs and Management budget from \$10,000 to \$20,000 to reflect actual spending.
- We will need an Annual Meeting vote to request money from the Bailey Fund. We would need to ask for \$21,000 to cover current and imminent needs. (See February Parish Board minutes.)
- The Finance Committee plans to consider a clearer definition of capital expenses and to determine if we should use the Bailey Fund to pay for capital expenses.
- There is a need to clarify what we will do if we have a deficit at the end of any year.

Campaign Update: Jim Supple

123 members and supporters pledged last year...not all have pledged so far. We do have 14 new pledge units, but our current receipts are now falling short on meeting inflation. This is a hard part of the campaign. We really need to work hard to secure the last funds we need. Jim commented: "It is a deeply spiritual experience to get to know people in the congregation and what they are willing to do."

Governance Committee: Tom Himmel

The committee is currently working on finding people to fill positions on the Board. There is one person who is being considered as a remote member of the Board. Lori Clark from the Governance Committee will join the Board. Laurie Evans-Daly is moving away from being finance treasurer and Bob Higgins will be taking that position. It would be helpful to bring him on now. Susan Ricker is leaving the Trustees. There is a candidate still being pursued. We had a lot of folks who were not willing to serve on the Board this year but might be available in future years. Tom Himmel has kept a record of these individuals. It is worth building a leadership path for Board positions. Some folks have indicated that they are willing to be considered.

Action: Tom Himmel moved, seconded by Renée Wolf Foster, that the parish board approve Bob Higgins as a member of the Parish Board to fill the remainder of Tom Stites' position for the remainder of the church year. The motion was seconded and voted in without objection.

The Governance Committee is still seeking a nominee for one position.

Stewardship/Auction: Vern Ellis

- Kicked off Auction planning last Wednesday; this year's theme is **HEARTS & HANDS**. Looking for donations and volunteers. There is a short lead time for the event.
- Many people from last year are willing to work on this. Rob Authier has been working on the administrative details and Vern will go to the city soon for approval to serve alcohol. There will be a need for additional promotion for this event.
- Marissa has a suggestion for music – Pentucket High School jazz combo does performances. Music is an open question. Marissa will follow up to see if the group is available May 5.

Focus Team Updates

Shared Ministry: Tom Himmel reports

The team has met a couple of times. Walter Power, Barbara Garnis, Tom Himmel, and Tina Benik joined the last meeting to discuss the connection of the shared ministry team with the other teams. The team was willing to become an accountability partner with the other teams, checking in with the teams on their plans and goals. A draft charge describes this. Another part of the team's role will be to support the Minister in her work, especially to assure that she will have time for her ministry work. The group

will occasionally report back to the Board.

Parish Board/Congregation Relations: Annie Maurer

The first Board/congregation meeting will be held on April 2nd just after the service with updates on the overall work of the board with an emphasis on facilities work and the budget. The next meeting will be on Zoom in mid-May to present the warrant so that congregants will be prepared for the Annual Meeting.

Consent Agenda

January and February Board Minutes

Action: Annie Maurer made a motion which Tom Himmel seconded for approval of the January board meeting minutes. The motion was approved without objection.

February notes will be considered at the next meeting.

Closing Words: Rev. Rebecca offered closing words encouraging all to take time for themselves.

Adjournment:

Action: A motion was made by Holly Cashman and seconded to adjourn the meeting. The motion was unanimously accepted. The meeting was adjourned at 8:10pm. The chalice was extinguished, and the meeting was closed.

Notes prepared and respectfully submitted by Kathy Desilets, Clerk