

First Religious Society Parish Board Meeting – April 27, 2023

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, Marissa Dewey, Laurie Evans-Daly, Tom Himmel, Vern Ellis, Minnie Flanagan.** **Note:** Names in **Bold** are **voting members.**

Opening Reading and Welcome: Rev. Rebecca offered a reading on Pride recognizing the work of the welcoming committee. A key quote: “we take pride in who we were meant to be.”
Rev. Rebecca also congratulated Tina on her retirement.

Minister’s Report:

- Preparations for the Annual Meeting are going well.
- Committee and workgroup reports are due to Cynthia by May 8th for inclusion in the Annual Report.
- A survey on congregational ideas and preferences on worship activities is out. Please complete it and encourage others to do so.
- Efforts to find permanent housing for the Mirzayee family are ongoing.
- Rev. Rebecca will be away from June 11 to August 15. Rev. Helen will serve for these months.
- Services will be held through July with no services in August to give all staff an opportunity to take time off.

Financial Report (provided in writing): Rob Authier/Renée Wolf Foster reporting.

- We currently have an operating deficit. This is mainly the result of unexpected maintenance and repairs. Income is above YTD budget, but pledge contributions are lagging.
- Examples of unexpected expenses included the need to replace steeple lights. The Green team and the Facilities team are looking at ways to more accurately project costs for maintenance of the buildings as well as to look for energy saving interventions.
- The annual financial systems audit has been completed. Of special interest, the FRSUU silver (which has been missing for a long time) was found in a vault at the Newburyport Bank.
- The May board meeting will need to decide on how to address the likely deficit. The Finance Committee is actively working on this and researching the propriety of using the Futures Fund to reduce the deficit.
- Thanks were expressed to Rob, the finance committee, and all who have been working on clarifying and solidifying our financial position.

Annual Campaign: Jim Supple reporting.

- Total pledges now total roughly \$514,000. The likelihood is that we will end near \$540,000.
- We have 244 pledge units compared to 266 last year. History suggests this number could increase as many pledges came in late last year.
- It is worth noting that we are above our targets for Sunday collections, and we need to highlight the importance of pledges to enable planning.

- Thanks are extended to Jim Supple and Mary McDonald for their extraordinary work on the campaign as well as to all others who worked on it, including Bart Bracken for record keeping, Vern Ellis for graphics, and all the stewards and captains as well as the seasoned advisors.
- Jim noted that we need to think about the burden on the chairs and see if we can do anything to spread this work a bit more.

Governance: Tom Himmel reporting.

- The committee is working on completion of the Warrant for the annual meeting.
- Two articles regarding the Bailey Fund—one to request approval of the use of funds for repairs in the past year, and the other to approve the use of funds if needed in the coming year for repairs and upgrades—are in final preparation and will be considered just before the budget.
- Another item will name Jane Tuohy as an affiliate minister.
- Language is being finalized to support continued work on the Anti-Racism Initiative and the consideration on the proposed 8th Principle of Unitarian Universalism.
- Annie Maurer noted that there will be a congregational meeting on May 31 to review the warrant.
- A suggestion was also made that we work to make all meetings hybrid and open to the congregation. This is particularly cogent now as we are proposing the addition of a board member who is generally an online participant. Also, we have had one instance of a member who wanted to attend online and was upset that this was not available. Consideration of making all meetings public would mean a tech presence would be needed and we would need to have a definition of the role of non-members. This issue needs policy development.
- The slate of individuals proposed for election awaits only a youth member and one member of the Trustees of the Endowment.

Stewardship: Vern Ellis reporting.

- The main issue recently was the auction. It would help to have more ticket purchases. We sold 54 tickets this year vs. 109 last year to date.
- The committee also asked about budgets for committees/teams. All teams are working to develop charters. How will funds be made available for the work of the teams?

Focus Team Updates

Parish Board/Congregation Communication: Annie Maurer reporting.

- First meeting was good—next will be May 31st to discuss the Warrant for the Annual Meeting.
- The committee is planning a dessert bar. Moving forward, two to three meetings a year will be planned.

300th Anniversary: Annie Maurer and Laurie Evans-Daly reporting.

- Sub-groups are forming to take responsibility for various facets of the celebration.
- Sarah Spalding will host a big dinner. Others are beginning to consider visions. The group hopes to have a calendar by the fall, and they are looking for more people to get involved.
- A search is still in play for a time capsule from the past and for banners used for the 200th anniversary.

- Vern Ellis asked if a Capital Campaign was being planned as part of the anniversary.

Other discussion:

- Meetings should be planned to debrief this year and start planning for next. These might include Program Council, full congregation, Auction, and Cookie Walk groups.
- We should outline steps for the development and adoption of policy.
- Continuing consideration of the Net Zero Policy should occur soon.

Adjournment:

- **Action:** Tom Himmel moved, and Minnie Flanagan seconded his motion that the meeting be adjourned. The motion was unanimously approved.
- **Closing Reflection:** Reverend Rebecca said we should consider whether there are conversations that we are avoiding. The next step is to be wise. She expressed hope that we are always brave enough.
- At 8:03pm the chalice was extinguished, and the meeting was closed.

Notes prepared and respectfully submitted by Kathy Desilets, Clerk