

FRS Parish Board Meeting –February 19, 2025

Present: **Tina Benik, Tom Himmel, Kathy Desilets, Jim Supple, Laurie Evans-Daly, Vern Ellis, Minnie Flanagan, Bob Higgins, Sarina Kahn Reddy, Andy Lobb, Lori Clark, Liss Larsen, Renee Wolf Foster,** Reverend Rebecca, Sue Fasoli, Lark Madden. Note: voting members are in bold.

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

Opening: Rev. Rebecca shared a reading on the topic of being cracked open and still standing and love as the final holding point.

Parish Board Covenant: Vern Ellis

Vern read Item 4 regarding the acceptance of varied points of view, the process of listening with an open mind/heart, seeking consensus, and supporting the ongoing process of shared understanding.

Anti-Racism Initiative: Sue Fasoli

Sue submitted a written report on the Leading Edge Team. The team is a group of FRS members representing various communities of interest in the church who are committed to exploring ways to implement the 8th Principle. The team is looking at a Community of Communities approach to engaging the congregation in a process to strengthen collaborations and facilitate action-oriented initiatives among groups in the church around the 8th principle. Paula Cole Jones, a co-founder of the 8th Principle movement in the UUA, is working with representatives of other UU congregations also undertaking this work. The team has attended a series of workshops to define its purposes and more fully understand the work ahead. The Board will be asked to participate in looking at where we are and what is ahead. Full congregation workshops to share the work of the team are planned for May. Sue invited anyone with questions to contact her or other members of the Leading Edge Team. In addition to Sue, team members include Rev. Rebecca, Eileen Vargas-Costello, Hugh Martinez, Julie Menin, Art Henshaw, August Mead, and Sarina Kahn Reddy. Sue also reported that there has been an excellent response to the congregational reading of Caste.

4th Century Campaign: Lark Madden

Focus groups with the congregation and meetings with community leaders led by the Congregational Insight Group have clearly pointed to the Parish Hall as a central issue. Although Parish Hall was not explicitly mentioned in congregational focus groups and meetings, it generated the most comments. Attendees identified a wide range of uses which, together, suggested the use of the space as a Community Center which would serve many purposes that align with the mission of the church. Community Leaders expressed very positive views of the church and identified many ways that the Parish Hall could be an asset to the community due to the central location of the building, the demand for space downtown, and the fact that the church can do things that no one else can do. To meet congregational and community interests upgrades and changes to the building, and to determine what work is needed and what it will cost, the 4th Century Team has met with seven architectural teams, three of which are woman-owned and all of whom have worked with churches. To fully meet these goals a formal feasibility study is needed to identify needs and determine costs. Changes beyond basic structural work will require that we raise funds, most likely through a capital campaign. The 4th century team is asking for Board approval to seek congregational approval to take the initial step of hiring an

architectural/engineering team to conduct the feasibility study. The study will give the congregation information to see what is possible and to finally define a specific plan for Parish Hall. Congregational buy-in and engagement in any plan will be essential. The team is congratulated for their good, thorough, and appropriate planning.

ACTION: Seek congregational approval for a feasibility study of upgrades to the Parish Hall.

Motion: Renee Wolf Foster moved to ask the congregation to authorize the Parish Board to enter into such contract or contracts with architectural/engineering firm(s) as are needed to conduct a feasibility study and to develop preliminary design at a cost not to exceed \$60,000. Vern seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Minister's Update: Rev. Rebecca

- The city has approached Rev. Rebecca about placing three artist shanties on church property. This would be compatible with our interest in deepening our community connections. The city will retain ownership and responsibility for maintenance. Two of the shanties will be used by the city and the remaining one will be available for our use. Rev. Laurel will develop plans for use in conjunction with others in the church.
- Dan O'Shea has ended his contract with FRS and work is underway to replace him.
- Rev. Rebecca introduced her intention to request a grant from the Lilly Foundation to support her sabbatical activities. This foundation has a specific program for sabbatical support and an interest in clergy renewal. Rev. Rebecca asked the Board to identify ways her time away could benefit the congregation. The list of benefits included ways to help the congregation and staff to develop a greater understanding of the shared ministry, including:
 - Recognizing the scope and depth of Rev. Rebecca's role both as spiritual leader and CEO and her need for a time for reflection and self-care away from her work in the church.
 - Helping the staff to recognize the things that they can do on their own. Clarifying and supporting the staff and committees in understanding and focusing on their specific roles.
 - Encouraging interdependence and improved communication to allow interdependence among various parts of the wider church community.
 - Enhancing shared ministry by requiring more lay involvement.
 - Helping congregants who rely heavily on Rev. Rebecca to recognize other sources of this support.
- During the time Rev. Rebecca is away, a sabbatical minister will work with us. They will be responsible for worship and pastoral care. Rev. Laurel will work full-time as head of staff and will interact with the Board. Rev. Rebecca will send a letter soon to the congregation reminding them of the sabbatical. This early announcement will offer ample time for discussion to build understanding and acceptance of both the benefits and the operational details.
- Action was needed to affirm our continued participation in the UUA Retirement Plan

ACTION: Retirement Plans for Staff

Motion: Jim Supple offered the following motion:

Whereas the First Religious Society Unitarian Universalist of Newburyport, Massachusetts ("FRSUU") is committed to assisting all of its employees 18 years and older to prepare for their retirement years, and,

Whereas the FRSUU's Retirement Plan (the "Plan") is the retirement plan sponsored by the Unitarian Universalist Association, therefore:

Be It Resolved that FRSUU hereby adopts the 2025 Restatement of the Unitarian Universalist Association's Retirement Plan with an implementation date of January 1, 2025, and commits to complying with all the provisions of the Plan and the elections made by FRSUU in the 2025 Employer Participation Agreement that it submits to the UUA Retirement Plan Committee, and they acknowledge receipt and approval via counter signature of same.

The motion was seconded by Renee and passed without objection.

- The board went into executive session during the meeting to deal with issues requiring confidential treatment at this time.

Finance Update: Jim Supple

- We don't have a budget yet, but final figures will come after the Capital Campaign.
- We are about to take ownership of Barbara Owen's legacy donation which is expected to have a final value of approximately \$700,000. The deed to the house has been approved by our lawyers and the house will need to be insured and will need to be checked regularly. The gift acceptance committee is in the process of reviewing realtors for the sale of the house.
- Barbara's intention for the proceeds of sale of the property is that "the proceeds be divided half and half between the Church's endowment fund and operating funds, with priority given to request for the needs of the music program."
- Plans to allocate the funds as Barbara intended are described below. See page 4.

ACTION: Plans for use of Barbara Owen Legacy Funds

Motion: Laurie Evans-Daly moved to accept the recommended use of the funds realized from Barbara Owen's legacy as outlined above. Tom seconded and the motion passed without objection.

Preliminary Procurement Policy in process and will come to the Board soon. It will include the need to solicit bids for major purchases or contracts.

Owens Fund Planning				
Net Proceeds of House Sale		\$700,000	Proceeds to Endowment per B. Owen's will	\$350,000
Available for Operations		\$350,000		
Dedicated Music & Development Use (per Rev. R)		\$100,000		
Capital Reserve Assumption	50%	\$125,000	Approximate Capital Reserve as of 2/1/2025	\$17,000
Operating Reserve Assumption	50%	\$125,000	Total Capital Reserve Post Sale	\$142,000
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Music funds will support a new composition for Candlelight and refurbishing of instruments that are part of Barbara's gift—including a harpsichord and a small organ. • Operational Reserve. A general rule of thumb is that an organization should have 3-6 months of available funds for operations. For FRS, the would be \$145,000. Our current capital reserve is \$17,000 				

Housing Allowances

The Chair informed the meeting that under the Internal Revenue Code, an ordained minister (1) is not subject to federal income tax with respect to a housing allowance for her home at 69 Pearson Drive, Byfield, MA, paid as part of compensation, to the extent the allowance is used by the minister to rent or provide a home and (2) is not subject to federal income tax on the rental value of a home supplied rent-free by the church. The Board on the 19th day of February, after considering the statement of Rev. Rebecca Bryan, setting for the amount Rev. Bryan estimates to be the fair rental value of the minister's home, furnished, plus the cost of utilities, during the year 2024, on motion duly made and seconded, adopted the following resolution.

ACTION: Clergy Housing Allowance

Motion: Jim Supple made the following motion: Resolved that the Board designates a housing allowance of \$80,000 for Rev. Bryan, to be paid as part of her compensation as of 7/1/2025 for FY26. The currently approved amount of \$80,000 for 2025 remains.

Governance Committee: Tom Himmel

- Tom reminded us to come and to remind others to come to the Special Meeting on March 16 so that we can be sure of a quorum.
- Continuing work on job descriptions for the three standing committees. An outline of key points has been developed, and Tom is meeting with the heads of these committees to solicit their suggestions and seek approval of overall content.
- Nominations for Board positions for next year are being finalized. Candidates are still needed for Chair of the Stewardship Committee (board member), Endowment Treasurer, Auditor, and one Trustee. Also, we would still like to identify someone to take the role of co-moderator for major meetings.

Stewardship Committee: Renee Wolf Foster

Plans for the Annual Giving Campaign are going well and the kickoff with the stewards went well. Training dates are being planned, and we have more than the usual number of stewards. The brochure is complete and in the mail.

Closing

Rev. Rebecca offered closing words reminding us to remember how our connections can get us through hard times.

Adjournment: A motion for adjournment was made by Kathy Desilets and seconded by Andy Lobb. With no opposition the meeting was adjourned at 8:45pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Desilets, Parish Clerk