

## FRS Parish Board Meeting – March 19, 2025

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

**Call to Order:** Tina Benik called the meeting to order at 6:02pm.

**Opening:** Rev. Rebecca read a quote from *Love at the Center* about the importance of risk taking and remaining steadfast and committed to love in conflict and hard times.

**Parish Board Covenant:** Tom Himmel read Section 7 of the Board covenant about recognizing and coping with mess ups (including the times one has left the ball on the field).

**Minister's Report:** Rev. Rebecca provided a report in writing and invited questions leading to discussion of the balance of her work given all the demands at this time and her pull to community work. Liss Larsen noted that clergy everywhere are feeling pressures related to the state of the world. The Board expressed support and trust and asked for ways we could help. Looking at how we can create more efficient internal project management was the most substantive suggestion. This might help inside workgroups to follow defined processes to get work done without repeated need to consult Rev. Rebecca. Also improved communication is needed. For example, the Board asked for regular reports from the committees and work groups and very few groups have submitted these reports.

Positive energy is evident in worship services and in other congregational gatherings for worship and for other congregational work. One example of this positivity is evident in the Capital Campaign. Stewards and those who have been contacted are generally feeling good about the church and willing to offer support. Good training, support, and follow-up from the leadership team and particularly from Bart Bracken along with the Stewardship Committee is helping to build both good feelings and good results. Thanks to all those involved in the campaign.

Rev. Rebecca received a proposal to install a plaque in the church to recognize the church's involvement in slavery. While the Board is sympathetic to this project, it would require significant research with steps such as identifying specific connections the church had with slavery and learning from other churches that have adopted this type of action. Sue Fasoli, leader of the Anti-Racism Initiative, understands that this is a complex process. The Board affirms those who wish to explore all aspects of installing a sign acknowledging our connection with slavery. Any decision to install such a sign will be dependent on the results of research.

**Staff Change:** Kate Lamie has found a full-time job and will be leaving her role as Communications Specialist. As an interim plan, we are identifying a combination of current staff, congregants, and professionals to take on various aspects of the work of the communications specialist.

**Capital Campaign Update:** Lark Madden presented a detailed description of the work of the Capital Campaign Team in seeking an architectural firm to undertake the initial stages of work on the Parish Hall. The committee interviewed architectural firms and established a detailed list of criteria for selection. Some of these were based on the Grants Team's assessment of what funders are looking for in projects with historic buildings. Based on these criteria, the committee identified Placework of

Portsmouth, New Hampshire, a woman-owned company with extensive experience working with historic buildings and interviewed references who gave very positive reviews. The Capital Campaign Team unanimously recommend that the Board move forward with Placework for initial architectural services for the Parish Hall. If the Board approves this recommendation, the Capital Campaign Team will begin the process of negotiation of a final contract. Team member Lisa Mead and her law firm will assist and represent FRS in these negotiations.

Kathy Desilets asked if the process that the Capital Campaign Team is following is in lieu of an open bid process. Jim Supple noted that the Board had not adopted a procurement policy and that in this case very specific skills and experiences were needed. The Capital Campaign Team used an extensive review process in selecting Placework and this process can be trusted as identifying the correct candidate. The procurement policy which is in development should identify what processes FRS will use.

**ACTION: Accept contractor for study of Parish Hall**

**Motion:** Jim moved that the board accept the recommendation of the Capital Campaign Team to move forward with Placework for initial architectural services for the Parish Hall. Renee seconded and the motion was carried with one abstention.

**Grants Team:** Andy Lobb reported that the grants team recognizes the need for specific skills to advance their work. They would like to identify and recruit new members who can bring those skills.

The initial members of the team were approved by the board, and there are two members who have joined since then and should also be approved.

**ACTION: Approve members of the Grants Team**

**Motion:** Andy Lobb moved that the board accept Sue Creed and Susan Thorne as members of the Grants Team. Tom Himmel seconded, and the motion carried unanimously.

**Finance Update:** Jim Supple

Jim acknowledged the extraordinary work that Diane Carroll, Betsy Latham, and others have done to help with work that Dan left behind.

Currently we have an annual surplus. Pledges are on track. We had a downturn in income from Sunday collections because of two online only services. Parish Hall income is keeping up with projections and we are doing okay on utilities. Some expenses are coming up which have not yet been quantified that have to do with fiscal processes.

Despite the request made to the Facilities Team last month we do not yet have estimates regarding HVAC for the Lower Meetinghouse. Given different views which are delaying the process, we are now looking for two proposals that the Board can choose between or before the next Board meeting in the hopes that we can get air conditioning in place before the hot weather. Following a robust discussion of all aspects of the delays in this project, it was decided that Jim will meet with the Finance Committee and Facilities Team to try to push this along and the Board will once again attempt to clarify the urgency of achieving a solution to the HVAC issue. Consideration was given to whether the Board would need to take definitive action to ensure timely action on the HVAC system.

In addition to the specific issue of HVAC, a disagreement on the distribution of funds realized from Barbara Owen's bequest to the church has been raised. Questions were raised about Barbara's intentions and what was in the best interests of the church. The Board approved a plan last month with careful consideration of Barbara's intentions. It appears that there is a lack of clarity regarding the management of funds for operating revenue and the need for a capital reserve.

**ACTION: Consideration of management of funds for operating reserve and capital reserve**

**Motion:** Renee Wolf Foster moved that the Board charge the Finance Committee, under the direction of its chair, to bring forward recommendations for managing operating and capital reserve funds with the goal of developing a policy that would detail how these funds should be identified in the budget and used. Lori Clark seconded, and the motion carried without objection. Jim Supple voted present.

**Gift Acceptance Committee – Realtor Recommendations:** Tina Benik

The Gift Acceptance Committee (Tina, Greg Benik, Lark Madden, and Joe Brouillet) interviewed realtors to choose one to manage the sale of the Owen house. Based on rates, community presence, and sales and proposed offering price, they recommended Kevin Wallace.

**ACTION: Choice of a realtor for the sale of the house bequeathed to FRS by Barbara Owen**

**Motion:** Renee Wolf Foster moved acceptance of the recommendation of the Gift Acceptance Committee to engage Kevin Wallace as a realtor for the sale of the house that Barbara Owen bequeathed to FR UU. Andy Lobb moved, Renee Wolf Foster seconded, and the motion carried without objection.

**Governance Committee:** Tom Himmel

Tom reported that the committee wants to offer an open invitation to members of the congregation to apply for positions still open on the list of board members, officers, and trustees to be voted on at the annual meeting. This could be included in the Board letter, the Steeple newsletter, or elsewhere. We could also look for people to serve on specific committees.

The committee continues work on job descriptions for committees, starting with standing committees: Finance, Governance. and Stewardship.

The bylaws currently require congregational approval for all expenditures over \$7,000. An increase is needed, if only for inflation. This will require a congregational vote to change the bylaws. Tom will work with Jim Supple to determine an appropriate figure for this proposed increase.

**Stewardship Committee:** Renee Wolf Foster

The committee will pin down the prize for the annual raffle (to replace Dinner Anywhere In the World) within the next week.

Renee clarified that this is a decision that the Stewardship Committee can make without other approvals.

The Annual Campaign is going very well as noted in the Minister's Report. We have over 117 pledges totaling \$409,200 which is 70% of our campaign goal. For those who pledged last year and this year, the average increase is 8.4%! Notably, we have nine new or returning pledgers.

**Net Zero Policy proposal from the Green Team:** Tina Benik

Tina distributed this proposal to the board for preliminary consideration.

This is not an official first reading.

**Consent Agenda:** Kathy Desilets

**ACTION: Review of minutes from January and February 2025 Board meetings**

**Motion:** Lori Clark moved to approve the January and February minutes. Andy Lobb seconded, and the motion carried without exception.

**Closing:**

Rev. Rebecca showed everyone a picture of a beautiful sunset and offered a blessing for the gifts of the evening.

**Adjournment:** A motion for adjournment was made by Bob Higgins, seconded by Andy Lobb, and the motion carried without exception.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:55pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Desilets, Parish Clerk