

FRSUU Parish Board Retreat – August 20, 2025

Present: **Bob Higgins, Tom Himmel, Kathy Desilets, Jim Supple, Sarina Kahn Reddy, Renee Wolf Foster, Lori Clark, Andy Lobb, Julie Menin, Jeff Bard, Leslie Lawrence,** Reverend Rebecca (note that bold indicates voting members)

Absent: **Liss Larsen**

Welcome: Bob Higgins called the meeting to order at 4:09pm and welcomed new members Julie Menin, Leslie Lawrence, and Jeff Bard. All have been Board members in the past and are deeply involved in congregational life. Bob also extended thanks to the departing members Tina Benik, Laurie Evans-Daly, Minnie Flanagan, and Vern Ellis.

Chalice Lighting and Centering: Rev. Rebecca lit the chalice and shared thoughts from a Black woman who writes about needs in the current situation. Key themes included the need for a move toward love as the center and the need to root out the powers and balance the work of resistance with peacefulness. For Black women who thought they had to save the world there is a need for recovery from exhaustion and the ability to build inner peace in a desperate world.

Check-in: Rev. Rebecca and Bob Higgins invited all to check in about their feelings about church life and something else of importance in their lives.

Minister's Report: Rev. Rebecca provided an oral report starting with our great staff who work well together. Other big issues:

- **Capital Campaign and plans for Parish Hall** relate to who we are in the community. Parish Hall presents a great opportunity. We should look to major fundraising during this church year along with ongoing congregational conversation. The second year will focus on things that need to happen prior to construction. Thirty-nine weeks will be needed for planning, permitting, etc. Church year 2027-28 is the anticipated start of construction.
- **Budgeted needs for church operations:** We plan to engage contractors to work on financial operations and facilities management. As we move ahead, we will see how this works and what further needs are not yet met.
- **A Holocaust Survivor** will speak on September 28. The church calendar lists major dates and events.

Updates: Rev. Rebecca and Bob Higgins

- **Closing on Barbara Owen House** (Jefferson St.) required that we fix a minor issue with the paperwork. Members have completed this and closing papers are ready. Thanks to Andy Lobb, Bob Higgins, Tina Benik, Jim Supple, and others who worked on this project.
- **Heat Pump system for HVAC in Lower Meetinghouse:** Starting this work required giving a deposit to the contractor before we received the profits from the house sale (referenced above). Jim Supple worked hard with others on a solution and secured interest-free loans from three parish members. We also were able to borrow against the endowment. Work has begun and will continue until October. The Facilities Team and Bill Clary have coordinated with the contractor. There is a question about the rebate that FRSUU

anticipates. The program is funded through March 2026 and there may be federal dollars. The project is within the funding authorized by the Board. We will continue to research the sources of funds. Mass Save and other rebates will help reduce the overall cost.

- **Security Cameras:** We have begun to explore purchasing security cameras for the front of the church building. Nick Place is working on getting bids. Bids estimated the cost to be \$4,000 initially for four cameras with ongoing maintenance costs.

ACTION: Confirmation of Parish Board Chair and election of Vice Chair

Motion: Jeff Bard moved that the Board approve Tom Himmel as vice chair and confirm the election of Bob Higgins as board chair for the 2025-2026 church year. Lori Clark seconded and the motion carried without objection.

Moving Forward as a Board:

The Parish Board was asked by leadership to review expectations of Board Members (as described in the Parish Board Manual) and the Parish Board Covenant. Tom Himmel sent a copy of the most recent Board Manual to all prior to the meeting.

Leading Edge Team Presentation/Discussion: Julie Menin and Sarina Khan Reddy

Julie and Sarina provided a comprehensive overview of the Leading Edge Team which also includes Sue Fasoli, Hugh Martinez, Art Henshaw, August Mead, Tom Himmel, and Sharon Tillman. With Paula Cole Jones, who has been a driving force behind the 8th UUA Principle and Article 2, the group is looking at a process to move FRSUU toward greater inclusion of diverse communities in all aspects of the church and to deepen our support for racial justice and anti-oppression.

The model that Jones proposes for this work is based on looking at all the communities that exist in a church including official groups like the Board and committees, and other groups with common interests and tasks. Encouraging groups to individually embrace the 8th Principle and to commit to acting for diversity, inclusion, and equity lays the groundwork of greater interconnection and moving forward. In addition to internal work, the church through its various communities can connect with outside groups, including those impacted by injustice. Tools are available to assist in planning, assessment, and action.

The Leading Edge Team will share this work with groups in the congregation and encourage all of us to engage in the process of bringing the 8th Principle forward.

Board Member Priorities/intentions for 2025-26 Church Year:

Board members offered the following:

- Parish Hall/Capital Campaign
- 8th Principle work
- Help prepare the congregation for Rev. Rebecca's sabbatical
- Support for changing Rev. Laurel's hours
- Communication of the work of the Board to the congregation

- More vehicles for communication among people to provide information. Suggestions: Intranet, Listserv to spread information, more use of Realm, Slack
- Board oversight of committees we have formed
- Regular policy updates
- Dealing with safety issues—we need to be ready for actions attacking us
- Knowledge management for committees
- Accessibility
- Balance comfort and action: it is a trying time, and we need to confront things for ourselves
- Create a spiritual space of safety and sanctuary
- When we say, “somebody should do something about that,” who is the somebody?

Closing: Rev. Rebecca asked for a moment of centering and then asked the Board to move into the new year with learning, acceptance, and curiosity. She reminded us that for 300 years people have been coming together in the sanctuary of our church. She offered a blessing: “Be blessed and do not allow this work to be all. Heal your soul.”

Meeting adjourned with mutual consent and social hour began.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Desilets, Clerk