

FRSUU Parish Board Notes – October 15, 2025

Present: Bob Higgins, Tom Himmel, Kathy Desilets, Jim Supple, Sarina Khan Reddy, Renee Wolf Foster, Lori Clark, Andy Lobb, Julie Menin, Jeff Bard, Leslie Lawrence, Liss Larson, Reverend Rebecca. (**Bold** denotes voting members.) Capital Campaign committee members: Lark Madden, Barbara Garnis, Joanna Fernandes, Doug Latham, Ed Budelmann, Vern Ellis; and Alyssa Manypenny from Placeworks, the architectural firm making initial space assessments for the Parish Hall. Absent: **Liss Larsen**

Call to Order: Bob Higgins called the meeting to order at 6:05pm.

Welcome: Rev. Rebecca welcomed all reminding us to remember our connections, strength, and love and to join the protest on the 18th if possible. She then read a “Let it Go,” a Danna Faulds poem about letting go of all expectations and trusting that things will be as they should be.

Capital Campaign Update/Discussion: Lark Madden and the Capital Campaign Team presented on the current state of plans for Parish Hall and the campaign. Key points:

- This presentation is for information only, to keep the Board updated.
- The mission is to build community within the church and within the greater Newburyport community through the Parish Hall building. A congregational survey identified use of the Parish Hall as a high priority. Specific potential uses identified were:
 - Flexible space for programming for church and community
 - Commercial kitchen
 - Potential for rentals for income
 - Space for youth
 - Short-term housing for those in need
- Alyssa Manypenny Murphy from Placeworks presented preliminary diagrams for renovation of Parish Hall to meet these needs including a description of limitations.
- Costs to date have been \$58,000-\$48,000 for architectural work and \$10,000 for cost estimates. The estimate for overall costs is \$2.7–3 million including a \$250,000 contingency reserve.
- Expected sources of funds are the congregation, charitable foundations, and incentives for making the work energy efficient with low environmental impacts.
- Next steps include talking with potential donors to determine giving capacity and interest and seeking Board and congregational approval.
- This project, which would be community facing, could serve FRSUU both by providing space for activities and programs and by reaching to new potential members and friends including young people. The project could have a major impact on the future of FRSUU.
- FRSUU will need \$350,000 for the next phase of the project. Authorization will need to come from the congregation. Various strategies are available for this, such as using funds from the endowment to bridge until initial funds from the Capital Campaign come in.
- We are in the early phase of our campaign, and there are still questions we need to address.

Executive Committee Composition: Bob Higgins indicated that the current Executive Committee includes the Senior Minister, the Parish Board Chair and Vice Chair, and the Director of Church Operations. In view of the needs of the Board, Bob recommended that the Finance Committee Chair be added to the Committee.

ACTION: Add the Finance Committee Chair to the Executive Committee

Motion: Jeff Bard moved to add the Finance Committee Chair to the Executive Committee. Andy Lobb seconded and the motion carried without objection.

Committee Member Nominations: Both the Grants Team and the Human Resources Committee require Board approval of members.

ACTION: Add a member to the Grants Team

Motion: Andy Lobb moved to add Jim Major to the Grants Team. Bob Higgins seconded and the motion carried without objection.

ACTION: Add a member to the Human Resources Committee

Motion: Leslie Lawrence moved to add Joe Brouillet to the Human Resources Committee. Jim Supple seconded and the motion passed without objection.

Leading Edge Team (LET) Follow-up Action: Julie Menin/LET Team asked that the Board become an early adopter of the Community of Communities approach to moving FRSUU's work on the 8th Principle. She reviewed the information which LET members presented last month about this approach and described the actions Paula Cole Jones recommended for early adopters including writing a group history, establishing a covenant, seeking to covenant with other groups, developing an initial assessment of current steps toward becoming a multicultural beloved community, and committing to a 2-year update to review progress. Julie also asked for Board approval for the LET Team to reach out to other church groups about becoming early adopters.

ACTION: Identify early adopters of the Community of Communities approach to 8th Principle adoption

Motion: Kathy Desilets moved that the Parish Board become an early adopter of the Community of Communities concept and that the Board also authorize the Leading Edge Team to reach out to other groups to invite them to become early adopters. Andy Lobb seconded and the motion passed without objection.

Transition Discussion: Bob Higgins introduced a discussion of the transition to a new minister and to other issues for the rest of this year, offering three topics for discussion:

- **Short Term: Addressing Senior Minister's Workload:** The Board should consider what work we consider most important for Rev. Rebecca to do during this church year and what we could be transferred to others on the staff or the Board. Reducing her burden would free time for the most important activities and could also strengthen the congregation.

- **Interim Minister Process: Update and Discussion:** To better understand the UUA's process for transition, Bob Higgins shared information he got from Christine Pursell, the UUA specialist on ministerial transitions. Julie Menin and Jeff Bard, who have been involved in prior searches, offered insights.

Typically, congregations appoint an interim minister for two years who continues pastoral and worship duties while assisting the Board and congregation in planning and preparing for the selection of a new settled minister. UUA recommends this process and has observed that congregations take time to let go of the departing minister and prepare for the new minister. They have found that the use of an interim minister results in greater potential for success of the new settled minister.

Bob and others have had questions from the congregation about whether we can speed up this process. We cannot begin recruitment until the spring when ministers apply for positions. Julie said that the work of finding a settled minister is extensive including reviewing what the church needs, helping the congregation let go of the current minister, and preparing a packet describing the church and community for distribution to those who may apply.

Suggestions for steps that can begin now:

- Recruit a task force to study staffing needs to help us to determine what we need. Talk with other congregations about what they have found. Bob plans to ask Board members to participate over the coming month.
- Determine if lay people can take on a part of the work. For example, can we reduce the senior minister's time on the Annual Campaign?
- Create a clear pass-through process that shields the minister from detailed involvement in every project, assigns a liaison between key committees and the Board, and streamlines communication. This works well with the Stewardship (FunRaising) and Grants teams.
- Consider written reports from committees to the Board.
- Ask committees to covenant on how to work internally and with other committees. Committees might consider adopting the Board covenant. The Governance committee could help.
- Clarify who owns responsibility for each decision that the church needs to make.
- Be clear during the transition what is permanent and what is temporary.
- Initiate a conversation with Rev. Rebecca about what she wants taken off her plate.

Bob will summarize our needs, initiate the process of going to key committees to let them know expectations, and organize small groups for various tasks.

Finance Report: Jim Supple sent out financial reports in their new format prior to this meeting. We are on budget through September. The new format highlights categories in the budget, not every detail, and makes it easier to track results. Feel free to call or e-mail Jim with questions.

Governance Report: Leslie Lawrence reported that the group did not meet in October but will pick up its projects in the November meeting.

Discussion of the recent meeting Rev. Rebecca convened with young church parents: They want to be engaged in current activities and would appreciate a more efficient process. They are most likely to get information through the Sunday Order of Service. Rebekah Stafford is willing to be liaison to Board/minister. We need to look at our structure and how to integrate young people. What next steps should the board take?

Stewardship/FunRaising Report: Renee Wolf Foster reports that the committee currently projects income for the upcoming auction at \$22,000, short of the budget projection of \$25,000. Despite the efforts of the committee and others, we have fewer live auction items and anticipate higher costs, including hiring a police detail. A technical glitch delayed the availability of tickets. Renee asked Board members to promote ticket sales. The team is working hard. The Board thanked Renee and the committee for their work.

Consent Agenda Items: Kathy Desilets

ACTION: Consider Board notes for June and September

Motion: Kathy moved that the Board approve the notes from the June and September Board meetings, as well as the August Board retreat. Andy Lobb seconded and the motion carried without exception.

Parish Board Discussion/Reflection: Rev. Rebecca left the meeting at 8:30pm to allow the Board time for private discussion. Bob Higgins suggested a second meeting (possibly without the minister) each month to allow for full discussion of topics under consideration. The next meeting will be on October 29 on Zoom. Bob will provide dates for future meetings.

Other Notes from Board Discussion:

- Next year, no one will be able to rely on an experienced minister to resolve issues. We need a solid plan to move forward.
- Consider a packet of information on issues sent to Board members so that they can prepare for the meetings.
- Consider periodic reports from committees to the Board, possibly every other month. If we do ask for reports, we need to consider timing and which committees need to report. Members had questions about the purpose of the reports.
- Make a clear charge to each committee indicating what work the Board is assigning to them. There were various suggestions about how to ensure accountability such as asking the committees to make a covenant regarding their work internally and with other committees. Could include commitment to the 8th Principle. Bob Higgins will synthesize ideas about committee accountability and go to each team to let them know expectations.
- We need to clarify with Rev. Rebecca what we need to take off her plate. A smaller group would be best to work on this with her.

- What will the committees need to do? Are there things we can do, through the Governance Committee or otherwise to deal with concerns of Young Church parents?
- Has the Board been too reactive? Could we have taken more initiative?
- What do we need in a business manager; what do we need from the congregation?

Adjournment: Tom Himmel moved for adjournment at 8:45pm. Jim Supple seconded and the motion carried without objection.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Desilets, Clerk