

FRSUU Parish Board Minutes – March 18, 2026

Present: Bob Higgins, Tom Himmel, Jim Supple, Leslie Lawrence, Lori Clark, Andy Lobb, Julie Menin, Sarina Kahn Reddy, Jeff Bard, Renee Wolf Foster, Rebekah Stafford, Kathy Desilets, Rev. Rebecca. **Absent:** Liss Larsen

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

Welcome: Rev. Rebecca welcomed the group with a reminder that we all live in the world as it is now, and all need to consider how to react. The challenges of the world have an impact on all of us. She then shared a poem by Naomi Shihab Nye titled “Shoulders,” which addresses the need to care for one another as a parent cares for a child.

Human Resources Subcommittee: Leslie Lawrence proposed the acceptance of Minnie Flanagan as a member of the Human Resources Subcommittee. Minnie’s bio has been distributed to the Board.

ACTION: Approve Minnie Flanagan to join the Human Resources Subcommittee.

Motion: Leslie moved that the Board approve Minnie Flanagan as a member of the Human Resources Subcommittee. Julie Menin seconded and the motion passed without opposition.

Updates:

- **Communications Specialist:** Elisa Scully has resigned. A colleague of Mara Flynn has agreed to fill the position at least until the end of the church year.
- **HVAC rebate:** Jim Supple reported that we have received a rebate check from Mass Save for \$130,000 – more than was expected. We still can apply for a federal rebate, though amount received from Mass Save decreases the need for this federal rebate. The initial application is due before the end of our fiscal year (June 30).
- **Annual Giving Campaign:** We are off to a good start. Many early responders have increased their pledges. We now need to contact the people who are slower to respond. We are currently \$50,000 ahead of last year’s pledges at this point in the campaign, a 22.5% increase. Bob Higgins thanked all who worked on this.
- **Dish Contract and Equipment:** Dish is out of the cellular business and is pulling out of their contract with FRSUU. We have a dispute about what is owed to us, and Dish still has equipment in our space, preventing any other use. We are considering options to deal with this in consultation with Lisa Mead. Loss of \$24,000 in income from Dish is one of the reasons for needing to increase our Annual Campaign goal.

Solar Panel Proposal: Bob Higgins reported that Jim Clary informed him that after due diligence, the Green Team and Facilities Team have decided that there are too many obstacles to moving forward. One issue is the question of our covenant regarding historical preservation. The Facilities Team decided that fixing the HVAC system issues is a priority at this time.

Grants Update: Andy Lobb reported for the Grants Team:

- The **Newburyport Community Preservation Commission (CPA) grant application** requests \$157,000 for fire suppression repairs and upgrades and is expected to be funded despite limited city resources.
- **The National Fund for Sacred Places** has invited us to submit a \$20,000 request for funds for building conditions analysis for Parish Hall. We believe that these funds are set aside for us. This will allow us to nurture our relationship which could give us access to other support.
- Thanks to the Grants Team for their work.

Interim Minister Search: Tom Himmel reported.

- The Search Team will be Tom Himmel, Julie Menin, Amy Cameron, Holly Cashman, and Sharon Tillman.
- Throughout the process, the Search Team will work closely with the UUA Transitions staff. All information about candidates must be kept completely confidential.
- By April 22, the Team will develop a church profile to provide to available interim ministers an overall picture of the church. Our profile will be posted by UUA.
- On May 6, UUA will release credentials of ministers seeking interim posts and profiles of churches seeking interim ministers.
- Ministers and churches will review available information and submit a ranked list of preferences to UUA. Between May 6 and May 17, we will have the opportunity to interview candidates. By May 18, UUA staff will match ministers with churches and send us the name(s) of candidates for our church.
- Between May 18 and May 21, we will negotiate with the selected candidate and reach an agreement based on a format provided by UUA. Their expected start date is August 1.

Jeff Bard and others remind us that the interim minister helps the church to be prepared to welcome a new settled minister, which is quite a different role than that of settled minister.

Questions arose regarding full Board input, congregational input, feedback from UUA, interview opportunities, and how we will determine what we want in an interim minister. The Search Team plans to draft a statement of what we need. In the past, the Search Team presented candidates to the Board via anonymous review of profiles. A major concern is protecting confidentiality of the candidate ministers. Discussion of the transition will continue.

ACTION: Approve membership of the Interim Minister Search Team.

Motion: Tom Himmel moved that the Board approve the membership of the Interim Minister Search Team as described above. Jeff Bard seconded and the motion passed without opposition.

Stewardship/FunRaising Report: Renee Wolf Foster summarized plans including:

- **Trivia Night:** May 2 from 5-7pm in the Parish Hall. Nick Place will collaborate with the committee on this event, which will be mostly social.
- **Rummage Sale:** Seeking donations of clothing. Will be held soon.
- **Yard Sale** in Parish Hall. Participants rent a table and donate a percentage of sales. Still looking for a date.
- **Men's Group Breakfast:** There was positive feedback on this mostly social event.
- The team hasn't ruled out a raffle if we can find a way to reorganize.

Finance Committee Report: Jim Supple reported.

- We have an operating surplus due to higher than anticipated income. Expenses will increase due to health care and heating costs, but we could still end the year with a small surplus.
- Building maintenance costs are high, so we have allocated additional funds to cover anticipated expenses in the coming year's budget. There will be expenses associated with the ministerial transition and interim minister. Costs for benefits and for building maintenance/repair are increasing rapidly.
- Next month Jim will provide a full budget package.
- Discussion of finances included how we could work on events and marketing, which would be important. Tom Himmel has spoken to interested members. We need to identify what is needed and we could convene a group to work with Nick on this.

Governance Committee Report:

Leslie Lawrence reported that the meeting for the month was cancelled due to the Ice Cream Social. The committee is exploring options for health insurance that might be comparable to the current plans and are less costly.

Consent Agenda:

ACTION: Consideration of the January and February minutes. Kathy thanked Sarina Khan Reddy for taking notes in January.

Motion: Bob Higgins moved that the Board approve the January 21 and February 19 Board minutes. Julie Menin seconded and the motion passed without objection.

Blessing:

At 7:45pm, Rev. Rebecca offered a blessing from *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse* by Charlie Mackesy: "We don't know about tomorrow—all that matters is that we love each other." Rev. Rebecca then left the meeting.

The Board continued to meet in executive session to discuss Rev. Rebecca's departure and farewell events.

Following the executive session, the Board returned to a regular session and two actions were taken.

ACTION: Accept the transition plan for Rev. Rebecca.

Motion: Renee Wolf Foster moved that the Board accept the transition plan between the Board and Rev. Rebecca. Rebekah Stafford seconded and the motion passed without objection.

ACTION: Change the date of the annual meeting to June 7.

Motion: Kathy Desilets moved that the Annual Meeting be held on June 7. Tom Himmel seconded and the motion passed without objection.

Adjournment:

Bob Higgins offered a reading which reminded us of the value of faith and that our faith leads us on.

ACTION: Jim Supple moved that the meeting be adjourned at 8:45pm. Lori Clark seconded and the motion passed without objection.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kathy Desilets, Parish Clerk