

FRS Parish Board Meeting – January 15, 2025

Present: Tina Benik, Tom Himmel, Kathy Desilets, Jim Supple, Laurie Evans-Daly, Vern Ellis, Minnie Flanagan, Bob Higgins, Sarina Kahn Reddy, Andy Lobb, Laurie Clark, Liss Larsen, Renée Wolf Foster, Reverend Rebecca, Leslie Lawrence. (Names in **bold** are voting members.)

Call to Order: Tina Benik called the meeting to order at 6:05pm.

Opening: Rev. Rebecca shared a reading on the goddess in older women.

Parish Board Covenant: Andy Lobb

Andy read number seven, which reminds us to recognize our errors and to address them. He emphasized using mistakes to learn and grow, providing an example.

- The Grants Team decided to respond to a request for proposals from the Mass Cultural Council and began work. As the deadline approached the team realized that they would not be able to complete the proposal. The team reviewed their effort and recognized that sometimes we need outside expertise to adequately address the requirements of grants applications, and that getting expert opinions requires resources of time and money.
- Andy noted that slips like this can happen in any group and the first step in addressing them should be to Inform everyone involved what happened and why. A general attitude of compassion, understanding, and the ability to give and accept feedback will enable us to learn and move forward.

Minister's Report: Reverend Rebecca

Rev. Rebecca provided a written report indicating that staff and community connections are going well. She pointed out that we will need a person as co-moderator/backup to Lea Pearson in her role as moderator.

- **Rev. Rebecca's sabbatical** is now scheduled from June 2026 – Jan 2027. Our contract includes a sabbatical every five years, but this was delayed with Rev. Rebecca's approval to accommodate important church events, including the 300th anniversary celebration.
- Tina Benik spoke about the importance of our full commitment to this sabbatical. Given the intensity of Rev. Rebecca's day-to-day work as CEO and pastoral leader, the sabbatical is a time for recharge and reflection. Board members agreed enthusiastically.
- Rev. Rebecca has identified the Lilly Endowment, Inc. foundation which supports clergy renewal. Rev. Rebecca requests Board support for her sabbatical dates and her application to the Lilly foundation to support her sabbatical.

ACTION: Approval of Rev. Rebecca's sabbatical dates and of a grant application to support the sabbatical.

Motion: Renée Wolf Foster moved for approval of the dates of Rev. Rebecca's sabbatical as mid-June 2026 – mid-January 2027. Andy Lobb seconded, and the motion passed without opposition.

Motion: Minnie Flanagan moved for approval of Rev. Rebecca's application to the Lilly Endowment Inc. foundation for sabbatical support. Jim Supple seconded, and the motion passed without objection.

Rev. Rebecca told the Board that a team of five people will work on details of the sabbatical and that a sabbatical minister will be engaged for this period. She asked for support from the Board in fostering a positive reaction from the congregation to the sabbatical.

- **Rev. Laurel:** UU clergy usually seek positions in the spring. Given this reality, Rev. Rebecca indicated that this would be an appropriate time to consider our contract with Rev. Laurel. The board expressed strong approval of the work Rev. Laurel has done to date.

ACTION: Extend Rev. Laurel's Contract

Motion: Tom Himmel moved that the Board renew Rev. Laurel's contract as assistant minister for the next church year. The motion was seconded and passed without objection.

- **Staffing:** Changes in core staff include the elimination of Cynthia Walsh's position. Nick Place will remain full-time with half of his time dedicated to facilities matters and oversight of major projects.

In the budgeting process we are working toward separating contractors from staff positions. Among the core staff, currently Dan O'Shea (finance) and Kate Lamie are in contracted positions. Kate's hours have been increased from 12 hours to 20 to accommodate workload. Other contractors include tech support, where we have significant costs. The board briefly discussed the pros and cons of using contractors and found this to be useful.

Currently we rely heavily on volunteers from the congregation to handle with facility issues. As we move ahead with major projects, to facilitate and centralize this work, we need to establish a facilities management position.

ACTION: Facilities Manager Position

Motion: Jim Supple moved that the board accept a leadership recommendation to add additional funds to the budget, totaling no more than \$4,000, to support the Facility Manager position at the manager level. Sarina Khan Reddy seconded, and the motion passed without objection.

Rev. Rebecca highlighted the need to budget funds for staff training. She also suggested that the terms of Board members should be reviewed in the interest of assuring continuity of leadership.

Human Resources Subcommittee: Leslie Lawrence

Leslie reviewed the UUA fair compensation salary-setting system. She reminded the board of FRS's commitment to fair compensation and presented the current personnel budget. The Board affirmed continuation of our policy of applying the UU standards and approved the personnel budget.

Governance: Tom Himmel

- Job descriptions for the standing committees are in process. The next step is to review the content of the descriptions with the committees.
- Leadership Development: UUA has extensive materials to help Board members and others to be more effective in their roles. Tom encouraged all to look at materials and identify those of particular interest.
- We should consider assessing the terms of Board members to ensure continuity of leadership and to ensure that members understand the issues discussed and their roles.

Stewardship: Renée Wolf Foster

- The Cookie Walk was a great success both in engaging the community (within and beyond the congregation) and in raising more money than last year. Thanks to all who took part with special nods to Nick's hot chocolate and Paula's outreach to passersby.
- A kickoff party in Parish Hall for the Annual Giving Campaign is in the planning stages. Its goals are to build community for the campaign and to have fun together.
- Considering holding the raffle again. Can we make it more exciting and marketable?

Annual Giving Campaign

- New stewards are invited to join. We now have 34 and hope to have 45-50. Tina Benik asked Board members to contact their friends and offered to reach out to recommended individuals.
- The organizers are trying out a new structure for the campaign. Instead of chairs, there will be a steering committee sharing the responsibility. Instead of using captains for information exchange, this will be through direct communications with Bart Bracken, Renée, and Jim Supple. For the first time, we will have honorary chairs. John and Florence Mercer will take this position in recognition of their long-time support of the campaign and the church.
- This year's theme is Be the Light: Make Love Real.
- While we have not found a policy prohibiting alcohol use on our property, there is a presumption that there has been a prohibition. Leaders of the Annual Campaign think it would be helpful to have beer and wine at some events.

ACTION: Alcohol Use at Campaign Events

Motion: Vern Ellis moved that the board authorize serving beer and wine on the FRS campus for events related to the Annual Campaign. Tom seconded, and the motion passed without opposition.

Finance Report: Jim Supple

- We are doing well with income, have exceeded our budget by approximately \$6,000, and have a net operating surplus.
- We are slightly behind on contributions and are looking to reach out to people who are 30 percent or more behind their pledge to remind them of our need.
- Fundraising income is increasing as planned. Yankee Homecoming events did very well, and Candlelight exceeded our goal.

- Expenses are currently under budget, mostly due to a decrease in the cost of staff benefits. This is partly due to contracted positions.
- We have adequate cash reserves.
- The fiscal folk are working to restructure the budget. This will include a new chart of accounts and categorize expenses to show amounts for functional areas such as building needs and staffing (including long-term consultants).
- The 2025-26 budget is still in process. We will hold a Board meeting on Zoom on January 29 at 6pm to review this budget and approve the amount for the Annual Campaign.

Afghan Family: Sarina Khan Reddy

- Sarina shared a detailed report which shows current activities that allow the family to operate successfully in this environment. Stories about the family's need for advocacy with the schools and health care highlight the needs for ongoing support. Keeping the family in our community keeps them in touch with established support systems and our volunteer network.
- Our volunteers have formed The Resettlement Partnership (TRP). Its goal is to provide a home for the family through a rent to own program.
- The TRP has a regular newsletter and invites donations.

4th Century Team: Vern Ellis and Andy Lobb

- Vern presented a report in writing on the work of the team.
- The recent Congregational discussion went well and included all groups involved in the 4th Century Team. The meeting let people know about the plan for a Capital Campaign.
- A second congregational discussion on February 9 or 16 will tie the Capital Campaign back to the Congregational Insight process.
- The Capital Campaign is in the pre-feasibility study phase. Informal conversations with potential donors have begun and we are considering what we want to do vs. what we can afford. We need to define our project plans and estimate costs. We also need to deal with the \$7,000 limit on expenses without congregational approval.

300th Anniversary Celebration: Laurie Evans-Daly

- Banners are up inside and outside of the church as of January 5. Laurie commends Vern's design work.
- The initial 75 copies of the anniversary book sold out, and we have ordered 30 more.
- Upcoming events include the Celebration Tea at the Museum of Old Newbury (May), the birthday party (June 8), and the Bed Race at Yankee Homecoming.
- Sunday services will include information about the long history of the church. Attendees reacted positively to the inaugural services of this kind.
- We are planning for a plaque to recognize the connection of the church with Native residents in the area.

Update on Barbara Owen Gift: Tina Benik

Lisa Mead's office—Mead, Talerman & Costa—has cleared the title and interviews with realtors have begun.

Closing: Reverend Rebecca offered a wish that we have times of great joy and a quote from Mary Oliver's poem, "When I Am Among the Trees."

ACTION: Adjournment

Motion: Minnie Flanagan moved to adjourn, and Renée Wolf Foster seconded. The meeting ended at 7:50pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Desilets, Parish Clerk