



**MINUTES**  
**Parish Board Meeting**  
**April 5, 2020**

Present: Gene Thompson-Grove (co-chair), Janet Britcher (co-chair), Karla Baehr, Ellen Blaney, Micaela Coady, Dave Demerjian, Charles Sandmel, Bob Williamson  
Absent: Steve Pratt-Otto  
Others: Clint Richmond (Buildings and Grounds), Rev Lisa

Gene called the virtual meeting via videoconferencing to order at 1:02pm. Rev Lisa lit the chalice as Gene read the opening reading, Rosemary Bray McNatt's The Courage to Begin Anew. We took turns reading each part of our Covenant. After a lightening road check-in, our fun activity was sharing in pairs things we love about self-isolation at home and things we really don't like about it.

**Buildings and Grounds**

Gene explained that the original purpose for inviting B&G to meet with the Parish Board was to make decisions about capital spending and the process for making them more transparent. With today's news that 2020-21 pledging is falling well behind last year's, the primary focus now needs to be understanding B&G's current fiscal year spending to date and its sense of urgent needs for next year because the Board needs this information for budget planning.

Clint reported these spending commitments to date (and the lead person for each project):

Pierce basement floor replacement (asbestos abatement)	\$ 5,450	Williamson
Replacement of Sanctuary Floor Cork	\$ 2,908	Richmond
Tree Maintenance	\$10,500	Spitzer/Richmond
Relamping in Sanctuary, Lyon & Dana	\$10,300	Williamson
Sanctuary sound system enhancement	\$ 2,714	Kirchoff
Parish House Classroom Painting	\$ 950	Joyce/Richmond
Parish House Ceiling Repair	\$ 700 est	
Upper Parking Lot Consultation	\$ 500 est	Dennis

He reported the following projects in the planning stages, with no funds yet committed:\*

Upper Parking Lot Safety: Exploratory Tree Pit	\$ 500 (est)	Dennis
Lighting Project	\$ 2,500 (est)	Williamson
2 Wheelchair-accessible Spaces in the Sanctuary	\$ 3,500 (est)	Dennis

\*The "stay-at-home" order has brought a stop to these projects for the foreseeable future.

Board members and Clint discussed the need for transparency about how potential projects are identified, how decisions are made, what distinguishes regular maintenance needs from capital needs from program needs, and what criteria should be applied to prioritize projects, e.g., mission, safety, hygiene, aesthetics, accessibility, efficiency.

The Board identified **next steps**:

**Called by Love, Sustained By Community, Committed to Justice**

We strive to be a welcoming, diverse and loving congregation that nurtures spiritual growth for individuals and families, celebrates multicultural community, and works together to demand social justice, dismantle racism, and care for our living earth.

- 1) Clint will provide for the Executive Committee's April 29 meeting a description of how B&G proposes to spend its CY 20-21 \$40,000 allocation, and the criteria it is using to establish its priorities for that spending
- 2) Clint will work with Janet and Bob (B&G Liaison) to review B&G's now out-of-date charter and propose changes for the Board's consideration at its May 5<sup>th</sup> meeting
- 3) Rev Lisa will ask the Nominating Committee to recruit members to serve on B&G in the future

Board members expressed their appreciation for Clint's long-time contributions to B&G.

#### **Annual Meeting: change of date to May 31<sup>st</sup> and format to virtual**

The Board discussed the Executive Committee's recommendation to delay Annual Meeting from May 17<sup>th</sup> to May 31<sup>st</sup> and to hold it virtually. Gene outlined three reasons for the recommendation:

- Give the Finance Committee and Board more time to get a more definitive handle on how large the pledging shortfall will be and the budget options available.
- Ensure sufficient time for the congregation to understand the challenge and weigh in on budget options to be considered;
- Give the Board and others time to figure out how to do Annual Meeting virtually.

The Board approved the recommendation to hold Annual Meeting on May 31<sup>st</sup> with a high level of consensus (8 5's)

#### **Next Steps:**

- Rev Lisa and Gene will plan for communicating about the date and format change to the congregation.
- Bob will lead a working group to develop a proposal for conducting a virtual Annual Meeting; the group is to include representatives from the By-Laws, Digital Ministry, and Finance Committees – as well as the Board Clerk (Karla) and the Moderator (Kimberly Rand))

#### **2020 Annual Report: Digital-only version**

Rev Lisa reported that she and Church administrator Alisa Halliday have developed a plan for gathering committee reports for the 2020 Annual Report from committee chairs and assembling them into a single PDF document for posting on the website.

**Next Step:** Rev Lisa will ask Alisa to provide committee chairs with guidelines for format and length (In order to make the document as accessible as possible for members of the congregation, Board members suggested that brevity be the rule this year, i.e., not more than one page.

#### **Finance Report**

- Charles reported that this year's revenue is expected to exceed spending.
  - The Board reviewed a draft schedule for budget development and deliberation based on the two-week delay for Annual Meeting
- Next Step:** Gene will work with Charles to finalize a new budget calendar and plan the virtual budget hearings
- Charles reviewed other highlights of the Finance Report:

- With bookkeeper Adam Berman, Charles is exploring ways to take advantage of the payroll protection provision of the new federal CARES Act to secure a forgivable loan to cover 2 ½ months of the salaries of fulltime positions (we have 3: Minister, DRE, Administrator)
- The Finance Committee has recommended that First Parish not invest in the Ujima Fund. The Finance Committee reported that it has not been able to access information about the Ujima Fund's financial condition or reach its office. In addition, the UUA (which oversees management of our endowment in its Common Fund) is on a path to increase its community investing allocation to 5% of the total portfolio. The Finance Committee reports that Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) typically pay 4%-6%. The Committee has concluded that investing in CDFI's with the UUA Common Fund affords the benefits of portfolio diversification and access to expertise in these non-traditional investments.
- Charles is analyzing essential spending requirements and likely income between now and summer in hopes of avoiding the need to draw more from our endowment this fiscal year. He explained that it is not fiscally prudent to draw from an endowment when its value has dropped as has ours since the COVID-19 crisis struck.
  - Rev Lisa is ensuring only essential spending of those accounts under staff control is taking place
  - There will be a \$6,000 saving in the insurance line over the last four months of the fiscal year as a result of the work led by Steve Pratt-Otto to find a new insurance carrier (The annual savings will be \$18,000 – from \$36,000 to \$18,000)
  - B&G expenditures have been halted and there is in excess of \$50,000 in the capital reserve account that can be “borrowed” from to help avoid an endowment withdrawal this fiscal year.

**Ministers' Monthly Report** (attached)

Rev Lisa reviewed highlights of her monthly report to the Board, including:

- Janet Britcher has agreed to serve as co-chair of the Board next year with the understanding that Board meetings will have to be on Sunday afternoons and/or be rotated between Sunday afternoons and those Wednesday evenings when only the select choir rehearses; Janet will be reaching out to invite a Board member to serve with her as co-chair.
- The Nominating Committee reports early success in recruiting new members to fill the 4 Board vacancies for next year, including the post of Treasurer.

**April 1<sup>st</sup> Board decision to offer housing at First Parish2 persons who may be released from ICE Detention for 14 days: next steps**

Board members reviewed the decision it had made in its emergency special meeting of April 1<sup>st</sup> to partner with BEYOND/BIJAN (Boston Immigration Justice Accompaniment Network) to offer to host 2 neighbors for 14 days at First Parish if they are released from detention as a result of the lawsuit brought in US District Court. The lawsuit seeks the release of detainees from the ICE detention center managed by the Bristol County Sheriff's Office in order to reduce the risk to themselves and others of spreading COVID-19. (Minutes of the April 1<sup>st</sup> Special Meeting are attached)

Board members discussed the need for proactive communication with the Congregation.

**Next Step:** Karla Baehr, Dave Demerjian, Ellen Blaney and Rev Lisa agreed to develop a message to be shared with the congregation in this week's Tuesday and Friday all-congregation email updates; the message will include a) information about how members can contribute if BEYOND accepts the First Parish invitation to host, and b) an invitation to reach out to any Board member to share questions and to learn why the Board felt so compelled by the First Parish mission to take the action it did on April 1<sup>st</sup>.

#### **Disruptive Persons Policy**

The Board approved the ***Disruptive Persons Policy*** that was discussed at length at its March meeting and revised to reflect the changes recommended at that time.

#### **Deferred to May Meeting**

Because of time constraints, the Board decided to defer two agenda items until its May meeting:

- RE goals moving forward and a process for accountability
- Next steps after the Shared Leadership Meeting about possible changes in sanctuary pews scheduled for March 29<sup>th</sup> had to be canceled because of COVID-19
- (Already deferred) Revisit the concept of *Calling In/ Calling Out*

#### **Minutes of Board Meeting on March 3, 2020**

The Board had previously approved minutes for its March 3, 2020 meeting via email. The Board has adopted the practice of approving minutes shortly after each meeting, rather than waiting until its next meeting in order to speed their posting on the First Parish website, part of the Board's commitment to transparency.

Respectfully submitted,

Karla Baehr, Clerk