

**Annual Meeting Minutes
May 31, 2020**

Note: *The May 31, 2020 meet was held via videoconferencing (Zoom) due to federal and state guidelines prohibiting in-person gatherings due to the Covid-19 pandemic; at the time of the Annual Meeting all Sunday services, committee meetings and other First Parish meetings and gatherings had been held virtually since mid-March.*

Attendees were welcomed to the Annual Meeting by a recording of Music Director Keith Kirchoff playing Wake Now My Senses. Serving as technical director for the meeting, Ministerial Intern Jud Wolfskill oriented participants to Zoom and how the virtual meeting would be conducted.

At 1:07 pm Clerk Karla Baehr confirmed that more than 38 members had joined the meeting, the minimum number to achieve a quorum. {The number of members participating rose to 81 at the peak, or 32% of the congregation.}

Acting Moderator Kimberly Rand called the meeting to order and Rev Lisa lit a chalice and shared a reading and ministerial blessing. The Moderator reviewed the First Parish mission and ground rules for congregational meetings.

Outgoing Parish Board chair Gene Thompson-Grove explained the Board’s rationale and plan for continuing to use a consensus decision-making process in deliberations, explaining that ultimately our bylaws require formal votes, consistent with Robert’s Rules of Order. By using a consensus process leading up to that vote, she explained, the Board has two goals: 1) practice reaching consensus, and understand that when we finally vote *yes* or *no* on the FY21 Budget, not all of the “yes” or “no” votes are the same; and 2) recognize that we don't all have to agree to move forward together, as long as we know we were listened to and taken seriously.

Gene presented the Annual Report by reminding participants that it had been posted online earlier in the week. She focused her remarks on the “what”, “why” and “how” of the Parish Board’s work over the past year. She shared the Board’s covenant and goals for the year: be mission-driven and policy-focused; be transparent and have clear decision making processes; be collaborative and reflective; have fun and avoid burn out. She offered examples of how both have been reflected in the Board’s agendas.

Parish Board co-chair Janet Britcher recognized out-going Board members Ellen Blaney, Dave Demerjian, Charles Sandmel, and Gene Thompson-Grove, describing specific gifts and contributions each had made.

Kimberly reviewed the proposed Agenda and invited questions. She reminded members that to save time without sacrificing the opportunity to ask questions and discuss, she would be calling for a single vote on the typically more routine business of Annual Meeting: accepting the agenda for the meeting, accepting new members, electing new officers and members of Standing Committees, and accepting the minutes from past congregational meetings.

Out-going Chair of the Welcoming/Membership Committee Eliza Blanchard presented new members:

Jenn Britt	Johanna Kobran	Virga Mohsini
Adam Faja	Michael Kobran	Bridgette Nadaff
Susan Faja	Carmen MacFadden	Christine Rossell

Perry Grossman Carrie James Danny Keefe	Jessica MacFadden Shensheng Miao Xiao Miao	Peter Sakura Jim Woodman Melissa Woodman
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Out-going Chair of the Nominating Committee Ray Wellbaum presented that committee’s nominees for new Officers and Standing Committees as required by our bylaws:

For the Parish Board:

- Alfred Brownell
- Emily Cherry
- Jen Guillemin
- Margaret Williams

For Officers:

- Moderator
Kimberly Zimmerman Rand
- Treasurer
Margaret Williams
- Clerk
Karla Baehr

For Nominating Committee:

- Whit Larrabee (member-at-large)

Kimberly reviewed and invited questions about the Minutes from the past year’s Congregational Meetings requiring approval: May 19, 2019 Annual Meeting and November 17, 2019 Special Meeting.

Kimberly called for a consolidated vote on all of the above recommendations: accept the Agenda for this meeting, New Members, the Nominating Committees recommendations for Officers and Standing Committee members, and the Minutes for the two congregational meetings. She asked for discussion, inviting members to offer their questions or statements in the Zoom “chat box”. There was no discussion. Voting was by show of hands with screen shots taken to record the vote. All actions were approved overwhelmingly.

Gene reviewed the Parish Board’s *Updated Recommended FY 2021 Budget*, pointing out that it has been available on the website for review and downloading in advance, along with a *Frequently Asked Questions* document prepared in response to questions raised at the three congregational budget hearings held in May and an updated *Building Blocks* document designed to give background information on each component of the budget. She described the positive impact on our budget for FY 2020 of Treasurer Charles Sandmel’s successful effort to secure a \$65,000 Payroll Protection Loan (which will become a grant) from the federal Covid-19 CARES Act. She then highlighted the themes in the feedback garnered at the three congregational budget discussions and how they had influenced subsequent Board discussion:

Positive responses to the Board’s initial budget proposal included:

- Strong canvass pledging
- Shows restraint without sacrificing mission in a unique year
- Continuing to pay staff at FY20 rates - no layoffs or furloughs
- Less concern about endowment draw in these unprecedented times
- Affirm Sunday service collections for partner organizations
- Reductions in program budgets are not drastic and everyone shares the lift
- Allows for flexibility as year unfolds

Concerns raised were:

- Rental income seems unrealistic
- Become an *Honor Congregation* in terms of Denominational Giving
- Maintain music as much as feasible

She explained how the Board had responded to the concerns, highlighted significant recommendations for both income and expenses, and pointed out that the proportion of the proposed budget committed to fulfilling our mission would go from 52% in FY 2020 to 57% in FY 2021. The recommended budget would authorize spending \$574,954, a 10% reduction from FY 2020, and would authorize a draw from the endowment of \$150,000, a reduction of 15% from the draw authorized for FY2020. The draw from the endowment would decrease from 7.7% in FY 2020 to 6.4% (2.9% from earnings and 3.5% from principle).

In small groups in separate “breakout rooms”, members addressed these questions:

- As you think about our mission, what works for you about the budget?
- What concerns do you have about the budget?
- Where are you on the consensus ladder?
 - 5: I can say an unqualified “yes” to the decision. I am satisfied that the decision is an expression of the wisdom of the group.
 - 4: I find the decision perfectly acceptable.
 - 3: I can live with the decision. I’m not especially enthusiastic about it.
 - 2: I do not fully agree with the decision. However, I do not choose to block the decision. I am willing to support the decision because I trust the wisdom of the group.
----- “the line”
 - 1: I do not agree with the decision and feel the need to stand in the way of this decision being accepted.
 - 0: I feel that we have no clear sense of unity. We need to do more work before consensus can be reached.

Using the chatbox, most small group facilitators reported high levels of both support and consensus about the budget, reporting 61 5’s, 19 4’s, 2 3’s and 1 abstention (83 consensus votes). Based on the discernment of a high level of support and agreement, Kimberly asked for a vote on the budget, noting that approval would require a 2/3 vote because it will require withdrawal from the endowment principal, not just earnings. Discussion in the chat box focused exclusively on members’ appreciation for the work of the Board and Finance Committee. The show of hands voting in favor was overwhelming. No hand was observed voting against adopting the budget. One member abstained. In addition, 2 members had secured and sent in early ballots in favor of approving the budget.

Kimberly asked if there was any other business before the congregation. Seeing no responses in the chat box, she adjourned the meeting at precisely 2:00 pm, the target set by the Board at the outset of the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Karla Baehr
Clerk of the Parish

Approved by the Congregation at the 2020-21 Annual Meeting on May 23, 2021