

**Parish Board Minutes
December 5, 2021**

Present: Karla Baehr, Alfred Brownell, Micaela Coady, Jen Guillemin, Jody Leader, John Mignano, Margaret Williams, Bob Williamson. **Absent:** Emily Cherry **Guest:** Deb Weiner, RE Consultant (as observer)

Opening

Chair Bob Williamson called the in-person meeting in Lyon Chapel to order at 1:10pm. Rev Lisa read Jan Richardson's *Every Bright Thing: a Blessing*. Members deepened connections to one another and to their work together by responding to the prompt, "How is Your Spirit?", and then read the Board Covenant together.

Monthly Matters

1. Minister's Report

Rev Lisa offered highlights from her [Minister's Report](#). Discussion included

- Planning for Christmas eve services
- RE staffing and programming including the restoration of OWL and Coming of Age programs in collaboration with First Church in Dorchester
- The Board's commitment to a holiday gift for staff
- Canvass Planning: Micaela, Margaret, and Alfred Brownell will represent the Board. Together with Rev Lisa, they will recruit members of the congregation to join the effort.

2. Fiscal Health Status Report (Finance Report)

Treasurer Margaret Williams reported that our operating financials are on target to meet the annual budget. Lower than expected rental revenue is offset by reduced expenses, primarily in staffing costs. Our endowment is doing well, which moves us closer to the recommended withdrawal of 4% annually.

3. Meeting Calendar and January Board Retreat

Board members reviewed its meeting schedule to help identify conflicts that could affect attendance, with special mention to the planned Board Retreat on January 29th. See [2021-22 Board Meeting Schedule](#)

Ongoing work

1. Minister's Agreement

Bob explained that he, Karla and Rev Lisa are reviewing amendments to the Ministerial Agreement (contract) the Board and Rev Lisa signed in 2017 when she was called. The primary goal of the review has been to bring the contractual agreement into alignment with the most current recommendations of the national Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) recommendations.

Sabbatical Leave:

Bob explained that Board guidance is needed on how to implement the Agreement's provision related to sabbatical leave:

The Minister shall use sabbatical leave for study, education, writing, meditation, and other forms of professional and religious growth. Sabbatical leave accrues at the rate of one month per year of service, with leave to be taken after four but before seven years of service. No more than six months of sabbatical leave may be used within any twelve-month period. The dates of the sabbatical plan must be approved by the Parish Board at least one year in advance.

Rev Lisa explained that the 2022-23 church year will be her fifth year. She proposes to take 2 months of her accrued sabbatical in January-February 2023 and 2 more months in 2023-24 (likely also January-February). She explained that interviews are underway for a ministerial intern to serve in both years to provide support to the congregation. She responded to questions from members, after which the Board met in Executive Session without Rev Lisa for an initial discussion of her proposal.

The Board plans to vote formally on Rev Lisa's sabbatical proposal at its January 5th meeting and develop a plan for communicating with the congregation.

Anti-racism, Anti-Oppression and Multicultural Awareness

Bob and Rev Lisa shared with the Board a letter Emily Cherry wrote to them explaining their decision to step down from the Board and “step back” from the First Parish community at least for a while. They explained their decision as prompted by the lack of willingness and/or ability of too many members of the Congregation to respect their identify as non-binary. Board members met first in pairs and then together to make sense of this unsettling development. Several members were inspired to share their own experiences of exclusion and invisibility. Members explored together how the Board might respond. Board members will add their pronouns to their name tags immediately, recognizing that is a necessary “technical” response to a challenge that will require a much more “adaptive” response if our community is to develop the fully inclusive, welcoming, and anti-racist culture our mission envisions. Members agreed to devote a portion of their January retreat to further exploration of its responsibility and response.

2. **Reopening Planning Group’s (RPG) Recommended Policy Revisions**

Chair Bob Williamson turned over leadership of the meeting so that he could don the hat of co-chair of the RPG. He explained the rationale behind recommendations RPG is making to adjust the First Parish policy for in-person use of the facility during the pandemic. [Reopening Planning Group Covid Safety Policy for gathering this winter](#) Constraints on in-person use are being relaxed somewhat and indexed to the risk designation of this geographic area. Other recommended changes reflect practical actions based on what has been learned this fall. The changes represent an effort to better balance safety and the desire of many to have opportunities to gather in community. The Board reached a high level of consensus to accept the revised policy (2 4’s and 6 5’s).

3. **Board Goals for 2021-22**

Ad Hoc Board subcommittees had met since the November Board meeting to propose more specific language for each of the Board goals initially proposed for 2021-22. Members began discussion of those recommendations, focusing primarily on a recommendation to learn about, implement and maintain the practice of a “Justice Pause”. Adapted from EquityXDesign’s “Equity Pause” practice, a Justice Pause would require the Board to pose questions like these as it makes decisions:

Inclusion: Who are we not hearing from? Why?

Relationships: Is this conversation/action/project moving us towards relationship-building and community-building?

Acknowledgments: Are we acknowledging the history?

Process & Practice: Are we on the right track? Do we need to update our practices and processes?

Goals: Are we living into our mission?

Implicit Biases: Where are our blind spots and biases?

The Board subcommittees agreed to refine their proposed goals for the Board’s January meeting.

Upcoming Board Meetings_

Next Meetings:

1. Exec Committee Wednesday December 29, 5:00-6:15 (Zoom or in person)
2. January Board Meeting Wednesday 1/5/22, 7:00 – 9:00 PM via Zoom
3. Board retreat Saturday January 29, 8:30 AM - 3:30 PM, location TBA

December Triads: Bob/Alfred/Karla + Margaret/John/Jody + Jen/Lisa/Micaela

The meeting was adjourned at 3:36pm

Respectfully submitted,
Karla Baehr, Clerk