

<b>Regular Attendees</b>		Present
Fifi Ball	Director of Operations	Y
Jeff Brainerd	Standing Committee member	Y
Kate Crosby	Standing Committee member	Y
Howard Dana	Senior Minister	Y
Dave Elwood	Standing Committee member	Y
Kristin Haddad	Standing Committee member	Y
Peter Nobile	Clerk	Y
Patty Popov	Standing Committee member	Y
Toby Smith Ropeik	Standing Committee member	Y
Mark Russell Prior	Chair	Y
Lora Venesy	Standing Committee member	Y
Alec Walker	Standing Committee member	Y
Tom Wilson	Treasurer	Y
<b>Guests</b>	<b>Representing</b>	
Bethany Lowe	Social Action	Y
19 guests	Attendees included: David Ropeik, Eric Moore, Abby Russell Prior, CC King, Margie King Saphier, Peter and Marilyn Lowitt, Lillian Anderson, Charles and Alex Lowell, Tony Rodriguez, Joan Wesolowski, Eric Van Loon, Sara Ballard (plus others)	

Howard opened with a poem “Salvation”, followed by a moment of silence.

A motion to approve an amended copy of the November 2015 minutes was approved unanimously.

There was no Chair’s report.

Minister's report

Howard reported that the UU College of Social Justice is interested in partnering more closely with FP and learning about how social justice works here. The annual pledge campaign is off to a good start with a good core group however more volunteers would be desirable. There seems to be a relatively low level of anxiety about the campaign this year. Tom reported that there are a number of good ideas about the campaign rollout including the theme, which is “Making Miracles Happen”. Mark encouraged all SC members to pledge early (a show of hands at the table indicated all will do so) and to get involved in the campaign outreach effort.

Director of Operations' report

Fifi reviewed the current FY2016 Budget Update. The only spending adjustment requiring formal Standing Committee consideration was an increase to line 6170 by \$1,500, due to insurance cost changes. A motion was made and seconded and the adjustment was unanimously approved.

Treasurer's report

An associate of Tom's with relevant expertise is reviewing health care benefits options packages for Fifi. The Wright Tavern discussion with the Trustees of Parish Donations is moving forward. The Concord Museum is interested in discussing management of the building. Ideas include restoring parts of the building back to 18<sup>th</sup> century character, and opening the first floor to the public. Funding will be the biggest challenge. A study and recommendations are in the works. The goal is to get a proposal before the SC and Trustees as soon as possible.

Ministerial housing allowances

Each year, the Standing Committee is asked by the ministers to allocate a portion of their salaries for housing. This allocation process provides documentation to the ministers in support of their individual tax filings. The allocation amounts are determined by the ministers and there is no impact on First Parish finances. Three separate motions for 2016 housing allowances were made, seconded, and unanimously approved: the first for \$58,037 for Rev. Howard Dana; the second for \$34,200 for Rev. Marion Visel; and the third for \$40,800 for Rev. Amy Freedman.

Sanctuary-Terrace Stairway options

Within the last three years there have been three falls on the stairway between the Sanctuary and the outdoor terrace area. Since then, Doug has added rubber stair treads and contrasting friction tape on the upper landing. Fifi presented a "soft" quote, supplied by Mark Brennan, to smooth a dip in the handrail and install a center railing on that stairway (~\$22,000). Robert Taylor, architect on the original building renovation, reminded us, in correspondence with Howard, that he followed building code during the design of that stairway; that this stairway is less wide than the stairway it replaced, but was kept sufficiently broad to accommodate code-mandated egress capacity; and that it was decided in design discussions not to introduce a center handrail to that stairway. The stairway, along with the rest of the renovated building, was approved by the building inspector after the renovations were complete (in 2011). Mr. Taylor has offered design a center handrail on that stairway at no additional (design) cost to First Parish. To reduce the likelihood of further problems while the addition of a center railing is being discussed, the addition of new signage and/or other possible solutions was suggested. Members decided to defer further discussion until the Facilities Advisory and Research Group came to the Standing Committee with a formal proposal and rationale. Peter offered support to Fifi and Howard in their work with the Facilities Advisory and Research Group. Alec suggested that safety on those stairs be the prime consideration, and raised the possibility of creating a special giving opportunity if we decide to complete the proposed construction work.

Other SC Member Business

Kristin reviewed the latest version of the Standing Committee Best Practices document. The idea is to keep a

living “things we do well” list with our Goals document, as part of our ongoing evaluative process. The list would help future evaluation sub-committees and support future goal, policy, and procedure-setting discussions. A motion was made and seconded to affirm this document, and was unanimously approved. Mark suggested that this document also be considered by the governance subgroup for incorporation into Standing Committee operating procedures.

Future agenda items were briefly reviewed.

#### Discussion: Black Lives Matter Banner

As promised at last month’s Standing Committee meeting, Social Action Director Bethany Russell-Lowe returned with a formal proposal crafted by the Race Conversations group. Bethany began by summarizing the goals of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement both generally and with respect to the UUA, which charged member congregations at the 2015 General Assembly in an Action of Immediate Witness. Bethany reported that in the US more than 100 congregations have put up BLM signs. This proposal for a banner at First Parish has been motivated by Howard’s sermon on the subject, and the recent BLM signage incident in West Concord, as well as continuing race-related incidents across the US. There are a number of general concerns including questions about the wording of the banner, and the potential for vandalism.

Bethany reviewed the BLM Banner proposal in detail. More than 50 people have been involved in the conversation around this banner. There are two unresolved issues. First, whether or not to add the additional text “Join the Conversation” to the banner. This statement has been supported by many, but some feel the addition of the statement might take away from the meaning of the Black Lives Matter phrase. Some in the proposal group feel that BLM is not a conversation, but a statement. The banner size is proposed to be about 6’-0” x 3’-0”, similar to the size of the Crop Walk banner, to be hung between the two left large front portico columns. The second unresolved question is whether a question/comment box should be positioned near the banner, open to the public. This issue is thought to be minor, and it was not necessary for the Standing Committee to address it. Bethany had also researched, and distributed this evening, a vandalism response plan, which could include a restorative justice process with anyone identified in any vandalism incident. While in some areas, church staff and congregation members have been threatened because of their support for the Black Lives Matter movement, this is not considered a concern for First Parish in Concord.

Standing Committee members engaged in a discussion with Bethany around the BLM proposal. At various points during the discussion, guests were invited to ask questions and make comments. A number of ideas were discussed, including but not limited to,

- When discussing racism, some language might be considered controversial or inflammatory. Talking points should be carefully crafted.
- Hanging a banner is a call to action and is just the first step in a journey for the congregation and the

surrounding communities.

- The statement that “All Lives Matter” is true and coexists with the more specific statement “Black Lives Matter”.
- During the recent month of conversations about hanging a banner, a very large majority of congregation members who provided feedback were very supportive.
- Howard and Bethany have been in touch with the Concord Police Chief, Town Manager Chris Whelan, and the Concord Select Board regarding our intention to put up a BLM banner, and have been received positively. About half of the Concord Police Department is non-white. The Police Chief’s previous job experience has included some racially charged work, and the Concord Police Department has openly supported folks who have had BLM lawn signs removed.
- The goals of the Black Lives Matter movement are tied to the 2<sup>nd</sup> UU principle of Justice, equity and compassion in human relations. Systemic racism is still deeply wound into US culture. The BLM movement is about more than policing issues, and includes support for fair access to healthcare, housing and education.
- Hanging a BLM banner would be a statement in support of the UUA Action of Immediate Witness against racial violence and other race-based oppression.

Public comments included:

- Hanging a banner includes an unknown amount of risk of damages to the church and the well-being of the congregation. Some readers might not understand the meaning of the banner and cause harm. The BLM movement does not seem to take a position on non-violence.
- Participating in discussions about racism and privilege can change people’s perspectives very dramatically in a very short period of time, especially for those who have not previously considered these issues.
- Several other Concord area faith communities are also considering or have already hung banners or signs.
- The banner would serve as a response to the recent national incidents of racial violence.
- First Parish has been in conversation about taking action for several months, and that the banner is just the latest step.
- There are previous examples of the Standing Committee dealing with controversial issues in this congregation e.g. the AYS controversy; and there are also precedents concerning political expression e.g. protesting US involvement in the Vietnam War.

In response to a number of questions about the meaning of the banner, Mark worked with Bethany to develop and come to an understanding of the Race Conversations group’s message. By hanging the BLM banner First

Parish would be making a statement that black lives matter, and in support of the BLM movement. As a UU congregation and as members of the UUA, First Parish would be taking a position in keeping with our UU principles. First Parish recognizes that systemic racism and race-based violence exist.

During the following discussion, Mark explained that the Standing Committee has the authority as elected representatives of the congregation to make the banner hanging decision, and confirmed that Standing Committee members were in agreement on the meaning of the proposed banner and felt well informed enough to make a decision. There would be two votes. The first would be on whether to hang a BLM banner. The second, dependent on passage of the first, would be on whether to post an additional statement such as "Join the Conversation".

A motion was made and seconded to hang a BLM banner on the church property. During the subsequent discussion, there was consensus that during the time the banner is hung, it would be important that activities be organized to engage members of the congregation and the larger community in conversations about racism and its effects. Also, the details surrounding the hanging of the banner would be left to Howard, serving in his role as Head-of-Staff. Guests spoke in favor of the Standing Committee decision making process.

After discussion, and additional input from guests in attendance, the Standing Committee voted unanimously to hang a Black Lives Matter banner on church property.

The Standing Committee took a 10 minute break and then resumed the meeting.

After a brief discussion, a motion was made and seconded to display the statement "Join the Conversation" in conjunction with the BLM banner. During the subsequent discussion, SC members debated whether the additional statement would detract from the BLM message, or whether it would be a supplemental statement calling the community to action. Members agreed on the importance of the BLM message being the primary message. After discussion, and additional input from guests in attendance, the Standing Committee voted 8 to 3 to display "Join the Conversation" as a secondary message. The details of how to accomplish this communication were left to Howard.

Standing Committee members next discussed the timeline for the display of the banner. Committee members agreed that the banner would be hung until the Sunday after the First Parish 2016 Annual Meeting. The Standing Committee would also receive periodic updates at its regular meetings about the status of the Black Lives Matter activities, and would be open to reconsideration of the length of time the banner would be hung. A motion to display the banner until the third Sunday in June 2016 was made, seconded and passed unanimously.

Standing Committee members determined that Howard and/or his designee, and Mark and Toby for the Standing Committee, were authorized to speak for First Parish about the decision to display the banner.

Subgroup and Liaison reports

Subgroups:

- Congregational Outreach: Kate reported that the group is focusing on reactions to the BLM banner and also on denominational affairs. She also voiced a desire for a table or something that would help Standing Committee members be more visible at coffee hour.
- Nominating: Patty reported that no vacancies are expected on the Nominating Committee in 2016.
- Leadership Selection: Alec reported that an organizational meeting is scheduled for 12/14/2015, with interviews to begin in January.

Liaisons:

- RE Council: Howard reported that this group is fashioning a role for itself around Rev. Amy Freedman. Dave reported that there have been good discussions and that the group is meshing well and is really getting to work. Howard reported that curriculum review has been pushed out toward the spring.
- Denominational Affairs: Mark introduced David Ropeik, a member of the Massachusetts Bay District (MBD) board, who briefed the group on MBD activities. The MBD was originally intended to bridge gaps between Unitarian and Universalist congregations when the two groups merged. This has become less of an issue and now that the UUA is organized into regions, the need for the smaller districts has been called into question. There are currently 54 UU Churches in the Mass Bay District, and the MBD has about \$58,000 in a bank account along with two endowments that generate about \$80,000/year. Currently, the MBD board is leaning toward dissolution of the district in favor of support for the UU Regional structure, but there are other options. An important question would be the endowment and related income would be managed after dissolution. The SC encouraged David to perform outreach to the congregation on this issue. David will be supported by the SC congregational outreach subgroup and the Denominational Affairs committee.

Member Reports

Toby encouraged all SC members to consider submitting a testimonial for the new FP web site.

Finance Committee Report on Spending Priorities

Joined by Gib Metcalf, Finance Committee member, Tom reviewed a summary of the Finance Committee Report on Spending Priorities that resulted from information gathered from the Congregation over the last few months. After some discussion on the list of priorities (incorporated at the end of these minutes), and after confirming with Howard that Annual Pledge Campaign planning would not be negatively affected, it was decided that given the lateness of the hour, the conversation would be continued at the January 10, 2016 Standing Committee meeting. In the meantime, comments and thoughts are welcome, and may be directed to Howard or to Tom.

The meeting adjourned at 10:11 pm.

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**Feedback on November 2015 Congregational Conversations  
about the First Parish Budget and Financials**

**I. Areas of most need of financial investments:**

- A. Increasing the hours for Pastoral Care
- B. Eliminate RE fees – expand pledging among RE families
- C. Building maintenance
  - i. Steeple repainting and repair
  - ii. Railing on stairs to the pulpit (safety issue)
- D. Denominational support to the Region and UUA
  - i. Full dues to the UUA and District/Region
  - ii. Supporting regional activities among UUA churches
- E. Reinstate Membership Director as paid staff person
- F. Address the 7.5% of pledges for Social Action
- G. Lifespan/Adult Educational Programming
- H. Investments to generate more “green” initiatives, including funding an audit

**II. Where can we shift spending to address higher priority needs?**

- A. Review current benefits package for potential savings
- B. Ministerial intern funding could be redirected
- C. The portion of the SAC 7.5% budget given to social action grants could be raised instead through specially purposed plate donations (7.5% = \$67,659; less Staff = 36,141)
- D. Assess opportunities for more savings through green initiatives on plant & property

**III. Thoughts and reactions to the Stewardship campaign:**

- A. Provide better communication before the campaign on pledge expectations and considerations
- B. View that giving relates to our sense of community and trust
- C. Educate pledgers around fiscal year concept related to pledges made in Spring
- D. Examine inculcating automatic pledging (with auto increases) by donors
- E. Howard is very visible about his pledging commitment (good thing)
- F. Use inoffensive strategies to encourage higher pledging (not guilt, but encouragement)
- G. Appeal to lower donors to encourage them to “build the base” foundation of FP
- H. Consider using public radio fundraising strategies (“a pledge of \$X costs less than a daily Starbucks coffee...”); call regular donors “sustainers”
- I. Concern about the dinner for big donors; appears to devalue those who give time and talent to church.

**III. Other suggestions and ideas:**

- A. Explore/promote planned giving for estate planning
- B. Look at more fund raising events – like the auction
- C. Explore whether we’re maximizing the use of the building for additional income (including Milldam Children’s Center)
- D. Communicate budget where staff costs are shown separately not as part of programs

**Summary Impact on Budget for Desired Investments:**

1. Increase Pastoral Care Ministers hours from 30 to 40:		\$25,000 (+pay & benefits)
2. Reduce RE Fees:	All fees	\$20,050
	Exclude COA, Crafts Fair	\$13,650
3. Full denominational support		\$31,446 additional
4. Replace staffing costs to fully support 7 ½% of pledges for Social Action		\$31,518
5. Steeple Repair:		Unknown
6. Railing on stairs in pulpit		Unknown
7. Reinstate Membership Director (estimate, depends on hours)		\$35,000 (pay and benefits)
8. Lifespan/Adult Educational programming		To be determined
9. Investments to generate more “green” initiatives – Energy Audit est.		\$20,000
10. Replace one-time special grant made in 2015		\$60,000
11. Salary increases to staff (3% x \$690,033) (w/o adds for ben, taxes)		\$20,701

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<b>Total of Investment priorities (priorities 1 – 9)</b>	<b>\$163,014</b>
<b>Total of pledge replacement</b>	<b>\$ 60,000</b>
<b>Total of staff pay increases (includes 10% est additional)</b>	<b>\$ 22,701</b>

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**Total potential cost increases** **\$245,715**

**Total Pledges in 2015:** **\$902,124**

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Increase Amount</b>
5% increase in pledges =	\$947,230	(\$45,106)
10% increase in pledges =	\$992,336	(\$90,212)
15% increase in pledges =	\$1,037,443	(\$135,319)
27% increase in pledges (covers all items) =	\$1,147,839	(\$245,715)