

First Parish Church in Concord
Minutes of the Annual Meeting
June 12, 2016 11:30am

The meeting was called to order at 11:40am by Moderator John Stevens. Rev. Howard Dana opened the session with a prayer.

Article I: To hear and act upon the reports of the Senior Minister, the Standing Committee, the Trustees of Parish Donations, and other committee reports. Motion by Mark Russell Prior, Chair of the Standing Committee.

Senior Minister report: Howard observed that we seem to be at the end of a long, long waiting period and are about to move in a clearer direction. Examples of this include next years' reconstitution of the Senior High Youth Group, working with Rev. Amy Freedman. Additional donor development work is underway, using three years' good pledge result data, and we are closer to knowing what we can expect from our annual pledge campaign, as well as to creating other ways to give to First Parish. We are entering a period of serious focus on First Parish's attitudes about Social Action – what should the future look like? Plans include a two-year pilot period for some innovative Social Action ideas. The past year has included the installation of Black Lives Matter (BLM) banners, which generated a great deal of discussion and reflection. This coming year we will celebrate the 200th birthday of Henry David Thoreau. We will also be looking at the creation of a better plan to deal with long term maintenance issues (Doug Baker has an extensive list of project needs), some of which are complicated or costly, but the church will have to deal these issues sooner or later.

Standing Committee report: Mark Russell Prior reported on the many accomplishments of the past year, including the hiring of Reverend Freedman as our Minister of Religious Education (MRE), the formation and work of the membership committee, the social action board work, and the BLM banners and resulting discussion. Many congregants report positive energy in church services. The annual pledge campaign included a record number of stewards, and we had a successful annual auction. The Finance Committee created a thorough and deeply informative benchmarking study as well as proposed revisions to financial policies. We have a healthy balance sheet, with good reserves and no cash flow issues. Rev. Dana and Fifi Ball (our Director of Operations) budget conservatively, and we have paid off our loan from the Trustees. The use of available cash and one-time donations allowed us to hire Rev. Marion Visel as Minister for Pastoral Care, Rev. Freedman, and to give small raises for staff.

The Annual Pledge Campaign this year netted about \$60,000 less than last year, mostly due to fewer pledging households. We will need to reduce costs and eliminate unnecessary and not useful activities, but not all the burden can nor should fall on the already over-burdened staff. This is not a panic situation at all, but to remain financially healthy we must readjust.

Trustees of Parish Donations report: Tim Jacoby reported on the ongoing work of managing the portfolio of our \$3M pool of investments, as well as rental income from the Wright tavern and three cottages, that results in an annual contribution totaling around 10% of our annual budget. Next year's contribution will be around \$145,000. New actions in the coming year include a closer look at "green" investments, including the disposal of two options that did not meet our new investment criteria; the Trustee's plan is to come forward with more new investment strategies. We are developing a new prime

giving program. The most exciting news is that an exploratory committee last year, including John Boynton and Mel Bernstein, worked on what has resulted in a 3-year lease arrangement at the Wright Tavern with the Concord Museum for some of the Museum's programming. The Tavern will be open to the public at least twice a year, and hopefully the lease will result in a long-term collaboration with the Museum to increase public access to the Tavern, including the securing of grants for repairs and restoration work on this marvelous and historic asset.

Mel briefly described his work this past year around the Wright Tavern, which came into the possession of First Parish in 1882 in order to prevent further deterioration of the building. At that time, Mr. Ruben Rice gave half of the bequest, and Judge Hoar gave a deeded gift that it be accepted at the next annual meeting (1883), so a total of 130 years of management are behind us. In 1961, the US Secretary of the Interior declared the Wright Tavern an important historic site (National Historical Landmark). The new arrangement with the Concord Museum will allow for three important things: first, around 10,000 children annually will learn first-hand about the Tavern's history; second, the development of a long term strategic plan in collaboration with the Museum; and third, public access will be broadened and we will be able to reach for new levels of enhancement, improvement and enrichment.

There was a question about the Carbon 200 divestment, and Tim clarified that our former investment list contained two securities that were on the Carbon 200 list and have been reassigned. Several parishioners raised concerns about our continued access to the Wright Tavern, including insurance, parking and schedule issues. Tim reported that the Museum will be paying insurance and maintenance costs, that there will be no use by the Museum on Sunday mornings, and no Museum employee parking on church property. Good communication lines exist between the Museum and First Parish.

Environmental Leadership team report: Brad Hubbard-Nelson reported on activities around climate justice work, inspired by Tim DeChristopher's work in Utah around issues of access to and proper use of public lands. Peter Lowitt offered that the ELT's climate justice work is central to our 7th principle, which this past year created a menu of four possible tracks: education (inspired by the BLM movement); household sustainability (Bob Andrews reported on efforts around consumerism, thoughtless growth, and behavioral changes); legislative action (including the possible adoption of a carbon pricing plan); and a direct action subcommittee (how to plant our feet and increase activism around the 7th principle). The ELT seeks much more involvement and engagement with the congregation in the coming years.

Article II: To choose all Parish officers for the ensuing year.

A motion was made by Alane Wallis, who moved that we nominate the following candidates for the terms noted:

SC member at large

John Lowe, for a three-year term
Kate Svrcek, for a three-year term

Officers

Peter Nobile, Clerk, for a one-year term
Tom Wilson, Treasurer, for a one-year term
John Stevens, Moderator, for a one-year term

The motion was seconded, and was approved unanimously.

A motion was made by Tim Jacoby, Trustees, to nominate Victoria Rizzi to the Trustees of Parish Donations for a 5-yr term. The motion was seconded and was approved unanimously.

Tim recognized the dedicated work of Dick Waters, who has served two 5-year terms on the Trustees and is stepping down. Mark recognized Alec Walker and Kate Crosby, who have each served two three-year terms on the Standing Committee, serving along four different ministers in six years, and through their labor and passion helping the Standing Committee develop a deeper sense of purpose and mission.

Article III: To ratify the 2017 UU General Assembly (GA) delegate slate.

A motion was made by Paula Vandever, of the Denominational Affairs Committee, to nominate a slate of delegates.

The list of delegates to this year's GA is as follows: Darien Smith, Sara Ballard, Lillian Anderson, Jim Sherblom, Doug Hardy, Jim Snyder-Grant, Dana Snyder-Grant, Beth Norton, and Lora Venesy (off site). Rev. Dana will be an ex officio delegate.

The motion was seconded and approved unanimously.

Article IV: To raise money for all parochial purposes, including the Budget for Fiscal Year 2016-2017: A motion to this effect was made by Treasurer Tom Wilson.

Tom thanked Annual Campaign volunteers and stewards for a successful campaign. Tom's summary of the campaign included the following observations: our overall goal fell short by about \$57,000. There were a number of pledge increases, some new pledges, some unchanged, some decreased, and a few households did that not pledge at all. The median pledge was \$1,050, and the average pledge was \$2,345. Tom reminded us that it costs about \$2,227 per household to run First Parish. Tom wants people to feel good about their pledge, and to make an informed judgement about how much and why they are pledging.

Tom reported on the implications of this years proposed budget, which includes the following:

- 1) Elimination of RE program fees
- 2) A paid sabbatical for Beth Norton
- 3) No salary increases this coming year
- 4) No increase of dues to the UUA
- 5) No funds set aside for long term maintenance
- 6) Provision of health care for next year's Ministerial Intern

Tom reviewed expected revenue and proposed expenses, for a total proposed FY2016-17 budget of \$1,189,120. Pledge results are consistent over the past 5 years, indicating in Tom's opinion that we may have reached a stable threshold of sorts. In order to live within our means, we will have to cut services, programs, or staff – either to raise the bridge or lower the water. This year's budget includes some adjustments and one-time expenditures, as noted above. Tom reviewed the budget in detail, illustrating specific changes to the budget and ratio of expenditures on people vs plant operations and other expenditures. Questions for Tom included:

- Jim Reynolds asked about number of pledging units, which Tom reported was 414 vs 439 last year.

- Richard Lowitt asked about putting money aside for a “rainy day” fund. Tom offered that we have set up a \$100,000 line of credit arrangement with the Trustees, as well as a 10% reserve set aside for unexpected overages.
- A parishioner asked about the total number of households in the congregation, and Fifi reported a total count of 692 members, and 421 households. The total number fluctuates because people move on and the books are always in the process of being “cleaned up.” After 2 years of not pledging, a household is put on “inactive” status.
- A parishioner asked: why no RE fees? Howard pointed out that we have been an outlier – that other churches do NOT charge RE fees, and the we also have concluded that families should feel no extra burden. We hope the commitment to these families may increase their commitment to the church.
- A member asked about staff raises: do raises include any Cost Of Living Adjustment (COLA) increases? Tom pointed out that because our budget includes NO raises, there is the danger of an actual hidden decrease in salary. Another member expressed sadness at why we can’t meet COLA and other staff raises.
- David Ropeik asked about what it looks like from a UUA perspective based on who pledges and what they pledge. Howard reported that we are typical across the UUA; the tricky part is that the larger we get the more complex our staff and programming requirements become, and we generally become less flexible. Tom reminded us that the Fin Com study confirmed that we are not an outlier; rather that in become ways our eyes are larger than our stomachs. The UUA sizing criterion 500-750 members designates us a type “Large 1” congregation.
- Erik Van Loon commented that we are only paying about 50% of UUA dues – how typical is that? Howard reported that among other large UU congregations, we are more generous than most. Many large UU churches tend to spend money for dues on staff, which creates resentment among smaller congregations who pay their dues. FP is somewhere in the middle of the fair-share pack.
- Toby Smith-Ropeik pointed out one reason the budget is so tight is that we have made an effort in the past 10 years to bring our staff payments to at least the mid-point of suggested UUA salary levels.
- Tony Rodruigez asked about why so many pledges have remained flat or decreased. Tom reported no one clear cause or indication.
- Patrick Everett asked why all members – especially those who do not pledge at all – are not required to pay at least a token pledge. Val Holt suggested that there might be more frequent reminders about pledges and how programs and services are paid for, and Tom asked for other suggestions.
- Brooke Stevens asked for an historical perspective on pledges; Howard reported that this church peaked in 2008, both in terms of RE registration and budget. Factors include: the large building project in 2008 which coincided with a general economic downturn, followed by Gary’s retirement, Jenny’s departure, and the inclusion of interim ministers. Numbers are sliding also in part due to a generally declining commitment to church attendance, especially among younger generations.
- Rev. Freedman spoke eloquently about being grateful to be part of the First Parish family.

Toms’ motion to approve the proposed FY2016-17 budget of \$1,189,120 was seconded and approved unanimously.

Article V: To act upon any other business that may come before the meeting.

Rebecca Curzon announced the upcoming 9/11 to 9/18 dedication of our new organ, including a recital on 9/16, a dinner on 9/7 and an opening concert on 9/18.

The meeting adjourned at 1:11 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Peter Nobile, clerk pro tem