

First Parish Church in Concord
Minutes of the Annual Meeting
June 10, 2018 11:30am

The meeting was called to order at 11:35 AM by Moderator Kristin Moore. Kristin was sworn in as Moderator by Peter Nobile, serving as Clerk. Rev. Howard Dana opened the meeting 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. A motion to this effect was made by Kristin Haddad, Chair of the Standing Committee (SC).

Senior Minister report: Rev. Howard Dana highlighted significant activities at First Parish this year, most significantly the Year for Reflection and Visioning, the Beloved Conversations process, and the rethinking we have done about Social Action funding. Howard commended the work of the Standing Committee and noted how as a Congregation we are moving from healing and recovery to more mission-focused work, and that First Parish is effectively at a “hinge point.” Suzanne Lowe thanked Rev. Howard Dana for his work on behalf of the congregation, especially regarding the increase of new members.

Standing Committee report: Kristin Haddad summarized the Standing Committee’s work, especially the Year for Reflection and Visioning that paints an optimistic and hopeful picture of our church. As a result of that work, three themes were identified: Building connected community, changing who we are (diversifying), and reaching outward. These themes will likely evolve into goals for the coming year. The SC continues to work on its 2-year goals. Lorie Van Loon asked about how the SC, the ministers and the staff work together, and Kristin reviewed the basics of our Collaborative Leadership governance model, including policy development, budgeting and review of initiatives.

Trustees of Parish Donations report: Phillip vanderWilden reviewed the responsibilities of the Trustees, and thanked Tim Jacoby for his 8 years of service to the Trustees. The Trustees will be supporting the church, via earnings on our Legacy Investment Fund and property income, with a donation of \$141,100.00 this coming fiscal year. The investment fund currently stands at about \$3.2 million total, and the investment strategy has been changed to focus on more socially responsible (e.g. including fossil-fuel free) vehicles, known as SRI (Socially Responsible Index) funds. Phillip reviewed the Legacy Giving Fund and recent property management activities. The Wright Tavern is fully rented and is a good income producer.

Mel Bernstein spoke about the exceptional value and history of the Wright Tavern, to both First Parish and to the United States as a whole. Last week was the second anniversary of the historic agreement between First Parish and the Concord Museum, which has opened the Tavern more broadly to the public and has increased efforts to restore and preserve the building. About 14,000 children and teachers engaged in hands on learning events about the American Revolution at the Tavern this past year. The Concord Museum and the Trustees will be developing a long term sustainable plan for the Tavern this coming year. First Parish looks forward to the fruits of these and other collaborations in and around the Tavern.

Racial Justice Action Group: CC King, Margie King Saphier and Wendy Holt highlighted activities over the past year, including the Race Conversations Group’s programs around addressing systemic racism.

The core group met monthly and engaged in racial justice campaign activities and has renamed itself the Racial Justice Action Group (RJAG). CC reviewed the work done by Howard and the ministerial staff and reviewed First Parish's part in fast developing suburban racial justice efforts. First Parish continues to participate in the Beloved Conversations program, we participated in large numbers in the Mother's Day Walk for Peace in Boston, and we are looking ahead to work on other racial justice efforts including the Poor People's Campaign. Finally, the RJAG is looking ahead to working more closely with the Louis D. Brown Peace Institute. CC thanked all who have been involved in these efforts.

Article II: To choose all Parish officers for the ensuing year. A motion was made by Eric Moore who moved that we nominate the following candidates for the terms noted:

SC member at large

Valerie Vallancourt, Standing Committee Member-at-Large, for a 3-year term
Jeff Brainerd, Standing Committee Member-at-Large, for a 3-year term
Kristin Haddad, Standing Committee Member-at-Large, for a second 3-year term

Officers

Michelle Fortier, Treasurer, for a one-year term
Kristin Moore, Moderator, for a one-year term
Peter Nobile, Clerk, for a one-year term

The motion was seconded and was approved unanimously.

A motion was made by Phillip vanderWilden, Trustee, to nominate Roslyn Romberg to the Trustees of Parish Donations for a 5-year term. The motion was seconded and was approved unanimously.

A motion was made by Kate Svercek who moved that we nominate the following candidates for the Nominating Committee for the terms noted:

Darien Smith, Nominating Committee, for a 3-year term
Jan Goddard Taylor, for a second 3-year term
Eric Moore, for a second 3-year term

Kate briefed the meeting regarding changes to the size and structure of the Nominating Committee. The motion was seconded and was approved unanimously.

Eric expressed gratitude to Marilyn Lowitt and Doug Hardy for their exemplary service on the Nominating Committee. Kristin thanked Patty Popov for her dedication and long service to the SC.

Article III: To ratify the 2017 UU General Assembly (GA) delegate slate. A motion was made by Rev. Dr. Jim Sherblom to nominate a slate of delegates.

The list of delegates travelling to this year's GA is as follows:

Jim Sherblom
Lillian Anderson

Elizabeth Norton
Sara Ballard
Jo von Rue
Darien Smith
Alice Van Deusen
Fred Van Deusen

Off-site delegates include:

John Lowe
Dave Elwood
Jan Power
Peter Nobile
Toby Smith Ropeik
Dana Snyder Grant

The motion was seconded and approved unanimously.

Article IV: John Lowe motioned as follows: the we replace the policy of reserving 7.5% of annual pledge receipts for Social Action with the following policy: “Annual Budgeting will reflect the importance of the pillars of our ministry: Music, Pastoral Care, Religious Education, Social Action, and Worship. Budgeting priorities will align with the First Parish in Concord mission statement.” The motion was seconded.

John reviewed the thinking behind this revised policy, emphasizing that Social Action is a fundamental pillar at First Parish. John reviewed work done by the SC and the congregation over the past two years that has resulted in this revised policy which is fundamentally aimed at good governance and helps us more comprehensively continue our 50-year commitment to Social Action giving. John summarized by pointing out that that this new policy is mission consistent, strengthens our governance, and broadens and deepens our commitment to social justice organizations.

Eric Van Loon proposed an amendment to the end of the motion as follows: “...and the Social Action budget shall include 3% of Pledge Receipts for grants to external organizations that work to achieve the seven UU Principals (allocation process to be determined by the Standing Committee.)” Eric expanded on the intent of his amendment, and a discussion ensued. Phil Villiers supported the amendment, pointing out that the amount of SA spending has fluctuated over time and that a minimum commitment is important. Ted Bayne spoke about the flexible hybrid model of giving that he and the rest of the Social Action Community (SAC) Board are committed to, and that the actual percentage is less relevant than the solidarity of the congregation standing behind giving in the first place. Loretta Ho Sherblom asked a clarifying question about the Share-The-Plate model, which Fifi and Michelle explained in relation to the overall budget. Alec Walker spoke against the amendment, pointing out that good governance policy should trust the decision-making process of the SC and leadership team. Lillian Anderson asked how we can be sure an appropriate amount of money will go out into the community, and Michelle clarified that the new policy will allow us to experiment with new ideas and not be bound by limits. Tom Wilson pointed out that the granting process is a constraining vehicle for investing in social action, and that any

fixed allocation will continue to limit flexibility as to what is internal vs external social action spending. Debate was closed by a more than 2/3 vote. The question was called on the amendment, which failed by a simple majority vote. A motion was made to call the question on the main motion, which passed by more than 2/3 vote. The main motion then passed by a simple majority vote.

Article V: Michelle Fortier moved that we raise money for all Parochial Purposes, including the Budget for 2018-19. The motion was seconded.

Michelle reviewed details of the annual budgeting process and reviewed the proposed 2018-19 budget. For the first time since 2005 we have exceeded \$1m in pledges, which is noteworthy news. Increased staff compensation, full UUA dues contribution and better care for our facilities were the three main fiscal priorities identified by the congregation through various feedback sessions and meetings over the past year. Annual pledges increased this past year by an average of 14%, and while there are fewer pledging households the median pledge has increased. Michelle reviewed our sources of income and spending categories. Michelle then thanked the Finance Committee and answered several questions about the budget.

Mailee Houlihan asked Howard what his thinking is on spending priorities, especially regarding Social Action. Howard thinks First Parish could work toward even higher levels of Social Action funding and staff support, which this past year included several initiatives indicating growth in Social Action funding and engagement. Bob Andrews expressed concern about future social action spending. CC King expressed concern about Social Action contributions to charities and what we might lose by not emphasizing grants. Howard pointed out that last year \$238,000 went out of First Parish in support of Social Action work. Dian Pekin also expressed concerns about the future amount of Social Action spending.

The motion was passed with a majority vote.

Article VI: Peter Lowitt moved that First Parish adopt a Climate Justice Resolution included in the meeting handouts. The motion was seconded.

Kate Crosby reviewed the basics of the resolution, pointing out the importance of “de-carbonizing” our economy and how First Parish is working with other UU Congregations on climate justice issues. Kate urged the meeting to consider how reducing the use of fossil fuels is essential to avoid the catastrophic effects of climate change. Peter outlined a future focusing on renewable energy sources, not tied in to further fossil fuel infrastructure investments. Peter also explained language in the motion having to do with civil disobedience, tying such activities to the civil disobedience work of luminaries including Henry David Thoreau, MK Gandhi and Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Joyce Carol Higgs explained the effects of mountaintop mining that led her to train in nonviolent civil disobedience, which she put into action in a protest against the West Roxbury Lateral pipeline this past year.

Finally, Peter explained risk mitigation research that the Environmental Leadership Team (ELT) has done in anticipation of possible consequences of acting against climate change, which the ELT further defines as an existential threat to life on earth. Dian Pekin spoke in support of the motion but was opposed to the nonviolent civil disobedience clause which she thinks places all members of First Parish at possible legal

risk. Eric Van Loon noted that personal or congregational liability is unlikely and should not be a major consideration factor in whether to adopt the measure. Kristin Haddad noted that the SC has reviewed this resolution but has taken no action on it. Bruce Blumberg spoke in support of the motion, point out that First Parish can speak as a moral institution. Gib Metcalf asked some clarifying questions about how specific the resolution is regarding infrastructure and technology, and how broadly civil disobedience is defined. Jim Snyder Grant spoke in favor of the motion and made a friendly amendment to the main motion as follows: item no. 3 in the resolution shall conclude with: “...including a comprehensive price on carbon dioxide emissions associated with fossil fuel as consumed in the Commonwealth.”

A vote was called, and the amendment passed by a 2/3 majority.

Bob Andrews spoke in favor of the main motion, emphasizing the non-violent nature of any proposed civil disobedience. A vote on the main motion then passed by a majority vote.

Article VII: David Elwood moved that we affirm the current mission statement as an accurate source of guidance for the Standing Committee. A yes vote affirmed the current mission statement, and a no vote will advise the standing committee to work on revising the mission statement in FY2019. The motion was seconded, and passed with a majority yes vote.

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

There was no other business.

A motion was made to dissolve the Annual Meeting; that motion was seconded and approved, and the meeting adjourned at 2:03 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Peter Nobile, clerk