

First Parish in Concord
Governing Board Meeting Minutes

January 14, 2025, 7-9pm

Meeting by Zoom

All members present

| | | |
|-----------------|------------------------|---|
| Fifi Ball | Director of Operations | Y |
| Lisa Bennett | Governing Board Member | Y |
| Kimma Brainerd | Clerk | Y |
| Neil Brock | Governing Board Member | Y |
| Jennifer Izzo | Governing Board Member | Y |
| C.C. King | Governing Board Member | Y |
| Gib Metcalf | Chair | Y |
| Kristin Moore | Governing Board Member | Y |
| Jim Reynolds | Governing Board Member | Y |
| Leah Russell | Treasurer | Y |
| Susan See | Governing Board Member | Y |
| Virginia Taylor | Governing Board Member | Y |

Opening Words

C.C. King offered opening words.

→ **ACTION ITEM**: It was requested that **C.C.** share the quotes/authors with the group.

Check-in

Board members shared 30-second stories that illustrated the Governing Board operating at its best.

Administrative Actions

- December Meeting Minutes (Meeting Agenda, Appendix II)
The following edit to December Meeting Minutes was proposed and considered:
“Bonuses were given to all salaried staff, prorated (%) based on their FTE status.”
→ **VOTED**: Amended meeting minutes from December 10, 2024, unanimously approved.
→ **ACTION ITEM**: **Kimma** to edit last month’s minutes incorporating this change, and post.
- Chair and Vice Chair Selection Procedures
Chair and Vice Chair Selection Procedures were developed and discussed previously (Meeting Agenda, Appendix II), and now up for a vote.
→ **VOTED**: Chair and Vice Chair Selection Procedures, unanimously approved.

Operations Report (Fifi Ball)

- Fifi sent around the **financials**. Fifi reported that we're going to save a lot of money this year by being under-staffed, and end up with a positive bottom-line despite some unexpected expenses that were unbudgeted (benefits, legal fees, etc.).
- Gib asked if there is anything that will require a vote next meeting regarding adjustments to the budget. Fifi: as of December 31 we're half-way through the year and **in good shape**. Per policy, → **NOTED**: Fifi will bring it to the Governing Board when we are \$2,000 over on any budget line.
- Leah pointed out that our **insurance** is going up. Fifi confirmed, and pointed out that our trustees give back about a third to First Parish, so it ends up at net zero, or close to it.
- Fifi has not yet transferred money from savings to the Fidelity account.
→ **ACTION ITEM**: Leah offered to help Fifi when she is ready.
- Fifi asked for feedback on the **spreadsheet** she sent. Gib and Leah said the red/green highlights and summary were helpful.
- Jennifer met with Kristin Haddad regarding the upcoming **ministerial installation**, the expenses for which are not on the budget (an oversight, as this is an expected expense in the first year of a settled ministry). Jennifer asked for guidance on how to incorporate these expenses. Gib says that a budget would be helpful and suggests that a small group work to outline the expenses. Current committee is C.C. King, Kristin Haddad, Ellen Whitney.
→ **ACTION ITEM**: Leah to be a point-person with Jennifer, Fifi and the committee as they plan expenses for the event.
- Susan raises the concern that it would be helpful for the Governing Board to have a chart or schedule for line **items that are missing from the budget** either because they're typically forgotten, or don't necessarily occur every year. Jim suggests including a 3% contingency for "stuff happens," to which Gib replies that the sustainability group can take that under advisement, and also to be careful to distinguish future expenses that we *know* are going to happen vs. things that we don't know will happen (completely unexpected).
→ **ACTION ITEM**: Gib suggests that the **financial group** (Leah, Jim, Neil), working with Fifi, could work on codifying the oft-missed or forgotten line items. (Examples: sabbatical, installation, etc.)

- **Housing Allowance**

Fifi proposes housing allowances for Amy Freedman (\$46,296), and Rev. Jennifer Johnson (\$54,000). Ministers are allowed to designate part of their housing as salary for tax purposes.

→ **V O T E D** : Housing allowances for Jennifer and Amy are both unanimously approved.

→ **N O T E D**: Governing Board chair (Gib) would like to know *before* meeting if there's going to be something to vote upon. Please give notice to Chair prior to meeting, so it may be included on agenda.

- **Facilities Manager Search**

Fifi reports that there have been about 30 applicants for the facilities manager position, 7 candidates in the pipeline. Offered salary \$70-\$75k which is mid-range (raised from \$60-\$65k, too low). Process: first (20min) zoom interview, then tour, then in-person interview. Fifi would like to make an offer within the next 2 weeks. Jennifer feels optimistic about that timeframe.

Minister's Report & Items (Rev. Jennifer Johnson)

- **Successes and Highlights**

- **5 new members** signed The Book.
- Welcoming and Membership is going to offer a **monthly open-book for signing**.
- Christmas Eve services had attendance of over **700 people**, went smoothly.
- Worship attendance is continuing to rise, generally at or over 300 (including online), and energy is great.
- Especially wonderful music in December (the Conchords, Lincoln Ringers, the orchestra, wonderful choir performances); and **winter holiday season celebrations** were festive and meaningful including caroler's, Vespers Service, Holiday Craft Workshop. All despite being short-staffed.
- **Church is "humming,"** overall success with wonderful programming, spiritual deepening, connecting. Vital and vibrant spiritual community. Shared responsibility: lay leaders, members, staff are making it happen, filling in the gaps (sometimes without it being noticed). This past Sunday was an example of what it means to be a vital, vibrant spiritual community.

- **Challenge: staff vacancies.** There are a lot of holes to fill, a lot of stretching. The staff significantly feels the vacancies, feeling stretched, stressful. Recent memorial service was challenging, although it went well.
- Jennifer was impressed with the way the disruptive person was handled... a strong expression of **healthy leadership**.
- A concern: we need **robust infrastructure around Welcoming**, offering entry points; there are still a lot of new people coming in.
- On the horizon: **Concord250**.
 - **The New York Times** piece on [52 Places to Go in 2025](#) includes Concord and Lexington.

- Jennifer will take the lead on **worship services** and the logistical needs, with the staff. We're in good shape for Easter worship. Exploring parking attendants as well as Shuttle. Note, also that week: Holy Week, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Passover.
- Gib asked about the role of the Concord250 Committee in preparing us for this big event, and whether that is working.
- Will be connecting again with **Concord250 Committee** for support. Will be exploring the idea of opening up for tours. Makes sense for **Reclaim Our Democracy** group to take the lead (on behalf of First Parish) on generating ideas for programming, because of the democracy connection as it relates to our history and mission. Jennifer is thinking about public relations and how we might want to share our history.
- We will be good partners with Wright Tavern, as well.
- Might we want to do some kind of **food fundraising**? Food trucks? The group that led the pancake breakfast will be meeting soon.
- Jennifer will be attending Concord250 meeting for clergy.
- **Installation ceremony** coming up.
 - Jennifer is excited about **Shana Lynngood** as preacher for this service, who has been an incredible mentor and stellar minister. Traveling from a distance.
 - **Sofia Betancourt**, President of the United Universalist Association, will bring greetings from the UUA. She spoke highly of the First Parish in Concord congregation from her time here last spring.
 - **Schedule**: Friday night informal meal for lay leaders and out-of-town clergy (like Sofia). Saturday — installation at 2 in the afternoon for an hour and a half. Followed by lightly-catered reception.
 - Will be a nice moment for us to celebrate. An installation feels a lot like an ordination, but it's about shared ministry. It's about us!
- We have been approached by John Gibbons and the UUA through their partner church program. A Kolozsvar **choral group** (UU High School) has put us on their itinerary as part of their U.S. tour, for April 27, 2024 (right after the Concord250!). Jennifer, Beth, Lillian and Tim met with Zsolt Elekes, one of the ministers there. We'll do some kind of potluck the night before, and these 40 high school students will perform at worship.
- It's a very very busy spring!
- Hopefully we'll hire **2 positions** by then. We're ready to interview.
 - **Minister for Congregational Care**. Gib asked if the position is advertised yet. Jennifer says it has been advertised for a while, however the record is not available as it is still pending approval by the UUA. Expected by Thursday, if not sooner. Then, we'll receive notice of interested parties. Ready to schedule the interviews.
 - The transitions office reported that 25 ministers applied for 13 settled ministries. Feeling optimistic. Jennifer feels that ours will be a desired position.

Finance Group Items (Leah Russell, Jim Reynolds, Neil Brock)

- **Fundraising Policy** (Jim Reynolds). The new policy items — 5.0 Financial Policies (2024) — were circulated and discussed. These proposed policy items belong in Section 5, numbers 22-26. Number 22 contains a non-substantive change (referring to section 8 for the definition of a First Parish group), while the others are additions/new.
 - **Policy 23c** — There was robust discussion on whether to include, modify or strike 23c: “These policies do not apply to capital fund-raising projects, which are handled separately from operating activities.” Feedback will be considered for revision.
 - **Policy 24**. Gib proposed a small edit (strike-through): Fund-raising must be sponsored by an organized group at First Parish (see 8.0 Policy on Congregational Groups) rather than by individuals ~~with their own projects~~.
 - Susan asks: what is an “organized group.” Jim highlights an important concern: How do we make sure we don’t inadvertently make it harder to do the good work that we’re doing?
 - Susan asks: are all of our groups required to submit annual reports? Fifi clarifies process/policy: if you want to reup your charter, you need to submit an annual report. You need 5 members, the chair is a member, not a friend. Describe what you’ve done during the year. If a group is going to go dormant – one of the ways we know about that is if they do not submit an annual report. That’s part of the policy.
 - **Policy 26** includes the break-downs that Jennifer recommended. Jennifer feels the lower clip amounts are more democratic: It gives people with less access to money, a say in the resources of the congregation; it gives people a voice. Gib: You could add language to 26 that these limits will be adjusted for inflation using the CPI index... something about an inflation adjustment, so that they’re real and not nominal.
 - **Recurring events**. Gib raised a question about the approval process around recurring events / on-going events. Financial group is asked to consider the process for recurring events.
 - **Use of excess money for a fund-raising effort that exceeds its goals**. Gib asks for clarification on how excess money is used. Gib points out: We’re approving not only the fundraising, but also the expenditures regarding that fundraising. Discussion around how to handle the situation of a group that raises more than they set out to raise. How to use that surplus? Financial group will give this some more consideration, perhaps including a re-approval process.
 - **Governing Board feedback and next steps** on new policy points. Gib says we have the bones of a good policy here. Overall Jennifer appreciates the policy and the guidance. A couple of concerns have been raised. Financial group can consider the discussion points, and finalize it next meeting.

- Clarification about the intent in setting policies: we are setting up the guardrails now for hypothetical scenarios that we could imagine happening in the future. We imagine these in an effort to be comprehensive, thoughtful and careful.

→ **ACTION ITEM: Finance group** (Leah, Jim, Neil) will think about the issues and concerns raised and come back to the Governing Board at next meeting with some thoughtful revisions to policy. Specific items to be addressed include:

- 23c strike or re-word
- 24 strike-through edit to incorporate
- Process for annual/recurring groups
- Add an inflation adjustment (real rather nominal amounts) to 26
- How to spend money from an over-raise

- **Annual Pledge Campaign update** (Leah Russell)

Instead of Sustainers event, we will be doing a community-wide event, in celebration (“Celebrating our Time, Talent and Treasure”). March 1st. Childcare, food, drinks, fun. Gib and Jennifer will speak to the importance of pledging, but it is not a pledge event, and we will not be soliciting pledges. Gathering testimonials and putting together a communication plan.

→ **NOTED: GB members** to put March 1st on their calendars for this event.

Emeritus Policy

- An inquiry came to the Governing Board from Elizabeth Norton asking to consider conferring Emeritus status upon Eric Huenneke, former organist at First Parish in Concord.
- The question at hand: What is our policy for Emeritus status for non-ministers?
- Gib asks, can a small group consider this question, do some research and come back to the Governing Board to lead a discussion on this topic? Let’s create a policy first, then talk about individuals. And, let’s think more broadly than music. Let’s think holistically about this.
 - Should we have an Emeritus status?
 - What is the criteria?
 - Who should confer it? (congregation?)
 - Rights, privileges?

→ **ACTION ITEM: Kimma** Brainerd, **Kristin** Moore and **Susan** See volunteered to form a small group to consider developing an Emeritus Policy — to do research and come back to the Governing Board (giving notice when ready) for discussion.

→ **ACTION ITEM:** Gib will follow-up with Beth and let her know that we’re taking up the question.

Governing Board Operations

- **Nominating Committee.** Gib urges Governing Board members to start thinking about what kind of characteristics that we'd like to see in 2 replacements for Governing Board members that will be stepping down in June.
→ **ACTION ITEM:** Gib proposes to invite the Nominating Committee to come speak to us at our next meeting in February.
→ **NOTED:** **Governing Board members** to give some thought to characteristics that we'd like to communicate with the Nominating Committee.
- **Greeter Position.** Jennifer asks: What is our understanding of the Governing Board greeter role, and how is it functioning? Is this working? Can it be more functional and effective? Jim/Susan gave some history on how this role came to be and how it has shifted over time. There was some discussion about the possibility of the greeter doing the announcements from the pulpit in services (helps with visibility and connection, makes us more approachable, and demonstrates shared ministry). Issue raised: some may not be comfortable with that responsibility, to which it was proposed that not every member need do it. Leah pointed out, as a reminder, the greeters also serve the role of counting money.
→ **ACTION ITEM:** Jennifer will think through this Greeter role and how we may move forward from here.

Announcement by C.C.: Two Story theater coming back January 30. If anyone can help out to show up early or bring cookies, please be in touch with C.C. who will send an email out to the group.

Meeting adjourned at 9pm.

ACTION ITEMS:

- **C.C.** to share the quotes/authors with the group.
- **Kimma** to edit last month's minutes (bonuses based on % FTE), and post.
- **Leah** offered to help Fifi when she is ready.
- **Leah** to be a point-person with Jennifer, Fifi and the committee as they plan expenses for the ministerial installation event.
- **Financial group (Leah, Jim, Neil)**, with **Fifi**, to work on codifying the oft-missed/forgotten budget line items, such as sabbatical, installation, etc.
- **Finance group (Leah, Jim, Neil)** to consider issues and concerns raised and come back to the Governing Board at next meeting with thoughtful revisions to policy (specifically 23c, 24, 26 and process for recurring groups, and dealing with surplus money raised).
- **Kimma/Kristin/Susan** to research Emeritus Policy and report back to the Board when ready.
- **Gib** to follow-up with Beth to let her know that we're taking up the Emeritus question.
- **Gib** to invite the Nominating Committee to come speak to us at our next meeting in February.
- **Jennifer** will consider the Greeter role and how we may move forward from here.

VOTED:

- Amended **Meeting Minutes** from December 10, 2024, unanimously approved.
- **Chair and Vice Chair Selection Procedures**, unanimously approved.
- **Housing allowances** for Rev. Jennifer Johnson (\$54,000) and Amy Freedman (\$46,296), unanimously approved.

NOTED:

- **Fifi** will bring to the Governing Board for a vote when we are \$2,000 over on any budget line, as per policy.
- Notify Governing Board Chair (Gib) of an **anticipated vote** prior to meeting.
- **GB members** to put March 1st on their calendars for Celebrating Time/Talent/Treasure.
- **GB members** to give some thought to desired characteristics to share with Nom Com.

NEXT MEETING:

(Second Tuesday of the month, 7pm)

Tuesday, February 11, 7-9pm
Brooks Room at First Parish in Concord
