

First Parish in Concord
Governing Board Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, March 11, 2025, 7-9pm

Meeting at First Parish, Brooks room

All but 3 members present in person

Fifi Ball	Director of Operations	Y
Lisa Bennett	Governing Board Member	R
Kimma Brainerd	Clerk	Y
Neil Brock	Governing Board Member	Y
Jennifer Izzo	Governing Board Member	Y
C.C. King	Governing Board Member	R
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	R
Virginia Taylor	Governing Board Member	Y
Rev. Jennifer Johnson	Lead Minister	Y

R = Remotely, by zoom

Opening Words

Jim Reynolds offered a poem for the Governing Board to contemplate.

Check-in

Board members shared reflections regarding a line in our Covenant:

“We nurture belonging across generations.”

Administrative Actions

- **February Meeting Minutes** (Meeting Agenda, Appendix II)
→ **VOTED**: **February 2025 meeting minutes**, unanimously approved.
- **Fundraising Policy** (Meeting Agenda, Appendix II)
→ **VOTED**: **Fundraising policy**, unanimously approved.

Operations Report (Fifi Ball)

- Not much change from December. Quiet month. All is good.
- An unexpected expense: plumbing work in the men's room (~\$3k).
- As of today, we have **159 pledgers and \$508,035 in pledges**. Very good by this date. A lot of energetic people. Just yesterday 10-15 pledges in one day.
- **New Facilities Manager Nigel Wonson** started work. He's integrating quickly, introducing himself to staff, etc. Jennifer highlighted his warm professionalism. He'll be at a meet n' greet on Sunday's coffee hour, and will be called out in Sunday service. He works Monday-Friday 8-4.

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

- Keeping busy with the **pledge campaign**, as well as preparing for **Concord250, Easter**, upcoming **Minister Installation, Pride**.
- **The Minister for Congregational Care** search continues.
- A lot of loss and illness in the community; **pastoral needs are high right now**.
- **Elizabeth Ide** is back a little bit more, and Rev. Jennifer is hoping she'll be able to take on more memorial services to help.
- **Intergenerational opportunities**. Program staff asked themselves, "What can we do now?"
 - **Joy Jam**, dinner provided, games, music, singing, for all ages. Share a meal and play together. Friday, March 21st and Friday, May 9th.
→ **NOTED: Governing Board members** to mark their calendars with **Joy Jam** dates of Fridays March 21st and May 9th at 6-8:30pm in Parish Hall.
 - **Parent Circle**, with lunch. Gathering with parents.
- Gib noted that the new **program booklet** is really great. Rev. Jennifer highlighted the hard work of the staff, especially Catherine.
- Rev. Jennifer shared learnings from **Parent Circle meetings**.
→ **ACTION ITEM: Rev. Jennifer** will share notes from the Parent Circle meetings with the Strategic Planning group.
 - Findings from parent groups, but also from research looking at patterns in religious communities everywhere shows that **families with young children are in need of care**.
 - Response to the need: The dinner is specifically *not* potluck. We will provide a meal and make it easy.
 - Struggle around **volunteerism**. Parents want to rest and be in the sanctuary. There *are* some people volunteering, but also many are stretched.
 - Jim asks if those that no longer have kids at home could help? Yes, *and* that group has also volunteered a lot.
 - Once or twice across a year works better than an 8-week stint for parents.
 - That leaves Amy and Dawn to plan the whole year, and also to quickly get parents up to speed on each Sunday.

- New parent volunteers are coordinating **teen service** on Sundays.
- Just getting to church feels like an accomplishment.
 - Parents value church, find it meaningful, and want the intergenerational aspect.
 - They want to rest in the sanctuary, have a moment to breathe and to be in their inner world a little bit.
- **Sports are the Number 1 barrier to going to church.**
- Rev. Jennifer will be visiting R.E. on the 23rd.
- Fifi suggests adding a line item for Food to the **budget**.
 - **ACTION ITEM: Fifi and Rev. Jennifer** will discuss adding a **Food line item** to the **budget** to cover Friday night meals and/or coffee hour.
 - Proposed coffee hour and/or Friday night food offerings. For people in need of care, food is symbolic of delivering care as well as nourishment. Let's offer food and encourage augmentation, as people are willing and able. (Example, the basics are provided — such as pasta, salad – and people can add to it optionally (dessert, side dishes, etc.).
- Gib welcomes Rick Moore, Peter Lowett and Ted Bayne, of the Greening the Campus group.

Concord250 Planning (Rev. Jennifer Johnson)

- On Wednesday, March 19th Rev. Jennifer and Gib Metcalf along with Holly Cratsley (to field questions regarding town) will be hosting a **Q&A on the role of First Parish in Concord250**.
- Gib highlights key issues of **security** and **safety** in the building (especially with current political uncertainty and not knowing what groups may be in town).
- No **pancake breakfast** this year.
- The church building will be locked.
 - Main reason the building will be closed: Easter Sunday the next day. We need to be ready. Providing Sunday service is a core part of our mission.
- Reclaim Our Democracy is planning some tabling.
- The Women's Parish Association will be selling **Minute Man cookies** outside near Wright Tavern and will share revenue with Wright Tavern. They'll use the kitchen at First Parish to bake and make cookies earlier in the week.
- We want to be good partners with **The Town of Concord**. We are open to all these options that have been proposed:
 - There will likely be port-a-pottys on site.
 - There may be a tent in our parking lot.
 - Safety officer may be assigned to our building.
 - The town of Concord would like access to some buildings in the community in case of an emergency (such as a lightning storm).

- Town of Concord is training Ambassadors. They are looking for 3 teams of 8 to do 4-hour shifts each. (So far they have 1 team of 8.) To be stationed at First Parish.
- Who will be on site at the church for Concord250? Nigel will be at First Parish, as well as Rev. Jennifer, Roselyn, Gib and a few others. Jim Reynolds volunteered to be on site. Rev. Jennifer's preference is for Amy Freedman to not need to come in, due to the inconvenience.
- There will be **no parking** in town. Those coming need to find a way in, check the Concord250 website for bus/shuttle service. Biking in is an option.
→ **ACTION ITEM:** Gib will send an email to the Governing Board regarding creating a **roster** for who will be on church campus.
- Will likely be getting some **walkie-talkies** to communicate with each other.
- The **parade route** will be different this year and will go right out front on Lexington Ave. People will watch from our lawn, from our steps.
- Leah asks if our **Black Lives Matter Banner** will be up, and Rev. Jennifer responds that yes, it will be, as well as our other two banners: Progress Pride and Democracy.
→ **ACTION ITEM:** Fifi will continue to follow up with a parishioner regarding the other two **banners** to be put up at the front of the church before Concord250. (A grommet issue?)
- Gib asks, what does the Governing Board need to know? Rev. Jennifer emphasizes that the **decision-making rationale has been centered around safety & security**, and is weighing requests against our mission and priorities. Sunday worship, especially Easter, is a primary need.
- **New sitting bench** installed near Wright Tavern, offered up and installed by Town of Concord.
- We want to support **Wright Tavern**.
 - Rev. Jennifer is interested in setting up more consistent **communication** with the Wright Tavern with regular updates (quarterly meetings). Presently meeting with Tom and Roselyn every other week, and will meet every week as the event nears.
 - An **officer** will be posted outside Wright Tavern (as required, according to state law, because of alcohol).
- **Private security.** There has been some consideration of hiring private security, armed or unarmed. There will be Concord public safety presence (plain clothes and uniformed) all over in town but no one will be specifically assigned to First Parish or other faith communities. As an identifiably progressive community, our church could be a target for certain groups that may be in attendance.
 - No state troopers are available. Local public safety is tapped out already for this event, including nearby towns like Acton, and not available even to hire privately.
 - Peter Lowett says that there will be check-points. There will be no backpacks allowed through. Everyone needs to have clear transparent bags. There are no metal detectors, however.
 - After discussion regarding the hiring of armed vs. unarmed security guards, the Governing Board gives Rev. Jennifer support to hire unarmed security guards. The board raised and thoughtfully considered the risk to First Parish of not having security, the

potential risk of having weapons or not having weapons, crowd control, property insurance, liability to crews.

→ **NOTED**: The Governing Board gives **Rev. Jennifer** support to hire **unarmed security guards**.

- **Easter Sunday.**

- Neil expressed concerns again about the care of the **grounds** for Easter Sunday.

- Should we get some volunteers for early Sunday morning to pick-up trash before services that day? (noting that no one will be able to be on site on Friday/Saturday).

→ **ACTION ITEM**: **Gib** will put out a call for volunteers in **First Parish Weekly**, to help clean up on Easter Sunday at 8:30am.

→ **NOTED**: We welcome any and all **volunteers** from the **Governing Board** for clean-up and getting ready for **Easter service**. Please make note on your calendars: Sunday, April 20th, at 8:30am.

Greening the Campus Group (Rick Moore, Peter Lowett, Ted Bayne, Kel Keleher), Meeting Agenda, Appendix IV

- Gib asked the Greening Group to meet with the Governing Board in recognition of the good work this group has been doing, to increase our mutual communication and understanding, to improve integration with our overall mission, as well as to think about process to move forward. The group is asked to report on current status and what remains to be done, as well as to present their fund-raising request to the board. Gib asks the group to share their priorities as well as potential benefits of their recommendations.
- The Governing Board hears from the Greening the Campus Group and asks questions and discussions ensue.
- Question raised for consideration: How does this work interplay with major capital issues as well as Strategic Planning? And, how might this work affect or overlap with other groups, such as the Disability Group (who also have put together recommendations regarding exterior doors, for example)?
 - Rev. Jennifer expressed a desire to centralize efforts (especially regarding fund-raising), and noted that Strategic Planning is in its early stages. Susan See also questions how priorities and coordination with Strategic Planning might work with interdependencies between groups.
- Peter Lowett gives an overview of the Greening Group citing the congregational **goal to get First Parish off of fossil fuels** (or as close as possible). Jim requests the actual resolution: The resolution from the 2020 meeting reads as follows: "We will establish a goal of eliminating or reducing our church's dependence on fossil fuels and thereby achieve net zero carbon emissions. This can be accomplished by upgrading heating and cooling and insulation systems for all FP buildings. ...To accomplish these goals the church shall establish a design and fund-raising committee by October 2020. To be chartered by the Standing Committee and Senior Minister. The committee shall report back to the congregation on its progress when the design is complete."

- The original cost estimate to achieve the goal of getting off of fossil fuels was **\$6.5 million**, as of June 2024 — by installing a **geothermal** system (including air conditioning in sanctuary, and air cleaning and filtration as pandemic protection, which were not part of the original mission/scope).
 - Greening Group's Conclusion: We have been priced out of geothermal. Alternatively looking at heat pumps, using electricity, which would cost less and have a 20-30 year life.
- Greening group has been working with consultants on a **modified \$2.5 million plan** (a pared-down system utilizing existing piping for a cost savings), setting aside air conditioning and air-cleaning filtration (for pandemic-protection) to revisit at a later date; basically a boiler-replacement plan (Rick holds up proposal). Jen Izzo asks for a break-down of costs.
 - Rick clarifies that the driving question the group asked themselves, in reviewing this proposal, that led to the current \$250 ask, is, "**What is *not* controversial in this plan?**" The result is this current request to move forward on the insulation and sealing project, which is a clear and present need.
 - The cost to finish the project would be \$2.25 million, after the sealing/insulation project.
 - Questions were also asked about the fee being requested for Windover and what work it would pay for.
 - The main driver for this work is **mission & values** — specifically, getting off of fossil fuels as an ethical issue — over cost savings (though money may be saved).
- Peter highlights their excellent team members that have been working on this project.
- The redesigned system is **eligible for an IRA* 30% discount**. (Republicans like churches!) There is a process with paperwork. The group will work with Fifi on this if the project moves forward. It is a reimbursement program; we pay up front. (*IRA = Inflation Reduction Act)
 - Concern raised by Rick regarding the scope of the project: **the 30% discount is available once only**, and won't apply to the larger project if we use it on just the insulation/sealing project. The discount could be available to the larger project.
- Discussion about the **\$250k for insulation and sealing project** (basic insulation and sealing of attic spaces, chapel, sanctuary, parlor and parish hall, and replacement of gaskets in doors and windows that are leaking) — a stand-alone project which needs to be done first. Benefit cited: the mechanical equipment in the plan can be downsized, due to resulting increased efficiency.
 - Committee clarifies that they do not want to scrap the **air purification** part of the project, rather proposing to do it another year.
- The Greening group brings up the current state of the **current (old) boiler** which could need to be replaced if it fails, and how would that impact this work? There is some urgency.

- Rick Moore asks what would we do if the **boiler** breaks down this summer and there is a proposal to replace it for \$1.5 million? We are trying to be ahead of that possible scenario, proactive.
 - Rev. Jennifer later notes that the boiler likely still has a few years of use in it.
 - Gib highlights the new ratified **fundraising policy**. Big-ticket items like this, above \$50k, need to have Governing Board and Minister support and also need to go before a congregational meeting. (And, therefore, no decision can be made today.)
- **NEXT STEPS**: Follow-up for the Greening Group to consider and provide:
- Come back and present the **benefits & costs** to help the board in decision-making.
 - Provide cost comparisons:
 - How much would we save on our heating bill with this new solution in place? What are the overall cost savings?
 - What would be the cost of putting in a new fossil fuel system, as in natural gas? (As a point of comparison to the proposed “green” system.)
 - Write a lay-person’s version of the Windover document that **distills key points** for us that are not as much in the weeds. Easy to read and understand for a non-engineer.
 - What if the boiler dies soon? What is Plan B?
- **ACTION ITEM**: Gib will share the **Accessibility Justice Task Force report** with the Greening group, as a great example (content as well as presentation), to use as a guide.
- Jim asks the committee to be sure to know that the Governing Board is supportive of their work. Rev. Jennifer also appreciates the data that this group has collected and shared.

Kitchen Assessment Task Force (Gib Metcalf, Jennifer Johnson)

- Proposed establishing a **Kitchen Assessment Task Force** with the purpose of **assessing** the current state of the kitchen for functionality, efficiency, sustainability and accessibility. The Team would make a series of **recommendations**.
- Considered some possible members including **Nigel**, facilities manager. Caroline McCloy, Heather Packard, Mariyln Lowett have all said they’re willing to serve on this committee.
- Neal raises the point that perhaps we’d like to have a **brand-new-member** be on the team, as a way to reach our integration goals. Rev. Jennifer suggests that we could have an appointed group, but that they could also reach out to include additional members on their own.
- Kristin asks to consider **caterers** and their needs to do events and services.
- Final recommendation is requested by **September**. (What kind of stove, dishwasher, etc.)
- Leah brings up budget/fundraising concerns in a larger context — all these things will cost money. And, expresses desire for these things to move forward recognizing the process and paths - research, recommendations, requests, fundraising, executing.

- Rev. Jennifer brings up our larger **mission** around accessibility, sustainability and the functionality of our space.
- The board considers and discounts the need to have a **liaison** with this group.
→ **VOTED** : Gib moves to set up this new **Kitchen Assessment Task Force** and move forward. Leah seconds the motion. Voted, all members in favor, unanimously approved.

Emeritus Policy (Kristin Moore, Kimberly Brainerd, Susan See), Appendix V

- The policies of Worcester and Harvard U.U. Churches were considered in drafting our policy, as well as general research online.
- Kristin highlights that the proposed procedure would require a congregational vote, in keeping with other policies such as Harvard church. And noted that full-time or part-time staff members are eligible. We set a time-period of at least 12 months after serving their role and leaving the church before they'd be considered. Would come with benefits as well as responsibilities.
- Leah asked, what would be the *process/procedure* for revocation? How would that happen?
 - Edit to policy (added): "The Governing Board may revoke emeritus stats for one of the following reasons."
 → **VOTED** : With one edit (above), the Governing Board votes in favor of the new **Emeritus policy**, unanimously approved with one abstention (by Jim, who missed the conversation).

Governing Board Operations

Annual Meeting Date

- Sunday, June 8th is proposed. Tom Wilson is not available to moderate, but Eric Van Loon can.
- Rev. Jennifer says there's a Pride worship service on June 8th. Doing it along with TriCon, who would like to host it at their church. (Members would need to get back to First Parish afterwards.) After discussion it is decided that it does not pose a conflict.
- Set the date, and appoint Eric as a temporary moderator. (Moderator pro tem.)
→ **VOTED** : To set the **Annual Meeting date for June 8th**, and appoint Eric Van Loon as moderator, unanimously approved.

Annual Pledge Update (Fifi, Leah)

- More than halfway there to last year's pledges.

2025 Auction

- Susan See requested we consider an Auction for 2025, and would consider chairing it, conditional upon finding enough people to help. If we are going to do it, we need to plan now.
- Last year's auction was not as effective as we hoped. It was a lot of work and we did not hit our goal.

- **Gib** thinks it deserves more of a discussion than we have tonight. Let's put on the April meeting agenda. (A fundraising project of some kind.)
→ **ACTION ITEM**: **Gib** will put fundraising on the April meeting agenda — fundraising project in general and auction in particular.

Executive Session

Meeting adjourned at 10:15 p.m.

GB = Governing Board

ACTION ITEMS:

- **Rev. Jennifer** will share notes from the Parent Circle meetings with the Strategic Planning group.
- **Fifi and Rev. Jennifer** will discuss adding a **Food line item** to the **budget** to cover Friday night meals and/or coffee hour.
- **Gib** will send a note to the Governing Board regarding creating a **roster** for who will be on the church campus.
- **Fifi** will continue to follow up with a parishioner regarding the other two **banners** to be put up at the front of the church before Concord250.
- **Gib** will put out a call for volunteers in **First Parish Weekly**, to help clean up on Easter Sunday at 8:30am.
- **Gib** will share the **Accessibility Task Force report** with the Greening group, as a great example (content as well as presentation), to use as a guide.
- **Gib** will put fundraising on the April meeting agenda.

NEXT STEPS:

- Follow-up for the Greening Group to consider and provide:
 - Come back and present the **benefits & costs** to help the board in decision-making.
 - Provide cost comparisons:
 - How much would we save on our heating bill with this new solution in place?
What are the overall cost savings?
 - What would be the cost of putting in a new fossil fuel system, as in natural gas?
(As a point of comparison to the proposed "green" system.)
 - Write a lay-person's version of the Windover document that **distills key points** for us that are not as much in the weeds. Easy to read and understand for a non-engineer.
 - What if the boiler dies soon? What is Plan B?

VOTED:

- **February 2025 meeting minutes**, unanimously approved.
- **Fundraising policy**, unanimously approved.
- **Kitchen Assessment Task Force** is created, unanimously approved.
- **Emeritus policy**, unanimously approved.
- **Annual Meeting date** set for **June 8th**, and Eric Van Loon as moderator, unanimously approved.

NOTED:

- **Governing Board members** to mark their calendars with **Joy Jam** dates of Fridays March 21st and May 9th at 6-8:30pm in Parish Hall.
- The Governing Board gives **Rev. Jennifer** support to hire **unarmed security guards**.
- Any and all **volunteers** from the **Governing Board** are welcome to help campus clean-up and get ready for **Easter service**. Please make note on your calendars: Sunday, April 20th, at 8:30am.

NEXT MEETING:

(Second Tuesday of the month, 7pm)

Tuesday, April 8, 7-9pm

Brooks Room at First Parish in Concord
