

**First Parish in Concord
Governing Board Meeting Minutes
September 10, 2024**

Fifi Ball	Director of Operations	Y
Lisa Bennett	Governing Board Member	Y
Kimma Brainerd	Clerk	N
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

THIS MEETING WAS HELD IN PERSON AT FIRST PARISH, CONCORD.

Gib Metcalf offered opening words.

Everyone checked in about how they are doing, including sharing thoughts about the First Parish Covenant.

First Parish Covenant:

As Unitarian Universalists, we are called by Love and by our vision of Beloved Community to live out our highest values.

As a congregation with spirituality at our core and spokes that connect us to our wider world, we pledge ourselves in Covenant so that our relationships and our community can thrive.

We covenant to live out our mission together.

We nurture belonging across the generations.

We support each other on our spiritual journeys.

We greet one another with curiosity, kindness, respect, and openness. In the belief that we can make progress together, we show up with energy, joy, and commitment to our shared values.

Honoring our diversity and centering justice, we strive to be open and intentionally welcoming. We are willing to be changed by being in community and by our world.

We respect the sanctity of our spiritual community. When in conflict, we talk with each other, not about each other. We listen without judgment, seeking understanding and acceptance.

Trusting in forgiveness and reconciliation when mistakes are made, we strive to be brave and risk vulnerability.

We seek goodness while we do not expect perfection.

As a community of members, friends, ministers, and staff, we cultivate a culture of appreciation for one another. We value expressing gratitude freely.

-- Adopted at the Annual Congregational Meeting, June 2023

ADMINISTRATIVE ACTIONS

Approval of June 11, 2024 Meeting Minutes. The Governance Board Meeting Minutes from June 11, 2024 were approved by the Board via an email vote that occurred in June of 2024.

Ministerial Housing Allowance. Federal law allows ministers to treat part of their salary as a housing allowance. The Governing Board is required to pass a motion approving a specific dollar amount for such allowance. The Board discussed the housing allowance for Rev. Jennifer Johnson. For the months of August 2024 (when she arrived at First Parish) through December, 2024, \$5,000 per month from her salary will be designated as a housing allowance.

Upon motion duly made and seconded, it was unanimously

VOTED: to approve the designation of \$5,000 per month from Rev. Jennifer Johnson's salary as a housing allowance for the months of August-December 2024, for a total of \$25,000 in 2024.

OPERATIONS REPORT

It was decided that this year the Director of Operations, Fifi Ball, will remove operational details from the material she presents to the Governing Board. Instead, she will flag any issues that should be discussed.

Fifi reported that First Parish increased its surplus cash funds.

She and the staff are gearing up for the new church year. She has regular meetings with Bruce to discuss plans to spruce up the building and logistics around upcoming events. When she meets with Catherine, she is focused on keeping up with activity on the website and social media posts. When she meets with Tina, they discuss bookkeeping matters.

Rev. Jennifer is responsible for holding the staff accountable to do their jobs right, including keeping track of their budgets.

SENIOR MINISTER'S REPORT

Rev. Jennifer Johnson started work at First Parish in August and reported that it's been a productive and positive beginning, with some good groundwork being laid. She feels a real sense of "knowing and being known," which is unusual for only 5 weeks of time.

Rev. Jennifer briefly summarized activities, successes and challenges in each of the seven Competency Areas upon which the Ministerial Fellowship Committee will assess her on the path to Full Fellowship. These are also the Competency Areas that the Governing Board and Committee on Ministry will be asked to evaluate in the spring for Rev. Jennifer's MFC credentialing process.

Early successes include retreats with the Staff and Governing Board. Rev. Jennifer reported that a strong foundation of trust and connection was created to support our collaborative work going forward. The staff is eager for positive culture change, and they've made a good start, focusing on creative collaboration, connection and joy.

The drop-in offerings to get to know the new minister were well-received and well-attended. Approximately 60 individuals participated in these events.

The biggest challenge that Rev. Jennifer has experienced thus far has been the ongoing leave of the Minister for Congregational Care and its impacts.

Debbie Clark Memorial Service. Gib brought up the email that the family of Debbie Clark sent to Rev. Jennifer regarding Debbie's memorial service. The family was disappointed and hurt over the process. Rev. Jennifer stated that after careful review, she concluded that the issues with this memorial service were not a systemic problem. It was a result of the timing of the ministerial transition, with resulting lapses of communication. The FP ministerial staff also experienced problems due to Covid and a family emergency. The staff worked really hard to cover the service, but in the end the family wasn't happy because the service was officiated by someone they didn't know. Ultimately, Rev. Jennifer feels that the family wasn't given the relational opportunities that they deserved. She will reach out to the family to discuss.

COMMITTEE ON THE MINISTRY

Rev. Jennifer wishes to start a new Committee on the Ministry to offer advice, support and insight. She asked the Governing Board to review a draft Charge for the Committee on Ministry, as well as a proposed list of 5 individuals to serve as the initial members of the Committee.

The Board discussed the Charge and suggested a few edits. The final Charge reads as follows:

Committee on Ministry Charge

The Governing Board and Rev. Jennifer Johnson establish a Committee on Ministry to provide the following functions:

1. *Provide support for and feedback around Rev. Johnson's performance and development, including the completion of the annual Committee on Ministry Preliminary Fellowship Evaluation as required by the UUA while Rev. Johnson is in preliminary fellowship.*
2. *Assess the vitality of the ministries and the covenant of the congregation; identify strengths, opportunities, and areas of potential conflict.*
3. *Serve as thought partners and internal consultants for Rev. Johnson.*

The Committee will comprise five members to be selected jointly by the Governing Board and the Lead Minister to serve for one-year terms with the possibility of reappointment up to a maximum of three consecutive years.

The Committee is an advisory committee to the Lead Minister, and there is no requirement to report to the Governing Board.

Upon motion duly made and seconded, it was unanimously

VOTED: to approve the Charge of the Committee of the Ministry as described above.

Rev. Jennifer then presented biographies of the 5 proposed initial members:

- Jeff Clanon and his family joined First Parish in the fall of 1993. His initial involvement was with Religious Education where Jeff and his wife Regina taught classes for a number of years. In the early 2000's Jeff was asked to participate in a Strategic Planning Committee which resulted in what was at the time the first formal strategic plan for the Church. Shortly thereafter Jeff served on the Standing Committee for several years and was the Chair during the Churches ministerial transition from Gary Smith to Howard Dana. Since 2015 Jeff has organized a dozen Retreats for First Parish Men with Howard Dana and currently with Paul Langston-Daley. He is also a facilitator for the Small Group Minister Program.
- Liz Rust is a committed UU since finding our faith 25 years ago. She has been an active member of the First Parish in Concord community since becoming a member in 2017, first working with the social action teams, and then joining the Standing Committee (now Governing Board). Liz served the Board for 5 years, including 2 as chair, and participated on many activities during that period. She currently leads the Welcoming and Membership team. Outside of First Parish, Liz volunteers as the Chair of the Board for the Concord Prison Outreach, and professionally consults in the field of affordable housing, serving as the Director of the Concord-based Regional Housing Services Office, a local municipal collaboration in support of affordable housing.
- Ted Smongeski is a recent member of First Parish in Concord, joining in the Spring of 2022. He and his wife Mary Rocheleau live in Concord with their two cats. Ted works as a Software Engineer for a healthcare company in Waltham. Earlier this year, he participated in Small Group Ministry, which he found very fulfilling and thought provoking. Despite moving to Concord and joining First Parish during the pandemic, he has felt very welcomed by this vibrant UU community. He has enjoyed exploring the UU faith as a new UU himself, and is looking forward to engaging more and contributing to the community through the Committee on Ministry!
- Sophie Wadsworth and her family (Bruce Morgan & Hugh Morgan,13) have been members of First Parish for over four years and UU's for decades. She has enjoyed an active role in our church, volunteering for our R.E. program and serving on the Congregational Life Committee. As

a nonprofit Executive Director, Sophie came to know our church while working at The Nature Connection, a Concord-based nonprofit. (Our congregation's community has supported NC for years with social action grants - and more!) Sophie now runs her own consultancy, coaching climate tech founders and other mission-driven leaders in communications, storytelling and public speaking.

- Rebecca Winborn spent 40 years working as a clinical social worker in a variety of out-patient settings with an emphasis on creating and sustaining healthy family systems. She has been a practicing UU for the past 30 years and an active member in three very different congregations: First Parish of Stow and Acton for 18 years (a small rural community); All Soul's Church in Washington, DC for a year and a half (BIG diverse urban community) and First Parish in Concord these past 10 years. At First Parish in Concord, Rebecca serves as a member of the Pastoral Care team, is active in the Racial Justice Action Group, including being a delegate to the UU Urban Ministry, and recently joined a pilot project, A Circle of Support, facilitated by UUUM working with DeeDee's Cry, a suicide prevention and support program in Roxbury.

Upon motion duly made and seconded, it was unanimously

VOTED: to approve the following slate of members for the Committee of the Ministry:
Jeff Clanon, Liz Rust, Ted Smongeski, Sophie Wadsworth and Rebecca Winborn

BANNER POLICY

Fred Van Deusen of the Reclaiming Democracy committee asked the Governing Board for approval to hang a banner on the church proclaiming "Reclaim Our Democracy." The banner would hang at least through the next Presidential election, and perhaps longer depending on the outcome of the election and aftermath.

The Governing Board discussed the need to not only consider this particular banner request, but also to develop a broader policy about who can speak on behalf of the church and what approvals are needed. A discussion ensued. While the group agreed with the sentiment behind the banner, they expressed concern that it may not be inclusive or welcoming to everyone.

Rev. Jennifer said that in her role as spiritual advisor for First Parish she is obligated to state that we shouldn't shy away from controversy. We should be willing to take on risk because it's part of our faith. Democracy is at risk, due to vote counting issues, degradation/threatening of poll workers, voter suppression, etc. Rev. Jennifer stated that our faith tradition doesn't exist without the democratic movement. Our impulse for faith is aligned with the impulse for freedom.

The group decided that the Governing Board, through the Governance Subcommittee, should draft a policy with "executive limitations" to guide the minister in how to make decisions about requests to speak on behalf of the church through banners, interviews, articles, etc.

Regarding the specific request from the Reclaiming Democracy committee, Rev. Jennifer will talk with Fred. In addition, the Board invited Fred to attend the next meeting to discuss this topic.

SOUP AND GAMES NIGHT

The Governing Board offered to host a Soup and Games party at First Parish for the 2024 Auction. The date for the party is Saturday, October 19, 2024. Jim Reynolds agreed to serve as lead organizer for the event.

GOVERNING BOARD OPERATIONS

Greeter Schedule

Jim Reynolds prepared a “Coffee Hour Representative Schedule” for the Governing Board to greet people during coffee hour throughout the year. The Board was asked to confirm their availability on the schedule.

GB Meeting Planning

Gib set the following schedule for Governing Board meetings this church year. A different subcommittee will present during each meeting. Names in parentheses are responsible for the opening words at the meeting.

September 10 (Gib)
Banner Policy

October 8 (Lisa)
Financial Sustainability

November 12 (Neil)
Governance

December 10 (Jen)
Strategic Assessment

January 14 (CC)
Financial Sustainability

February 11 (Kristin)
Governance

March 11 (Jim)
Strategic Assessment

April 8 (Leah)
TBD

May 13 (Susan)
Budget Finalization

June 10 (Virginia)
Wrap-up

EXECUTIVE SESSION

The Governing Board went into executive session.

The Governing Board meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:15pm.