

First Parish in Concord



The Standing Committee's Senior Minister Evaluation

2015-16

March, 2016

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Overview

Every year, First Parish (FP) in Concord's Standing Committee (SC) is responsible for completing a written evaluation of our Senior Minister. This year, the response to Reverend Howard Dana's third year of ministerial leadership is once again strongly positive. Howard appears comfortable in his leadership role. His open, direct, and honest communication around finances and stewardship is helping our community feel more comfortable with this topic. We hope to see continued growth in his ministry at First Parish.

Methodology

Like last year, FP's annual evaluation of our Senior Minister combines input from all SC members, plus input from another 13 selected lay leaders. All but one responded.

The SC's Evaluation Subcommittee asked each person by email to comment on the following five goal areas and measures that were set for this year by the Senior Minister, with input from the Standing Committee.

1. Develop a Path to Membership suitable for a large congregation.

Measures: Membership Committee formed with a convener and regular meetings
 Clear charter for the membership work
 Clear method developed and documented for joining the church
 System to track new members for two years

2. Implement fundraising work beyond the Annual Pledge Campaign (APC.)

Measures: Meet with past Auction Committee chairs
 Form a new Auction Committee
 Have an Auction at First Parish
 Meet with Treasurer to explore possible donor development outside the APC

3. Support the reorganization of the Religious Education Program and the RE Council.

Measures: Ensure RE participation is tracked
 Provide programing for children and youth every Sunday
 Provide supervision and support to the MRE
 Attend three family-oriented events to get to know RE families better

4. Partner with the Standing Committee to develop a longer-term vision for achieving the mission of FP.

Measures: Create a process for the congregation to talk about social justice
 Lead the SC in exploration of spiritual leadership
 Further refine and document the relationship between the SM and SC
 Working with SC and Denominational Affairs Committee representative to explore FP's role in the UUA

5. Is there anything else you would like to add to this evaluation about Rev. Dana's performance this year?

All comments were then aggregated, removing specific name references. What follows is an executive summary of the input received. We have also compiled a list of suggestions to guide the creation of future Senior Minister goals.

Unabridged comments are included as the appendix for Howard's review.

Goal One

Develop a Path to Membership suitable for a large congregation.

Measures: Membership Committee formed with a convener and regular meetings

Clear charter for the membership work

Clear method developed and documented for joining the church

System to track new members for two years

All four measures have been achieved and there is overwhelming support and appreciation for Howard's efforts this year to ease the path to FP membership. Previous obstacles to membership have been removed. These efforts have already paid off in 20 new members this year as of March 1st.

It appears we now have a size-appropriate and sustainable membership path in place. The three-fold program (1) welcomes, (2) provides a quick and easy pathway to membership and (3) works to integrate new members into the congregation.

A new membership committee has been mobilized, meets regularly, and acts to implement this plan. While providing leadership, Howard has also ensured that the committee takes ownership. Without a staff person dedicated to membership, this initiative is an excellent example of how lay leaders can be rallied successfully fill a void.

Anecdotal evidence from new members suggests Howard himself is a big part of their decision to join. In addition, we value that Howard has used the pulpit to both publicize monthly opportunities to *sign the book* as well as impress upon the congregation that *welcoming* is a community-wide responsibility.

There is strong interest among respondees in hearing about continued progress in the membership area. There may be value in publicizing information about the new membership program to the wider congregation.

Goal Two

Implement fundraising work beyond the Annual Pledge Campaign (APC.)

Measures: Meet with past Auction Committee chairs

Form a new Auction Committee

Have an Auction at First Parish

Meet with Treasurer to explore possible donor development outside the APC

At this point in the church year, three of the four measures have been achieved.

Howard met with previous auction chairs, a new auction committee was formed (with Jen Izzo as chair), and after many years of languishing, a church auction is now scheduled for April 30, 2016. Everyone is pleased to see the return of this important fundraising tradition at First Parish and many new faces appear to be involved in the planning.

When the original theme of the auction was questioned, Howard provided support to the auction committee, helping them re-brand the auction around a *May Day* theme.

Howard continues to be deeply involved in the annual pledge campaign, recruiting team members, attending meetings, and participating in a large donor event. This year there is a new and important component that attempts to educate smaller donors and encourage them to increase their pledges to a more sustainable level. Howard has also supported the WPA this year in their fundraising efforts.

As a community, we continue to value Howard's ability to speak honestly and openly about financial matters, which models ways for us all to become more comfortable talking about money at First Parish.

There appears to be some preliminary work in the area of Planned Giving in that the Finance Committee is discussing it. Everyone is eager for more progress in this area.

Goal Three

Support the reorganization of the Religious Education Program and the RE Council.

Measures: Ensure RE participation is tracked

Provide programming for children and youth every Sunday

Provide supervision and support to the MRE

Attend three family-oriented events to get to know RE families better

At this point in the church year, the first two measures have been clearly achieved, the third is invisible to us, and Howard has attended at least one of the three events referenced in the fourth goal.

A system of RE attendance monitoring was put in place this year and there is widely appreciated programming for children and youth every week, soon to be extended into the summer. Although intergenerational services are valued, some input suggests their "*child friendly*" nature could be improved.

We appreciate Howard's leadership during a difficult RE transition. He and Amy appear to work well together. Anecdotal evidence suggests RE parents are pleased with the RE program and the new MRE. Howard supported the RE Council's request for the elimination of RE fees, long desired by RE families, and an important statement about equitable access to programs at First Parish.

Feedback from a few lay leaders suggests there remains some tension within RE leadership that may need to be addressed. While this may be as simple as improving communication, a few comments suggest the three-way relationship among the Senior Minister, MRE, and RE Council may not be as synchronous as it could be, in order to best support religious education.

There is widespread interest in Howard making a closer connection with RE families. We encourage him to find ways to do this, without over-taxing his already busy schedule.

Goal Four

Partner with the Standing Committee to develop a longer-term vision for achieving the mission of First Parish in Concord.

Measures: Create a process for the congregation to talk about social justice

Lead the SC in exploration of spiritual leadership

Further refine and document the relationship between the SM and SC

Working with SC and Denominational Affairs Committee representative explore FPC's role in the UUA

There has been much acknowledged evidence of good progress on the first measure. The *Black Lives Matter* banner, Social Action listening sessions, and survey and discussions of funding have made for visible progress; there is a general feeling that Howard's leadership and involvement are evident here. Howard's efforts toward hanging the *Black Live Matter* banner were widely seen as a positive step for First Parish.

Standing Committee retreats were well attended and much appreciated. Some Standing Committee members are pleased with the attention given to spirituality; others feel that its role in spiritual leadership is still unclear.

There is consensus that the relationship between the Senior Minister and Standing Committee is working well and improving. Some feel there is still room for clarity and need for further definition of roles. No further documentation has been created so far this year.

With regard to denominational affairs, there is a feeling that this is an area getting more attention from both Howard and First Parish, with some very positive feedback on Howard's efforts. Others appear uncertain about the specifics of these efforts.

Additional Comments

Is there anything else you would like to add to this evaluation about Rev. Dana's performance this year?

There were many comments on the positive direction of First Parish under Howard's ministry. Worship and sermons were particularly highlighted, as well as the general energy and enthusiasm in the congregation and a feeling among many that we are moving past recent challenges.

Howard has continued to show strong management at First Parish with solid support from the new MRE and continued support from our pastoral care minister. Many comments show appreciation for Howard's involvement in financial matters which contribute to the overall financial health of First Parish.

Conclusion

Highlights of the past year under Howard's leadership include significant attention given to Religious Education (RE), Social Action (including the Black Lives Matters banner), membership, and fundraising. Annual Pledge and Auction committees are energized and working hard. Our new MRE is well liked and respected for her work. Pastoral Care has become a strength.

Preaching was highlighted by many as one of Howard's strong points, especially the thoughtful and personal aspects he includes. Many feel that the congregation is continuing to be noticeably more comfortable and relaxed with Howard and vice versa, and we appear to be emerging from a long and difficult period of transition.

Our community welcomes and encourages Howard's attention to our long-term vision and our place in the world in the coming years.

We encourage Howard to take advantage of opportunities to connect with members informally and personally, and to give RE extra attention.

Howard's ministry at First Parish has gained substantial positive momentum over the past year and we look forward to a strong year ahead for him and for First Parish.

Suggestions for Future Senior Minister Goals

Suggestions for future goals include, in no particular order:

- Focus on long-term goals and vision - work more with Standing Committee to create goals that align with that vision and build greater collaboration between staff and parishioners. (perhaps a 5-year plan, out of an all-parish retreat or with other parish involvement)
- Look for ways to connect to more members, some of whom feel a distance in their relationship to Howard (especially in RE)
- Encourage the MRE to do whatever necessary to improve collaboration with RE Council.
- Create joint goals with MRE to build community with RE
- Promote member's fiscal responsibility to First Parish, possibly including an education component for new members prior to Annual Campaign