

First Parish Unitarian Universalist – Canton
Minutes of the Parish Committee
August 28, 2024
7:15PM on Zoom

In Attendance:

Kitty McGregor, President
Dave Williams, VP-Administration
Larry Cotton, Treasurer
Debbie Radovsky, VP-Member Services
Don Seaman, Member-at-Large
Bette Wells, Member-at-Large
Rev. Dr. Michelle Walsh, Minister

2024-25 Parish Committee Guests:

Rev. Dr. Clyde Grubbs

Absent:

Jonette Nagai, Clerk

Welcoming and Check-In:

Call to Order and Chalice Reading: The meeting was called to order at 7:23PM. Bette lit the chalice and gave the following chalice reading:

We Prepare for the Future

by Robin F. Gray

By the light of this chalice
we prepare for the future.
We prepare ourselves
for the times of triumph
and times of trial that might come.
We prepare ourselves to be present
to one another with loving hearts
even in the most difficult of times.
We prepare ourselves
to make the connections
that will lift us out of isolation
and prepare the path of justice and equality.
We ignite this flame, symbol of our faith,
to beckon us into community,
warm our hearts with love,
and give us a light to follow as we carry our faith into action.

Consent Agenda:

The minutes of the June 12, 2024 Parish Committee meeting were approved unanimously with two abstentions from Larry and Debbie because they are new to the Parish Committee and were not at the meeting.

Ministers' Thoughts and Concerns:

This has been a difficult summer pastorally for many in the congregation. In particular, Michelle noted the loss of Miles Altfillisch. A moment of silence was observed in his memory. The Seaman and Amster families, Reverend Anita, and many others have been dealing with health and other issues. This has increased the Caring Circle workload. A couple of changes have occurred on the Caring Circle with Barbara Foley joining and Bette Wells stepping down.

Michelle also noted the impact of the current political climate on the congregation. Despite recent developments, this will, unfortunately, continue to be challenging with no end in sight.

The proposed schedule for Faith in Action recipients that Michelle developed and circulated prior to the meeting was unanimously approved by the Parish Committee. Bette expressed appreciation for all of the work Michelle has been doing to prepare for the coming year and her amazing organizational skills.

Dave thanked Michelle for all of the work she did for the Neponset River Mind, Body, Spirit Center activities to reach out to the local community and logo. Michelle noted that AnneE Holden was the one responsible for the initial draft logo; work will continue on this with Don Seaman and AnneE. Michelle has been working with Diane Tynan, Director of the Department of Elder and Human Services for Canton, for some of these activities (open to the larger Canton public for all adult ages) which are at 1:00pm on Thursdays. In addition, the last Soulful Sundays' event attracted one young adult, Shannon, who prefers an afternoon to morning time; we are hoping she returns.

Michelle explicitly noted that she does not want to be responsible for handling cash donations at these events. Also, to satisfy Church Mutual liability requirements, we will be having people sign a Church Mutual release of liability for the Body Groove dance/exercise activity in particular.

Looking forward, Michelle plans on continuing to work with the CDEI and the Elder and Human Services of Canton, among others, to develop programs during the year. Don and Kitty will take a larger role in going to the CDEI meetings; the next one is on Monday September 9th at 7PM at the Canton Town Hall. The CDEI and Elder and Human Services of Canton would like to organize a fund raiser for the Canton Helpline and Food Pantry and may need to channel donations through the church since they are two separate departments of the town. Details to be worked out.

Michelle mentioned the need to improve how to publicize Board meetings so that anyone interested can participate. It was noted that Board meetings are always open to members.

However, if there is something specific that a non-Board member wants discussed, they would need to let Kitty know ahead of time so that it can be included in the agenda. Information will be included in the monthly newsletter, the website, and the weekly order of service. The question is what else can we do since we would like to continue improving transparency and communication?

Michelle reminded us that the deadline for the September newsletter is Friday, August 30th. Everything needs to go to Barbara Casaly.

One of the take-aways from the Parish Committee retreat on August 10th was the importance of staying on track with priorities and goals. Michelle reiterated the importance of this so we will be including our agreed upon priority goals for the year on every future Parish Committee agenda and tracking the status for each. These goals are discussed in more detail later in the minutes.

September upcoming events include the UU Climate Justice Revival. There will be a speaker for the UUA Disaster Relief Fund at the end of September. Because of worsening climate change, the funds for the UUA Disaster Relief Fund are being quickly depleted. Michelle is also encouraging us to sign up for the Neponset River Association Clean-Up Day in September on Saturday, September 28th, as part of our partnership with the Sharon UU congregation on the UU Climate Justice Revival. There will be other related activities as well. More information to follow.

The Parish Committee unanimously voted to affirm the Rev. Dr. Walsh's ability to determine the apportionment of her housing versus salary split for this fiscal year. In the future, Clyde noted that this can simply be included as a note with the consent agenda once a year.

Financial Status Update:

Larry voiced appreciation for the various people involved in handling various aspects of the church's financial responsibilities. David Bryant is the primary person doing many of the nitty-gritty Treasurer duties; Jonette is assisting with the transitioning of Treasurer duties; Dave Biggers and Dick Mezger are members of the Finance Committee; and Carol Smith pays the bills and does the bookkeeping.

Kitty voiced concern over the amount of cash on hand in the bank to pay ongoing bills which is only \$23K. This is the result of the low level of pledge income during the summer months which is typical. Larry was comfortable that there should be no need to transfer funds from the Parsonage fund assuming pledge income picks up in September as has happened historically. Larry and David are monitoring the cash level on an ongoing basis. Going forward, Larry, David Bryant, and Tom Hanold will coordinate as necessary to transfer money from the Parsonage Fund to the checking account.

The Parish Committee unanimously voted to approve Tom Hanold and David Bryant as signers for the Fidelity account for the Parsonage fund so they have the power to make appropriate

transfers. Larry will send the signed notarized form to Fidelity. (The actual vote taken incorrectly referenced the Ministerial Fund and was corrected subsequent to this meeting.)

Larry has formally informed the UUA of the amount that the congregation will be sending to the program fund which will be paid quarterly.

Don asked how the St. Pauly shed initiative has been performing. We were all happy to hear that it has proven to be quite successful. Recently, we have been generating roughly \$150 to \$200 of income a month on average.

Michelle brought up the administration of the Dignity Fund which historically has been managed by the minister with no oversight or input from anyone else. Michelle's proposed practice is to inform the Treasurer when there will be a disbursement from the account. However, after additional discussion, it became clear that this would not be a simple, straightforward change. Some concerns brought up: 1) what the specific roles and responsibilities should be for the Minister versus the Treasurer; 2) should anyone else be part of the process, and if so, who; 3) did the bank account need to be changed to reflect the new name and/or be interest bearing; 4) should there be more than one person signing checks; and 5) what should the policy be should the disbursement amount exceed a certain threshold e.g. \$2,000. In the interest of time, the decision was made to table this topic to the next Parish Committee meeting on September 11th. In the meantime, Larry, Kitty, and Michelle will make sure that the Bank of Canton is aware that Michelle is now the minister and the person who will be signing any checks against the account.

Team Leaders Update:

Visioning – There were not many developments over the summer as we took a much-needed break. Dave again expressed his excitement of the approval of the Neponset River Unitarian Universalist Community (NRUUC) DBA at the annual meeting. For this year, the plan includes: 1) continued outreach and discussion with adjacent UU congregations including Braintree, Foxborough, and Stoughton; 2) setting up a Friends of NRUUC account to collect donations/funding; 3) creating a NRUUC website; 4) applying for UUA and other grants; and 5) work with Michelle to collaborate with other organizations.

Kitty provided the update that she reached out to Braintree recently. They are still interested, but are not fully aware of what is actually involved or the back story since they entered the conversation late. However, Kitty is impressed with their leadership and hopeful since they have said they will be getting back to us on a possible meeting to move things forward.

In terms of applying for grants, unfortunately for us, Elizabeth Foster has moved on. She will be Director of Religious Education and Family Ministry at the United First Parish Church in Quincy.

Workplan – Don has had a busy summer: 1) weekly maintenance of the St. Pauly shed; 2) meeting with Michelle weekly on a new structure for the team; 3) working on fleshing out the speaker series; and 4) developing fund-raising ideas. Going forward he will be continuing work on these items and also: 1) working on partnering with CDEI on activities; 2) working on church

service stuff; 3) encouraging more people to volunteer time, services, and talents; and 4) working on the stewardship campaign and related activities. Deb Radovsky, Barbara Foley, and Larry Cotton have agreed to be resources and part of a sounding board for the team.

Reconfiguration of Teams – As a result of the offsite meeting earlier in the summer, there will be a reconfiguration of the leadership teams. There will be three teams versus two, each with two main leads and each focused on two specific high-level goals. These goals are priority goals and will be the key focus for each team.

The leaderships teams and their respective co-leads are: 1) **Congregational Life and Stewardship Ministry**, co-leads Don Seaman and Dave Williams; 2) **Vision Ministry**, co-leads Kitty McGregor and Dave Williams; 3) **Building Projects Ministry**, co-leads Kitty McGregor and Debbie Radovsky.

Beyond the co-leads, many other people will be involved. For example, as noted earlier, Deb Radovsky, Barbara Foley, and Larry Cotton will be resources for the Congregational Life and Stewardship Ministry. Nancy Devine and Susan Johnson have agreed to be “helping hands” to work with Deb to work on the goal of reviewing the membership and friends list. Kitty will be involved with CDEI programming.

Goals for the Congregational Life and Stewardship Ministry: 1) Creating a year-long fundraising/stewardship schedule; 2) Reviewing the membership and friends list.

Goals for the Vision Ministry: 1) Establishing next steps with Braintree and Foxborough congregations; 2) Investigate a new website/Developing a marketing plan

Goals for Building Projects Ministry: 1) Sanctuary Roof repair; 2) Driveway repair.

As noted earlier, these are the priority goals for the Parish Committee this year, and tracking of the above six goals will be part of every Parish Committee agenda for this year. Michelle and Kitty stressed the importance of focusing on the priority goals and for all of us to be involved at an appropriate level that leverages our expertise and knowledge.

Don mentioned he had developed a long project list (60 to 70 items) of additional buildings and grounds related items that should be addressed as time and budget allows. He will share these with Kitty and Deb. These will need to be addressed but cannot take priority over the six key goals.

The hope is that the new team structure will be effective in moving forward and helping to share the workload and responsibilities.

Summer Projects:

Sanctuary Roof Repairs –The roof is leaking badly and something needs to be done. If nothing is done, the leaking will impact the infrastructure around the cell towers and damage the organ. Ideally, we would replace the entire roof. One constraint for replacing the entire roof is that it

needs to have the same look per our agreement with and funding from the town. The big constraint is the cost which will be in excess of \$60K which we don't have.

To take care of the immediate issue, Kitty asked for quotes to patch the leaks. She obtained and circulated three quotes to the Parish Committee prior to the meeting. One quote was for \$10K; the other two for roughly \$35K. The more expensive proposals involve repairs to roughly one third of the roof based on less comprehensive assessments by the contractors involved. The least expensive proposal was the most detailed and based on a comprehensive review of both exterior and interior spaces affected. No decision was made at the meeting, but Kitty will be doing a little more due diligence before sending an email to the Parish Committee with a recommendation to be voted on prior to the next PC meeting. The objective is to get this done before winter

For the longer-term solution, we will be looking to see whether we can get funding from the town to replace the roof. This process may take a couple of years. Kathleen O'Connell has agreed to help with this. Kitty also had a conversation with George Comeau who is head of the town committee responsible for grants who was open to the idea. Bette mentioned she thought that Lisa Lopez might also still be on this committee who was helpful the last time we got funding. Clyde noted that a campaign for the organ might be another option to consider since it is one of the oldest organs in North America. The Ministerial Fund is another option to consider.

Retreat Insights – Michelle wrote up and circulated summary notes from the retreat, not intended to be minutes, which are not meant to be shared widely outside of those who attended. However, she proposed sharing these with a limited number of others such as Dave Bryant, trustees of the Ministerial Fund and others on Vision Ministry Group. No one voiced an issue with this. It was noted that the Vision Ministry Team will be restarting their monthly meetings with the first meeting on Thursday, September 5th at 10:30AM at the church where the contents of the notes would be shared.

Miscellaneous:

Communication – Michelle is working on tweaking the structure for communications from the church. First, there will continue to be a once-a-month Newsletter put together by Barbara Casaly with contributions from the President, Treasurer, Clerk, Minister, etc. Second, there will be a mid-month Mail-Chimp style communication which will replace the weekly email sent with reminders about important or significant events and activities. Third, Michelle is working with Carol Smith to develop a Google group announcement list which will go out on an as-needed basis; this will also look like an email. Michelle also mentioned the concept of an email chat list that would require a moderator which she is not considering for now. She is looking to create a structure that is easily replicable and durable. Calendar and website updates will be done on an ongoing basis. We are all hoping that this will improve communication. These changes will be first announced in the September Newsletter. Michelle will also post on Facebook after Labor

Day. She noted we will eventually be looking for people to help with Social Media and Marketing.

50th Anniversary of the creation of FPUU Canton – Don Seaman noted finding a plaque on side of the Sanctuary commemorating the merger resulting in the formation of First Parish Unitarian Universalist Canton in July of 1974. It was noted that this should be honored at some point.

Recap of Follow-up Items prior to next meeting:

- Develop process for handling cash donations at events. (who?)
- Think about what the Dignity Fund policy should be. (All)
- Michelle to circulate summary notes from retreat to Dave Bryant, Tom Hanold, Dick Mezger, Dave Biggers, Felisa White, and Laurie Burkhardt.
- Kitty to write an article for the September Newsletter laying out information about Parish Committee meetings including policy and where to find out when/where they are.
- Others who are contributing to the September Newsletter to send their write-ups to Barbara Casaly and Michelle by Friday. (Larry Treasurer's report, Kitty Welcome, Dave Vision Mission report, Jim Music Notes, Jonette Clerk's report)
- Don to call together with Dave a meeting of the Congregational Life and Stewardship Ministry with Debbie, Larry, and Barbara Foley.
- Finalize repair of sanctuary roof. (Kitty)
- Debbie to reach out to Nancy Devine and Susan Johnson to set up a time to start review the membership list.
- Michelle to send Debbie the last version of membership list used for the annual meeting vote which is incorrect in not including Annie Holden as a member.
- Arrange for celebration of Golden Anniversary of FPUU Canton. (who?)

Next Meeting of the Parish Committee:

In general, Parish Committee meetings will be held on the second Wednesday of the month at 7:15PM on Zoom. The next meeting will be Wednesday, September 11th.

Closing Words:

Michelle read the closing words.

Hopefulness in Bad Times

from "You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train" by Howard Zinn page 208

To be hopeful in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty, but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness.

What we choose to emphasize in this complex history will determine our lives. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and

places—and there are so many—where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act, and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction.

And if we do act, in however small a way, we don't have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live *now* as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory.

Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 8:46 PM.

Minutes prepared, and respectfully submitted, by Jonette Nagai, Parish Committee Clerk