

First Parish Cambridge Governing Board Minutes
Special Meeting, Sunday, April 3, 2022, 2-3:30 pm
(Virtual meeting via Zoom)

Present: Governing Board Members and invited members of the Governance Advisory Committee and

Jan Puibello, Chair	Tod Hibbard, Member at Large
Sylvia Wheeler, Vice-Chair	Julia Gallogly, Member at Large
Cade Murray, Treasurer	Rev. Adam Lawrence Dyer, Lead Minister
Carolyn White, Clerk	Rashid Shaikh, Governance Advisory Committee
Gloria Korsman, Past Board Chair	Grace Hall, Governance Advisory Committee
Jane Stabile, Member at Large	Nina Lytton: Governance Advisory Committee

Attendees from the Strategic Planning Committee: Josh Sheldon, Monica Bueno

Attendees from the Project Development Team: Cynthia Hibbard (advisor to), Cushing Giesing, Susan Shepard

◆ AGENDA:

- Opening/ Introduction (10 min.)- What are you bringing to this meeting?
(3 words)
- Perspectives from Rev. Adam (20 min.)
- Break (5 min.)
- Key Questions For Leaders (Discussion) (30 min.)
- Proposal/Discussion (15 min.)
- Next Steps (5 min.)
- Closing (5 min.)

Introduction

- Goals of this meeting: Identify the need for a more comprehensive process.

◆ MATERIALS

- Adam's Fantasy Mission Statement.docx
- Anatomy of a Revived Church – last chapter.pdf (by Thom Rainer)
- April 3 Resources.docx
- Future of First Parish in Cambridge.pdf

A recording of the Zoom is available on the Google Drive via the link sent by Jan Puibello on

- **Opening/ Introduction (10 min.)- Rev Adam Dyer opened the meeting. The first order of business was to answer this question:**

**What are you bringing to this meeting?
(3 words)**

Each person offered 3 words: Joy, Curiosity, Hope, Possibility, Optimism, Anticipation, Love, Excitement, Inquisitiveness, Commitment, Concern, Trust, Experience, Community, Interest, Caring, Positive Outlook, Sense of Wider Community, Conviction for Possibilities, History, Perspective, Love for the congregation, Love for the Building, Possibility, Gratitude for all of us, Trust.

- **Perspectives from Rev. Adam (20 min.)**

Rev. Adam mentioned that one word keeps coming up: "Isolation" or "Siloed Communities" [within First Parish in Cambridge]. "People participate in what interests them but there is not a concerted effort to bring them together; there is not history of comprehensive collaboration. One of the major issues we are facing is that our future will require significant financial investment in the building. We need to partner with someone and this partnering process will be new and a new kind of presence for us. My desire is to break the "isolation". We are all aiming at the same goal but how can we concretely hold that? These thoughts were motivated by my meetings with Leggat McCall (Mahmood Malihi). My job-function touches on everything and what everyone does.

There are some hard questions and a Proposal: a proposal for a TimeLine and Next Steps. "

GOALS of the Meeting

- Identify the need for a more comprehensive process.
- Accessing important resources. Partners for Sacred Places; and, Thom Rainer, a Christian pastor with very smart perspectives.
- Form a team for this specific moment. (Have we owned publicly, as a group, that this is like a Ministerial search?)

- Hire an experienced consultant.
- See “Partners for Sacred Spaces” and Thom Rainer as helpful resources, and other useful resources.

PERSPECTIVES- 1 from REV ADAM

Observations:

1. Physical: The building is deteriorating. It is 189 yrs old: it has outlived its original design by lasting 140 yrs. longer than it was supposed to. It was built out of wood to be easier to replace.
2. Physical: need to keep it standing and bring it up modern standards. Bathrooms need to be updated.
3. Finances: It will be costly to update and we don't have enough money to just fix it.

MISSION:

Rev Adam feels it is too broad. What do we do and how do we do it?

There are resources around “Mission”. The Strategic Planning Committee has been working on this as well. Rev Adam shared his own “ Fantasy Mission” in the Meeting Materials.

RESOURCES: Repairing, renovating the building will be costly and the Project Management Team can share the cost details. Rev Adam pointed out that finances are not the only resource. Staff is also a resource. Currently, the staff are stretched thin, particularly Adam and Carol. Streamlining and clearly defining the project will better utilize the staff.

The size of our endowment compared with the number of people engaged in the community. “It is a hard equation to see.” We have 148 pledging units but on any given Sunday, there are only 40-60 people engaged on Zoom. Add another 20 or 30 children and parents: we are still at “Family” size in terms of engagement.

IDENTITY: What are the connections between the different identities? Elders and families, single people and married people. What are we doing to make that more present?

PERSPECTIVES-2: Current directions/ trends

-Inside: Rev Adam said there is some growing energy around making church. “Today [April 3] was an example of people coming together in our beautiful space. It is also apparent that it is a consistent core of people. What is the actual energy of the congregation at large to make changes? Is it sustainable for what we wish to do? “

-Outside: Rev Adam knows of 33 ministers who have left parishes during this pandemic. There has been a lot of anxiety around this time. One said, “I didn't sign up for this. I am leaving.”

PERSPECTIVES-3 Outside Observers:

-Structural – David Torrey, architect; Jeff Lussier: Owner's Project Manager

Rev. Adam said it has been informative to talk with them. They have a lot of hope for what we want to do and where we want to go. They have contributed helpful info about possibilities for the building.

They ask, “What works? What IS First Parish in Cambridge?” For Rev Adam, it has been revealing to answer those tough questions.

PERSPECTIVES-4 Inside Observers

The Board: has been deeply engaged and immensely engaged.

The Project Management Team: has been moving forward with what it can achieve. I am inspired by that impulse that “we can get this done”.

Living Our Spirituality- the Strategic Planning Team: they have been discussing this but are clearly waiting for next steps.

The Staff: They feel overwhelmed and are unclear about their role.

KEY QUESTIONS-1

Rev. Adam raises these Questions knowing that they are difficult.

1. We need to separate the actual from aspirational – what are our myths?
2. Who is First Parish in Cambridge? What is our demographic now?
3. What does First Parish in Cambridge do? What are we actually doing?
Can we name them? It needs to be actual, not aspirational.
4. What motivates First Parish in Cambridge? And to that end, what is the “why”, our *raison d’etre*?

KEY QUESTIONS-2

Rev. Adam is sharing Qs he is asking himself as he explores what he does:

What does it mean to be a _____ at First Parish in Cambridge?

Family?

Elder?

Single?

Young Adult?

Couple?

Person of Color?

Pagan, Buddhist, atheist, theist, seeker, etc.? :

Newcomer?

KEY QUESTIONS-3 Here are the tough Qs:

The toughest ones...Is FPC viable? What parts are thriving?

Hardest one of all: Is FPC dying or dead?

What is the purpose of continuing to be “First Parish in Cambridge”?

These are Qs many organizations and parishes are asking themselves.

Rev. Adam recognizes that we can’t answer these Qs alone. There are resources we can and need to use. This is a unique time in all churches.

Two sources that Rev Adam has found to be very useful and urges us to look at them:

- Thom Rainer:

- Partners for Sacred Places

1st resource: Thom Rainer has “Seven Characteristics of a Revived Church” (and Adam asks how they relate to FPC):

Seven Characteristics of a Revived church:

- Accepting Responsibility-- (How has the church owned its path to where it is today?)
- Overcoming the Traps of Traditions -- (Are we actually open to change?)
- Expanding the Scorecard -- (What are our metrics for success as a church?)
- Committing to Powerful Prayer -- (How committed to Unitarian Universalism are we?)
- Dealing with Toxins-- (Are there histories, behaviors, etc. that have hindered our health?)
- Seeking Silver Bullets No More-- (Do we look to one thing or person to be the “answer”?)
- Creating Meaningful Membership-- (Why do people care about being in our community?)

2nd resource: Transitioning Older and Historic Sacred Places- Community-Minded Approaches for Congregations and Judicatories (from Partners for Sacred Places)

There are hard Qs but worth hearing.

The next questions are ones that Rev Adam would like a Team to work on:

Here is the Framework for a Decision-making Process:

- Form the Team
- Information gathering
- Evaluation
- Reflection
- Decision
- Action/Implementation

GROUP REFLECTION on Rev Adam’s Questions

Q1-4: What are our myths? Who are we? What does FPC do? What are FPC identities?

Some of the answers were:

“One of the myths is that we are the FPC as it was 20 years ago except it is not 20 years ago and the world is different; there are so many more transitional people, so many more students...What we are experiencing is what we have gone through in the past 2 years with the pandemic, Covid-19. My point is we are not what we were 20 years ago and we need to not mourn or idealize the past.”

1.“I hear people say it was a congregation that rallied around the minister, there were a lot of social justice efforts, a lot of music, a very active church; there was a lot going on. That is what attracted me to FPC. That is the image I have of it. I wasn’t there at that time, though.”

2.“ I was a different person 20 years ago. We have to be open to comparing us to 20 years ago. Who are we now? We are touching the elephant in different places. It’s all true because it is true for them.”

3.“I think it is true about the pandemic and it has changed a lot of things. There is also a myth that it has changed everything. I think some of it has roots that go further back than two years.

What does FPC do? This is hard to put in words. I think our myths about how effective we are is bigger than what we are actually able to do. We are not as effective as we could/should be. “

4. Thank you for asking these provocative questions and we need to grapple with them. The myths: the comments about the staff being overwhelmed; we feel similarly. One of the myths is that if we sit back, someone else will take care of it. For the repairs here and there to the building, our endowment has covered if for the smaller membership. I look forward to finding a map forward.

5. My concerns: we have had energy for projects but we haven’t been able to go forward because there are not enough people. There are people who are in the congregation but what do they need to achieve the goals we have? Who are the people who are not members but wish to get involved? How do we invite them in?

Rev Adam: I want people of the Harvard community to be able to feel connected to the Congregation. I do think we should go out and recruit! I have no qualms about being a UU evangelist on the Harvard campus. But what are we inviting them to?

6. A few thoughts: Is our church immortal? I haven’t been a member too long but there is something about the history that makes me feel like this is a rock that will always be here. Wait a minute? Won’t it be here forever? Before the pandemic: are these issues stemming from before? Yes, 2 things: When [our Team] started thinking about strategy: we think there is reluctance about change. And we kept hearing: Who are we?

The issue of not having a clear identity is problematic. What is our collective spirituality? When we have clarity around that, it will be easier. We need to figure out reluctance to change and “who are we?”

7. Rev Adam mentioned Aspiration vs. Actual and I hear what we are saying: the community is smaller than 20 years ago but I think the structure is very important in all that. Our building is a beacon, which connects to the community and has potential to serve the community as a gathering place, supporting each other, Y2Y, Tuesday Meals, and what we do for our community and for the larger community. The building is so important for that. Make it look like we care about it. The building right now is turning people away. It may be pragmatic but I think we need to use the resources we have...

8. My dream is to have Rev Adam’s name on the front of the building.

[Rev. Adam: “A place to write it properly and people to see it as they come in. I hear you!

To be called to this pulpit is a huge honor. I would love that! I recognize that there is some nuts and bolts work to be done so that there are actual people coming in to see it.

This gets to one of those Qs. Please read these materials, particularly *Partners for Sacred Places*. Is my name on the church going to answer the challenges we face? Will it help us?”]

Q5-6: Is FPC VIABLE? How?

Is FPC DYING? In part, in total, if so, why? If not, why?

[Rev. Adam: “I had to ask myself these baseline Qs to have this meeting.”]

1. I think if we look objectively and I am saying this with love, it is alarming to me that we don't have a pipeline of new members. During the pandemic, we didn't have a sign that said, "Join us on Zoom". So I am alarmed by the issue of viability.

Rev. Adam: I really appreciate that. Today's chat featured something: What is FPC doing about Ukraine? I have been presented many times with "FPC should do ..." I am trying to just do church on Sundays. Can someone step up to do something about Ukraine because I want to do it too!"

2. You said it nicely: "Who is going to do it?" People have to step up. You didn't make anyone feel bad but you made your point.

3. Two things: About Ukraine: As a POC, Ukraine is a trigger point for me. On the Qs, as I see it, the building sits on top of me like an 800lb gorilla. What about **with** our building? And what about **without** our building?

4. I appreciate these Qs. They are not difficult to answer: FPC IS dying and we have a smaller imprint on the community. Even more telling is that if you need to ask the Q, then yes, it is dying. It is like a beloved relative in their declining years but I feel like it is a slow decline and I think it can be reversed. We need to be aware of it. We need to think of it in those terms. This meeting is a fantastic way to start that process.

Rev Adam hopes that we can research carefully, read different resources but it needs a team dedicated to answering these questions to help us move forward. It needs a team as important as a ministerial search committee.

Financial options need to be explored more in-depth including financing and sale of development rights, etc.

Rev Adam presented his ideal Timeline and Benchmarks, based on "Partners for Sacred Places" book:

-April: Call to Action (this meeting)

I would love to see a monthly meeting that engages these Qs and these processes.

-May: Read, gather and discuss guiding resources and identity members of the Team(5-6 people) ;

Define the process going forward; Prep to present to congregation for the June Annual Congregational Meeting.

-June: Important to engage the community such as Harvard and the Historic Commission.

Have a presentation at the Annual Meeting.

July: A break in July.

-August: Confirm community partners; Asset management is crucial. Rev Adam hopes we will engage Leggat McCall. They know a lot about Harvard and the potential to partner with Harvard.

-September: Asset mapping and walk-through with Community Partners and get their feedback.

-October: Update the Congregation

-November: another meeting with the Congregation

-December: a break

- January 2023: Initial meeting with potential partners.

COMMENTS from Board and other attendees:

1. We need to be financially viable and be viable as a Community. The building needs to a place we are proud of and works for our different activities. This isa given but how do we get that Community we aim for?
2. My other comment is that if people come up with ideas but are always told "go do it", they will be discouraged. We need a place to put "ideas".
3. I see a strong community even if people take it "off-campus".

4. I think the entrance needs to be welcoming. Let's put up scaffolding so people can see we are doing something. Right now we are organized not to grow. Being more diverse might be uncomfortable for some people. A pipeline for new members was mentioned and that we don't have one. If we want to matter, we have to think about those who are not our members. It's an opportunity to include them sooner rather than later.
5. Something haunting me, if we weren't the UU congregation in Harvard Sq, then we wouldn't BE the UU in Harvard Sq. With our endowment, we could be somewhere else. My question: Are we, or not, the UU congregation in Harvard Sq?
6. About Harvard Sq. For me, a spiritual community does not have to be in Harvard Sq. It has advantages and disadvantages. My ID as a member of FPC is as separate from Harvard Sq. Harvard Sq does not mean a lot to me .
7. Our theological ancestors brought the first big wave of colonizers to the Turtle Island. We have a responsibility to that history. I feel very connected to that history and to justice-making for that history. UU is a living tradition. We are introspecting and changing. We could be continuing on with that but we also operate like it doesn't matter.

[Rev Adam: "This Q. of connection to history. We talk about it but what do we do about it. Are we doing anything with our history? What are we doing with the MA Wampanoag? Native cultures? What is the congregation doing? What are the opportunities for that?"]

8. I wish to endorse the line of thinking that our history is a great asset. We are entwined with our history. We don't bring up our history with slavery. William Brattle and his slave Cecily and before that. The silver Dummer Bowl was given to us by William Brattle. It is worth a lot. I refer to that as the "Reparations Bowl". I would like a discussion about slavery and our church. We will never escape our history.

[Rev. Adam: Harvard will release a large report on Harvard and Slavery. We will hear a lot more on that.]
 Rev. Adam shared his screen of his "Fantasy First Parish Mission Statement". Statement (see separate Word document)

Rev Adam said that this is what we do and couldn't we put MORE energy into it?

His "Ask" is that we form a team of people who come together to focus on this and who can steer us in a direction. Without it, we will not be any further along.

This team would pull from a broad base of stakeholders. It has a deadline. It has a mandate and an endgame. It is immersive for that period of time as the group meets, researches, and crafts their message. The team is composed of people who are actively invested in the future of the congregation. Gloria mentioned, for reference, that if this is similar to a Ministerial Search Team, it would be drawn from the Nominations committee and thus it is accountable to the Congregation. She said it doesn't need to be a call for Nominations but that is a way to do it.

Rev Adam asked us to meet again in a month and do some research on our own of what other UU Congregations. Could we plan a May meeting of this same group after reading some of my resources and doing your own research?

Jan thanked Adam for helping us to think about how to remold, to refit ourselves. She thanked the Board, mentioning that these are hard questions but these conversations are really important. We need to face these questions.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:35 PM.
 Respectfully submitted,
 Carolyn White, Clerk

Approved by the Governing Board on April 19, 2022
 Carolyn White, Clerk