

First Parish Cambridge Governing Board Minutes
September 19, 2023 at 7PM
(Virtual meeting via Zoom)

Present: Governing Board Members 2022-23

Cade Murray, Chair	Sylvia Wheeler, Past Board Chair
Tod Hibbard, Vice-Chair	Rev. Rob Hardies, Contract Minister 2022-23
Jane Stabile, Member at Large	Rich Lawson, Clerk
Nina Lytton, Member at Large	Grace Hall, Governance Advisory Committee
Patrick Sullivan, Member at Large	

Regrets: Carol Lewis and Lindsay Lucke

Also Attending:

Rashid Shaikh - Ministerial Search Committee

Karin Lin and Charlene Galarneau for the RET agenda item

Dara Bayer (Co-director of Cambridge HEART) and Lois Markham for the HEART agenda item

Chalice Lighting & Check in – Sylvia Wheeler on behalf of Nina Lytton

The Chalice Lighting was a Poem, *Continuum*, by Simon J. Ortiz

The check-in prompt was: What is our shared responsibility to our Cambridge Community?

Consent Agenda – Cade Murray

A motion to approve the consent agenda was made by Tod Hibbard. The motion was seconded by Jane Stabile and then approved unanimously.

Racial Equity Team (RET) update to the Board – Karin Lin and Charlene Galarneau

The RET members expressed gratitude for the history of support from the board. There are now nine regular members of the RET: Karin Lin, Charlene Galareneau, Rashid Shaikh, Nina Lytton, Lois Markham, Siobhan Bredin, Susan Leslie, Margaret Drury, and Elizabeth Kline. The RET has recently acted as an incubator for new working groups: e.g., the Slavery Legacy group; and Cambridge HEART. It is also an incubator for leadership, as evidenced by the number of RET members who have gone on to the Board.

The team mentioned several activities being planned. Karin Lin won the bidding for a sermon by Rev. Rob, so there will be an antiracism sermon in February. RET might host a conversation after the service. There is a potential common book read being discussed - *A fire at the Center* by Karen Van Fossan (not out in print yet; should be Oct 2023). Karin and Charlene are both planning to transition out of leadership from RET.

Sylvia Wheeler added that she is participating in the Slavery History Legacy group, and that it has a tremendous amount of energy. Siobhan Bredin will do a play about this on the 22nd of Oct. She is beginning to work with Jennifer Goodman about getting RE engaged.

Rev. Rob also mentioned that Dr. Dave Ragland is leading a project about reparations as a spiritual practice and a practice of justice.

Rashid Shaikh noted that Elizabeth Kline is a member of the group, too. She is working on communications so that there is sufficient visibility about the program across the parish.

Cambridge HEART - Dara Bayer, one of the two co-directors of HEART

Dara Bayer joined the meeting at that point to provide information about HEART. She started by outlining progress that the group has made since Stephanie Guirand's presentation in June of 2022. HEART has hired and trained seven responders to launch HEART's community-based safety program. The responders are currently doing non-emergency response work: mutual aid needs; interpersonal violence; support going to court; support with transportation for medical appointments, etc. There have been over 60 primary requests from the community. The HEART team has also led work on outreach and mutual aid. Over 1000 people have been touched so far: giving away coats; young people's program about alternative response; etc.

The team is also developing infrastructure for a "warm line" as one step toward mobile crisis response. They are aiming to have that operational in 2 months. By early 2024, they hope to have a van, which will provide the mobility needed for crisis response. As they continue to make progress, they are also aiming to be realistic about what can be done with the limited resources currently available.

Their resources have grown modestly, recently. They did secure \$300k in ARPA funds from the city. They do not, though, have a long-term contract with the city. The city is developing its own Community Safety Department, which does have funding. The City Council passed two resolutions supporting HEART, but negotiations have proven difficult. This is one way in which First Parish parishioners may be able to help - providing political support.

Nina Lytton asked about the philosophy of HEART regarding the Cambridge police. Dara Bayer noted that this is part of a big question: "what is safety?" She noted that for many communities, the police are not safe for them. HEART is committed to offering another option that is separate from the carceral system. She offered to discuss this in more detail in another setting that provided more time for discussion.

Sylvia Wheeler indicated that the Board is very supportive conceptually, but has practical questions about how this would work.

Tod Hibbard referred to the original letter from HEART asking for endorsement, which referred to "the Monday Coalition".

Dara Bayer explained that the Monday Coalition group started 3 years ago as a means of being transparent with the community. The participants in the meeting include: HEART members, local activists, city officials, and anyone with an interest. The group is now meeting every other Monday. Some FPC members have been attending that meeting for more than a year (Rich Lawson and Alison Altman). Dara Bayer offered to send a list of organizations that have already endorsed HEART, since that overlaps with the organizations that participate in these meetings.

Cade Murray said that there is a strong desire from FPC to *support* HEART, including from Marc McGovern. The idea of a formal endorsement is less clear, since it isn't obvious exactly what that means. First Parish also wants to avoid impacting its relationship with the police or other parts of the city government.

Dara Bayer said that she was open to continuing to talk about safety, and other topics related to HEART.

She shared her email (dara@cambridge-heart.org) so Board members could contact her.

When Dara Bayer left the call, Cade Murray said that he would work with Rich Lawson and Lois Markham on our own statement to be specific about what we want to say rather than nebulous "endorsement".

Jane Stabile remembered that Carol Lewis had some hesitation when the Board discussed HEART in a previous meeting. Cade Murray indicated that he would discuss that with Carol outside the meeting, since Carol was not able to attend this Board meeting.

Board Priorities

1. Ministerial Transition

Tod Hibard led this update. Several other members of the search committee were also present, including Rashid Shaikh.

The search committee is aiming to add a younger person on the committee, ideally someone with someone with a child in RE. So far they have had no success. They will continue to try.

The committee has been very active with communication. They have sent two letters to all parishioners describing plans and progress. They have also held two in-person congregational meetings. In those meetings they explained what development ministry is, and had breakout groups for more detailed discussions. They also developed an online form for feedback, which has received a number of comments.

The next step is to organize focus groups through the month of October. The groups will include: people of color, people who participate in services online, past chairs of board, representatives of the music program and the RE program.

Another congregational conversation will be held in mid-Oct, which will be followed by a special board meeting to prioritize down to the top 4-5 themes. This will then be communicated back to the congregation to confirm that their messages were heard.

All of this will generate important material for the congregational record. This form will be available from the UUA on Dec. 1. We want to be ready to submit that document on the 1st. Once the congregational record has been reviewed by UUA it will be shared with all ministers who are in search on the 1st of Jan. Between then and the end of March, there will be a matchmaking process. Interviews with ministers are expected to be held in March so that it would be possible to extend an offer by the 1st of April.

2. Membership & Initial Church Year Experiences

Rev. Rob provided this update, and noted that most of the information was in his report. Karin Lin and Susan Shepherd are doing a great job welcoming newcomers. There has been a high volume of people passing through the newcomer table. Visitors are being recorded in Excel so that the team can do appropriate follow-up. There will be a new member orientation in October. Every new member will be invited to join Soul Matters in the fall. We now have the infrastructure in place to meet the demand that we are seeing. The next key question is whether visitors will keep coming back.

Cade Murray asked if anything else was needed from the Board. Rev Rob replied that everyone should try to connect with visitors each week. New folks need to meet more than just Rev. Rob, Karin, and Susan; we should all be greeters.

The board discussed ways to sustain the very positive start to the church year. This could include publicity, direct invitations (especially to people who haven't been in church for a few weeks), continued great sermons, continued great music (possibly including a full band more regularly).

The board also recognized that people are looking for connections and community. The more we can bring in spirituality (with lowercase s), the better we can address the struggles people are experiencing. This will need to be an ongoing discussion at future board meetings: "What would it mean to rebuild the church around the needs of our community.?"

3. Rebuilding the RE Program

Rev. Rob reported on the significant progress with the RE Program since last month. We have hired three very well qualified educators, which addresses all the open roles. There were 18 children on homecoming Sunday, which is more than we've had since the pandemic. There are also 18 children registered for the RE program. Parents have taken us up on the offer of early childcare.

Rev Rob thanked Cade Murrnan and Grace Hall for all their help getting the space ready during the summer.

Building Project and other Improvements

Sylvia Wheeler provided this update. She indicated that there is now more clarity about when the scaffolding will come down in early November. This will be an opportunity to make a statement to the broader community: we now look different; we are back from COVID. There is not much time, so it will be important to prepare a plan.

Cade Murray said how impressed he was with the progress; it seemed like a great challenge to be at this point at the beginning of the calendar year.

Digital Archiving of FP Records Update

Rich Lawson provided an update following a meeting with two people from the digital archives group at Harvard Divinity School. They can set up the infrastructure for us for both entry and retrieval. It will be simplest to start digital archiving with the same content that we have been archiving in print form. Over time we can augment that with additional material. The HDS staff suggested that we consider things like photos of events, a snapshot of our web site, etc.

Sylvia Wheeler agreed that this could be a rich topic, and worthy of more conversation. Oral history can be valuable, especially with the people in our congregation who have had colorful lives. [Recording these stories could be an intergenerational RE opportunity.]

Grace Hall suggested that we now begin to archive letters from the board to the congregation. Since it won't require printing, it will be relatively quick and easy to include this type of material.

The board provided unanimous agreement to proceed with digital archiving as discussed: starting with the current list of information, and bolstering that over time.

Italian Pasta Night

Grace Hall asked whether wine could be served at Italian Pasta Night, which is coming up in a couple of weeks. By tradition, the Board has to approve requests for wine to be served on premises (though this is not in the bylaws.)

Jane Stabile moved to approve wine at this event. The motion was seconded by Patrick Sullivan. No objections.

The agenda item "COVID testing for FP events" was deferred.

The meeting was Adjourned at 9pm

*Note: Chalice lighting/check-in monthly rotation – Proposed 2023-2024
August: October: Lindsay, November: Jane, December: Patrick,*

January: Tod, February: Rich, March: Lindsay, April: Nina, May: Jane, June: Patrick. (Sylvia is a substitute as needed)

Addendum - List of organizations that have endorsed Cambridge HEART

Material Aid and Advocacy Program

Sunrise Cambridge

Cambridge DSA

APTP/MHFfirst

The Democracy Center

Muslim Justice League

White Bird Clinic

YWCA Cambridge

Cambridge Residents Alliance

SURJ Boston

Our Revolution Cambridge

blackyard

Cambridge DSA

Transition House

Amistad Law Project

Jewish Voice for Peace-Boston

Green Cambridge

Good Bank

Resource Generation Boston

Y2Y Network, Inc.

Kavod Boston

IMPACT Boston

Traprock Center for Peace and Justice

Citizens for Juvenile Justice

Safe Medford

Families for Justice as Healing (FJAH)

Justice For Housing Inc

Raheem

Black and Pink MA