

Parish Committee Minutes

First Parish Unitarian Universalist of Arlington

January 21, 2025 7 - 9 pm

Via Zoom

John Anderson, Anne Quaadgras, Al Tosti, Susan Moore, Joanna Pushee, Carolyn Hodges, Steve McMullin, Kate Tranquada.

Ministers: Rev Marta Flanagan (Lead Minister), Rev Erica Richmond (Parish Minister), Rev. Stevie Carmody (Minister of Religious Education); and Rev. Tricia Brennan (Adjunct Minister)

Guests: Lissa McBurney and John Galantowicz (Finance Committee), Amy Speare and Joel Carlton-Gysan (Stewardship Committee)

7:03 **Call to Order** (John A.)

7:04 **Reading and Chalice Lighting (Carolyn)**
Two minutes of silence

7:10 **State of First Parish (Rev. Marta)**

- Flag dedication Sunday 1/19: First Parish congregants and ministers marked the raising of the US flag together with the pride progress flag in love and defiance.
- Rev. Erica's last sermon before her leave
- Rev. Tricia's first sermon with us this term as adjunct minister while Rev. Erica is on leave.

Rev. Marta Flanagan remarked on how many shifts we as a people and the leadership of First Parish have been dealing with: the presidential shift with a new administration; our changing sense with ourselves: needing to play the role of active dissenters; a sense of a "new role" as witnessing to our liberal values, and more. First Parish congregants are holding a lot at once.

Rev. Marta Flanagan mentioned her retirement as a shift, along with Rev. Erica's parental leave. The congregation is also planning the budget for the next fiscal year. Rev. Tricia Brennan has arrived and is providing pastoral and ministerial support, delivering sermons, and taking on parts of Rev. Erica's portfolio.

State of the Parish (Rev. Erica Richmond, Parish Minister):

- Rev. Erica expressed gratitude as the Parish Committee continues to support the transitions that Rev. Marta mentioned.
- Rev. Erica expressed gratitude to folks who have been figuring out the state of Massachusetts medical leave, and bonding leave paperwork. She shared a document for the Committee on Ministry in the chat box of Zoom and reviewed Rev. Tricia's role as point person.
- Rev Erica will not be checking email for 15 weeks.
- If any deaths or pastoral emergencies occur: that news would come through Rev. Marta to Rev Erica directly; a plan would be formed if outreach is needed.
- Rev. Erica plans to send two updates through Rev. Marta and the First Parish office. First, an announcement of the baby: "here is who First Parish gets to meet!" The other update will be around March to say all is well. Rev. Erica is happy to receive cards. Rev. Erica is well-supported: she and her spouse live near both sets of in-laws.
- Rev. Tricia and Rev. Erica have met to go over Rev. Erica's portfolio: Membership, Social Justice, and Lay Ministers.
- As a note: the Stewardship Committee is not in Rev. Tricia's current portfolio. Lay leaders are stepping up.
- Rev. Erica expressed that she will genuinely miss everyone at First Parish while she is on leave.

The vice-chair of the Parish Committee, John Anderson, expressed gratitude to Rev. Erica, on behalf of the Parish Committee.

State of the Parish (Rev. Tricia Brennan, Adjunct Minister):

- Observations (after one week):
 - Rev. Tricia Brennan has felt incredibly welcomed and put at ease in a genuine way. She has felt seen.
 - Rev. Tricia has been struck by the level of activity at First Parish! She cannot yet wrap her head around all of the activity! It's big, broad, deep and it feels layered. First Parish is an engaged congregation.
 - People know what they are doing. The staff has answers. Folks in leadership are doing well: it's a well-functioning place.
- Aspirations: This adjunct period marks Rev. Tricia's fourth time coming into a congregation due to a leave or sabbatical.
 - It is one of Rev. Tricia's aspirations to support colleagues, in this case, Rev. Erica. It means a lot to come in, to support Rev. Erica. The aspiration is to allow Rev. Erica to slide back in when she returns.
 - Rev. Tricia is excited that she gets to work with Rev. Marta Flanagan. Rev. Tricia's hope is to be a good colleague.

- Rev. Tricia would like to be a ballast in the moving waters and provide groundedness in this living, liberal institution.

Rev. Tricia expressed praise and gratitude for the really hard work of the lay leaders of First Parish.

MOTION 1: I move that we approve the designation of \$18,200 for Rev. Tricia Brennan's housing allowance from within her contract total, for 2025. (Carolyn) Seconded (Joanna). 8 of 8 in favor. None opposed.

AGREEMENT TO REMOVE THREE NAMES FROM MEMBERSHIP.

Each year, the clerk of First Parish receives a list of names of members who appear to be inactive. The clerk first reaches out to the ministers, Parish Committee Executive, and sometimes other lay leaders to confirm that the individuals on the inactive membership list do appear inactive. The clerk then sends letters to the individuals and follows up with email and/or phone calls to find out if these members are feeling connecting to First Parish, or if it is the time to be removed from the membership rolls. According to the bylaws, there is a requirement that three attempts must be made before removing a member's name.

Inactive membership list - no response after at least three attempts:

Jennifer Nelson

Lili Silva

Glenn McElhoe

MOTION 2: I move to remove the following names from the official membership roll of First Parish UU Arlington in accordance with the bylaws: Jennifer Nelson, Lili Silva, and Glenn McElhoe. (Joanna) Seconded (Al T.) 8 of 8 in favor.

The clerk will work with the Office Manager to remove these three names from the membership rolls. The clerk will work with the Stewardship Committee regarding these individuals and the former members who requested that they be removed from the rolls.

7:25 Review of Financial reports & dashboard (Carolyn)

- December financials: Revenue

First Parish is showing as tracking a little bit below for pledges (seasonally adjusted). There were a few pledges which drifted into "other income" and the Treasurer and Office Manager confirmed that about \$3-4,000 is now accounted for. First Parish received two stock gifts at the end of December 2024.

- The Treasurer is getting confirmation on a few things which are not yet reflected for pledge income for December; these items will be reflected in January 2025. First Parish is at a 5% differential. Very tight, so First Parish is in good shape.

- The Treasurer asked if there were any questions on the revenue side.

Update on the tenant:

- The Treasurer will set up a check in (a 6-month check in) with the tenant, Adventures in Montessori (AIM). The check-in has been moved from January to February of 2025. The intention is to set a regular February/September or October schedule for routine checking.

Town of Arlington: Parking

- The Town has caught up on the parking rent payment.

Expenses:

First Parish spent less than was budgeted in all expense categories. It is expected that utilities will jump up a little with January and the cold weather. The new benefit schedule (revised) kicks in (as a reminder: 50% cost share for health). The variance that is seen in benefits should reduce between now and fiscal yearend. First Parish has had several employees take advantage of that benefit.

Some payroll adjustments are pending. Carolyn and Liz McKersey are following up and reviewing these adjustments. The Treasurer expressed gratitude on the flexibility of Rev. Marta. Much appreciated.

The Treasurer asked if there were any questions about expenses. Having none, the Treasurer noted that she is looking ahead and mentioned that forecasting is typically done in February. As the Parish Committee moves into the budget discussion, the Treasurer requested that the Parish Committee embrace a culture of abundance. First Parish is in a wonderful position for any religious organization: we are in great financial shape.

7:31 PM - Additional Committee members arrive (John Galantowicz, Amy Speare, and Joel Carlson-Gyson)

MOTION 3: I move that we adopt the consent agenda and documents as presented to the Parish Committee. (Carolyn) 8 of 8 Seconded. (Steve and Al) None opposed.

Clerk's note: Jeff Keffer had expressed support for motions two and three prior to the Parish Committee meeting in personal communication with the vice chair.

- 7:43 PM Budget development for FY '26 (Lissa McBurney)
- Review draft budget for FY26: major items & wish list
 - Identify which wish list items to prioritize and to focus on, especially for the stewardship campaign.
 - Ensure the budget will align with the stewardship campaign goal

The Finance Committee agreed to integrate the wishlist into the budget itself. The committee talked about cost drivers and ongoing business which typically always increases from year to year.

Modest increase for the Music Director over three years.

Some funds for care coverage in the coming fiscal year to roll in (the Finance Committee is no longer talking about these funds separately since they are business as usual)

Office expenses: Hardware to improve internet access; a mesh system (the Office Manager has some quotes on this); videos of the congregation to support the search for new settled minister; web page updates. These office and tech expenses will support First Parish in putting our best foot forward.

Contractor/consultant / bookkeeping - The Treasurer is working with staff and the bookkeeper to get an updated job description completed; once that is in place, there may be a request for more funding.

Property - maintenance / repair - offset by increased Trust contribution

There is a very small Religious Education increase. Wishlist item: Spirit Play Curriculum

Parish Committee had approved an organist and accompanist for the children's choir (the Music Committee integrated these in their budget); Music Committee is seeking to continue the organist and accompanist. Music Committee is also looking to add music files for musicians to use.

Racial Justice Coordinating Committee:

The majority of the line item shows \$5,000 for the Reckoning and Repair work. It was mentioned that this would be offered as a match of up to \$5000 for independent fundraising that their committee will do.

The Welcoming Committee (LGBTQIA+)

The Parish Committee had approved three years as a working group with an evaluation at the end of that term. This coming year of 25-26 will be that third year. The Welcoming Committee has requested to split the difference for this line item.

UU MASS ACTION: last year, there was a one-time approval. Because First Parish is getting so many services from UU Mass Action, this year it was requested that this amount become an ongoing contribution. (It was noted that whether the amount would be considered "dues" is another conversation).

For the total expenses for FY 2025-2026: the total is going up 4.85%. Half of that is salary, benefits, and personnel.

Office expenses (primarily one time) are another large expense. The rest of the expenses are widely spread for the rest of the budget after salary/benefits/personnel and the office expenses.

INCOME:

Both for capital reserve and the Wellington fund, the Finance Committee reported increases.

Religious Education rental fees show a modest increase in overall income.

This 25-26 year will be the last year for the Second Minister Fund.

One-time gifts: expected to go down.

Overall, First Parish's income is going to go up, but moderately. Expenses are also going up. Looking at a gap of \$82,000 total.

Questions from a Parish Committee member:

- How much of the office expenses is one-time rather than recurring? About \$5,000 for the videos, the standing request for website improvements to update pages and fix links; Treasurer and Finance Committee agree. It is about \$4,000 for the improvements for the internet throughout the building.
- The approximately \$82,000: Is that what the Parish Committee borrows from ourselves? This amount comes from the discretionary surplus, correct? The Treasurer confirmed, yes.

Amy Speare (Stewardship Committee): The Stewardship Committee has agreed to go for a goal of \$825,000 this year for the stewardship campaign. This is a 4% increase on last year. The last two years, we increase pledges about 5% over the prior year's actual pledges.

Gratitude was expressed by the Parish Committee for Lissa McBurney of the Finance Committee, to Carolyn Hodges as Treasurer, and to John Galantowicz for stepping into a finance role, and to all who had a hand in presenting the information.

8:00 Five minute break

8:05 Budget development (continued)

John A. reiterated the question about highlighting items to pull forward and asked the Parish Committee to discuss what to lift up; some things are critically important such as paying for our utilities; First Parish can stretch and have a successful campaign: First Parish has really good programs, well-supported staff. The campaign can allow us as a community to live into our mission.

A Parish Committee member inquired whether there is an expectation that before a new minister comes in, pledges would be down or not. The participation levels are a focus for the Stewardship Committee this year. Which information is available for trends?

Revs. Marta/Tricia - typically, there's a dip, but First Parish experienced an increase in the last year of the interim immediately before Rev. Marta came. In addition, Rev. Tricia noted the conventional wisdom is that it is not a time when a lot of new members join, but that is not always the case. Know that a dip is not unusual, but doesn't have to be that way.

A Parish Committee member said: As was mentioned before, First Parish continues to welcome more new members. There is new energy. New members came in during the fall of last year and continue to do so, along with newcomers in general. The contributions of new people count.

Another Parish Committee member said: Given the political and cultural climate, and the transition that First Parish has: we are investing in finding somebody who is going to be our next lead minister. We are investing in what comes next. Speaking to the budget process, First Parish is specifically investing in where the funds are going.

The Parish Committee has collected over 170 responses for the Charting a Course survey. The working group shepherding the data is looking at that and is sharing the information with the Stewardship Committee. Marc Jacobson will be looking at the data for Stewardship, which will help with talking points for visiting stewards.

The visiting stewards training meetings will be offered both in person and on Zoom.
Sat., Feb. 22, 3-4:30 pm in person, in The Parlor
Tues., Feb. 25, 7-8:30 pm on Zoom

The Parish Committee will share the Charting a Course data with the Stewardship Committee by February 2nd.

The Treasurer and the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) have a call scheduled regarding what to expect for salary offers for a new minister. First Parish would like to budget correctly for interim transition costs.

Reparations and music: Matching going on with potential of \$10,000 or more to re-distribute for reparations (Carolyn/Rev. Erica). Use the Giving First model. Money

gets distributed sooner rather than later in that model. Reckoning and Repair group is still deciding. Ability to spend the money still requires Parish Committee oversight.

UU Mass Action is a highlight. First Parish supports confronting oppression and providing pathways to justice.

Music, including the organist: First Parish has a continuing commitment to music. First Parish has a new music director in place. We are in a place and are fortunate to help him and the Music Committee. Lots of people are involved in music.

Website updates are a highlight because First Parish has the ability to attract and engage with the best candidates through improvements in the website.

A question from a Parish Committee member about the tenant was posed: Is there a sense of how our tenant is doing financially?

The Treasurer reported that Adventures in Montessori has the highest rating that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts gives. The tenant did some building renovations in the meeting house and can increase enrollment. There is a recommendation that the Parish Committee commit to a standing meeting with a representative from Parish Committee in attendance with the Officer Manager of First Parish. It would be a great support to the fabulous Office Manager. A lesson learned from the previous tenant is to have more frequent check-ins. The Office Manager has been fantastic redirecting the tenant to the lease. It was agreed that Al Tosti would check in sometime in February.

Rev Erica thanked the Finance Committee for pushing for and highlighting / challenging all of us. There was the big congregational vote in May 2024 and First Parish voted to support the Reckoning and Repair affirmation. The working group would jump at the chance and be encouraged by the institutional commitment.

Rev Erica spoke about UU Mass Action: the Social Justice Committee voted to be a congregational partner with them already. They are partnering to do fundraising with them. Partnerships with area churches have emerged. Legislative action within the Commonwealth of Massachusetts includes Action Days where people get help calling state representatives. Advocacy Days are also scheduled and UUs come together at the state house to lobby in person. A vigil on the lawn for the right to shelter also included youth.

If you have received Maryglens's visiting stewards email message, please reply. The Stewardship Committee would love the Parish Committee's help and support.

Rev. Marta underscored that the participation of the Parish Committee members is a strong backbone to the visiting stewards program and efforts.

Point of clarification: A Parish Committee member asked if the December message had gone out and the thank you notes for your gifts of the past year. They are two separate

things. The Stewardship Committee sent the thank you cards for previous participation and gifts in the January communication. The December one is done by the Treasurer and the Office Manager, along with support from the communications associate. Those communications will go out by the end of January.

Interim Minister Search Committee (ISC)

The Parish Committee needs to assist with a write-up for the Stewardship Committee to provide information on the process of finding an interim minister. The goal is to answer people's queries while the Stewardship campaign is happening. There will be a document in the Stewardship Committee Google shared drive. The Parish Committee expects that the interim person will be with First Parish for two years. In that first year, the selection of the settled minister will be a priority. The goal would be to have a new lead minister in place in the fall of 2027.

The ISC has been selected by the Parish Committee and has been introduced to the congregation during a worship service. The identities of the members of the committee are available and they are hard at work. The congregation would be able to learn about the identity of an interim minister sometime after the Annual Meeting.

The interim minister is hired by the Parish Committee based on a recommendation by the search committee.

The settled minister is called at an all-congregation meeting.

The process of hiring an interim lead is the same process as searching and hiring the minister or director of religious education, the adjunct minister, and our parish minister. A Search committee is formed; the Parish Committee will hear from the search committee. The Parish Committee will vote whether to hire that person.

The Stewardship Committee asked who the point person or people are and was directed to Parish Committee Executive.

Investment of families and youth

To add to the highlights of what to pull forward during the Stewardship Campaign: the children and youth of the parish, the service trip, and all the good work religious education does. Rev. Stevie has been instrumental in supporting, along with the new music director, Daniel Parsley.

Rev. Stevie added that lifting up the religious education program fosters raising children with UU values, contributes back to the community, and that the choir and December service project are huge. In terms of lay ministry, people who are isolated from First Parish were visited and the visits were very well-received. Kids were able to get involved in the wider ministry of the congregation.

The game night was really fun! Upcoming event is line dancing! - it's the night of the Parish Committee daytime retreat Sat., Feb. 1.

Our First Parish potlucks. Hosted by various committees.

Lots to celebrate. Gratitude expressed by all!

8:15 Stewardship Campaign Planning (Amy Speare & Joel Carlton-Gysan, Stewardship)

- Finalize the financial goal for the stewardship campaign: \$825,000

Overwhelming consensus by the Parish Committee to go for the proposed goal of \$825,000 for the stewardship campaign.

8:50 - Amy, Joel, Lissa, and John G - left the Parish Committee meeting. The Parish Committee expressed gratitude: Thank you all!

8:51 Rose of Recognition

The Parish Committee discussed some nominations for the Rose of Recognition. From the nominations, it was agreed to nominate and move forward with the Alliance. The Alliance has been asked to do a lot given the recent losses in First Parish. They have hosted more than usual and really stepped up from the usual activities. The Alliance has ensured that families who are grieving are comforted. Annette Sawyer, as coordinator, and the group have been wonderful. In times of need, the Alliance met needs when they would normally move forward with one or two memorials in a year, not four. Kate T. and Carolyn H. will do the write up for the First Parish website and e-bulletin.

Other Business

There being no other business, the vice chair expressed gratitude to the Parish Committee. Gratitude for John A for stepping up to chair the meeting. Gratitude for Rev. Erica and well wishes for her leave and motherhood.

9:01 Adjourn

MOTION 4: I move that we adjourn the meeting. (Anne Q) Seconded (Joanna/Kate) 8 of 8 in favor. None opposed.

MOTIONS:

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Minutes prepared by clerk, Joanna Pushee.