

Parish Committee Meeting Minutes  
First Parish Unitarian Universalist of Arlington  
November 14, 2023  
Hybrid meeting: First Parish Parlor and Online on Zoom

In person - Sara G, John A., Jeff K., Joanna P., Carolyn H., John S.; on Zoom – Anne Quaadgras, Celia W., Al T., and Rev. Erica; with Rev. Marta and Rev. Stevie joining in person.

Guests: Jim Hall, First Parish member (congregational meeting); Maggie Carey of the Reckoning and Repair Working Group (congregational meeting); Annette Sawyer of The Trustees

7:03 Call to Order (Sara)

Feeling “Enough” and Chalice Lighting (Sara)

Three minutes of silence

7:08 Parish Committee monthly gratitude (Celia and Sara)

This month’s recommendations and nominations for the Rose of Recognition are: Alan Linov, Social Justice Committee chair, and Lori Kenshaft for her work on the STAR Adult Education Committee.

Members of the Parish Committee showed enthusiasm about these two nominations.

The Rose of Recognition appears in the e-bulletin, on the First Parish website, and in *The Spire*.

[Applause (hearing and ASL applause) by the Parish Committee and attendees.]

7:16 State of the Parish (Marta, 25 minutes)

Rev. Marta presented highlights from three key areas: institutional notes, the Unitarian Universalist Association’s Article II re-drafting, and the War of Israel-Hamas.

- Institutional notes to highlight included:
  - From the first nine Sundays, attendance is up 15% compared to the last church year. [ASL applause]
  - First Parish has welcomed the new interim Music Director, Daniel Parsley, who has signed his letter of commitment.
  - About 25-30 people attended the First Parish Financial Summit. Each report was a testament to how aware and in control of First Parish’s financial well-being folks are. Gratitude was expressed from Rev. Marta to the First Parish Treasurer, Carolyn Hodges for the kick-off.
- UUA Article II in the UUA bylaws:
  - Rev. Marta preached on Article II twice. She held a two-session adult education workshop in which 35-40 people participated per session.

- For the last 40 years, Article II has held the purposes, principles, and sources. This article has been going through a re-drafting since the death of George Floyd in 2020.
- The re-drafting centers love as primary to our tradition as Unitarian Universalists.
- Addressing the balance of Unitarian and Universalist denominations: Universalism has long centered on love. Unitarian's heresy valued human goodness and looking at questions with learning without abdicating authority to the outside.
- Centering love not as a sentimentalizing force but a vigorous one as in Dr. Cornel West's words: "Love made public is justice."
- The War of Israel-Hamas since 10/7/23 and the impact on the First Parish community
  - Rev. Marta shared some documents with the Parish Committee as a way to enter into discussion as the world enters the fifth week of the Israel-Hamas War.
  - One document was Rabbi Rachel Barenblatt's "Velveteen Rabbi Blog" from 11/10/23.
  - Overwhelm, threat, and hate instances have increased. Rev. Marta gave a reminder about four past hate instances, one of which was arson targeting the Jewish community, in the Arlington area.
  - There is a sense of threat in the community, but there is also an overarching theme of seeking/questioning belonging and safety.
  - Rev. Erica and Rev. Marta hosted nearly 40 people in conversation. There is a hunger for discussion.
  - Themes from discussion: What is important is we need to practice all voices being heard. All people speak without a fear of harassment, recrimination, or whispering; without incitement or categorization. We should not equate Hamas with Palestinians; and should not equate Jews with Israel. Don't assume if you're talking to Palestinian that they agree with Hamas. Don't assume if you are talking to a Jewish person that they agree with Israel.
  - We are not going to reach an agreement on this global issue. This is not one of those issues. First Parish is going to get to practice our Pluralism.

Discussion on the State of the Parish followed. Comments and highlights from the Parish Committee included:

- There is a hope that we model, a shared hope that peace will come.
- Listening is important, especially to as "why" / what is the backstory?, what is the conclusion, but also how did a person get there?
- There are tears; this conflict is close to our members.
- What expectations do we have going into the holidays? First Parish serves as a place of sanctuary and soft landing, literally and spiritually a sanctuary.

- People come to First Parish for normalcy during the holidays; amplify keeping it simple. Echo consistency and reassurance. During the time of greeting, offering a question is working well. Don't forget humor. Don't forget ritual.
- Gratitude was expressed for Rev. Stevie's contribution to service last Sunday.
- The 6th and 7th graders, with the leadership of Rev. Stevie and Rose, are taking a trip in early December: the youth will be visiting a synagogue over the weekend. Eric Segal and Peter Heller are leading the group.
- Gratitude was expressed for Diane Taraz's musical offerings. Recent newcomers praised the music they heard.

#### 7:55 Review of Financial report & dashboard (Carolyn, 10 minutes)

- October financials
  - Pledges are rebounding and are expected to continue; the year-end reminders about paying pledges go out to the congregation in early December.
  - The Treasurer may ask for assistance in January if the pledging rate is not rebounding, although First Parish usually experiences a bump in payment of pledges in November/December near year-end.
  - The Montessori Children's House of Arlington tenant has seen a decrease in student enrollment, so this month's rent was less than the prior month. The Treasurer and the Chair of the Parish Committee will be looking to get information on the arc of enrollment at their next meeting with them.
  - Expenditures are generally running favorably. Property looks unfavorable, but the budget was straightlined and does not align with the actual expected cadence of expenditures.

#### Discussion included:

- Given what First Parish is seeing, the Parish Committee is considering another fundraising event in the spring. Some soft outreach conversations have begun around an event, possibly in April or May, that might be a food-related event to increase giving.
  - Regarding some ongoing known overages (see the September tab in the indicator template), Parish Committee Executive has been working with the Office Manager on some technical issues related to Wifi; all other tech overages and potential expenses are still on hold as updated information on technology is being researched.
- Financial Summit debrief

Rev. Marta spoke on the Financial Summit at the beginning of the Parish Committee Meeting. Further notes can be provided by the Treasurer, Carolyn Hodges. John Anderson's efforts with visioning with people in the room were successful.

Very interesting ideas emerged, particularly ones placed on "the bike rack" during the visioning section of the summit. Highlighted ideas included: Legacy Giving, improved information to members about tax advantaged giving; and compensation review. It was a successful and interactive session for all parties attended.

Gratitude expressed.

8:02 (Vote 1, Discussion). Consent agenda: Minutes, Financials, Ministers' Reports

I move that we adopt the consent agenda. (Jeff). Seconded (Anne Q.) 9 of 9 in favor. None opposed.

Break

8:05 **Reckoning and Repair special congregational meeting request** (Maggie Carey, 10 minutes)

Maggie Carey is representing the Reckoning and Repair Working Group of the Racial Justice Coordinating Committee.

The Reckoning and Repair group's brochure and affirmation were passed out to Parish Committee members and guests. A list of upcoming events was also passed out.

March 24, 2024 is being requested as a date for a congregational meeting with the purpose of adopting the affirmation prepared by the Reckoning and Repair group.

The Reckoning and Repair group will also have a number of initiatives that the ministers are conducting, and Bill Gardiner will be conducting a Zoom workshop on The History of Racism and UUA in February. Maggie Carey, on behalf of the Reckoning and Repair group, asked the Parish Committee to endorse or vote on this proposal and to recommend that it go before the congregation during a congregational meeting.

The Parish Committee is hearing requests regarding congregational meetings during the current meeting; the Parish Committee is to look into the schedule, regarding whether such a vote would go into a separate, special March meeting or into the May Annual Meeting.

Discussion:

- It was suggested that in the acknowledgement, the number of pew owners be added. In this way, congregation members can know the scale of the numbers and the meaning.

- Some questions were raised regarding the reparations piece and what that process might look like. Being able to let members know what other churches are doing, as well as more information on what the Reckoning and Repair group has in mind for reparations would be helpful.
- The relationship among First Parish as a congregation and local communities of color is being forged but is not in place to an extent yet in which First Parish would be able to propose reparational actions other than what First Parish perceives is wanted. First Parish is in collaboration with the NAACP and others, such as NCOBRA.
- First Parish is in Middlesex County. What might be the place to highlight is groups within our local community being aware of First Parish's work as a step.
- A question about whether a quorum would be needed was posed.
  - Yes, a quorum of the congregation is needed: 20% of the congregation would need to attend.
- Has the UUA given any guidance on this topic? The New England region of the UUA has done a lot of work on this and there are resources and folks in the UUA with whom First Parish is working.

Appreciation was expressed for how much work and continued outreach the Reckoning and Repair group has done. Gratitude from the Parish Committee to the Reckoning and Repair group. Rev. Erica echoed elevating the hard work of the Reckoning and Repair group, including being mindful not to overload the congregation with it when there are so many active initiatives.

8:36 PM Seven principles special congregational meeting request (Jim Hall, 10 minutes)

- The Parish Committee received Jim Hall's proposal via email on October 31, 2023. Thirty signatures from the First Parish congregation would be required to call a congregational meeting.
- First Parish member Jim Hall proposed:
  - "(1) adopt a Covenant for our Parish itself to affirm and promote our present seven UU Principles, and (2) declare how we know a free, just and peaceful world community can be created. These matters — and the reasons for them — are more fully set forth in the attached "Request For A Congregational Meeting" and "Rationale". Especially given all that is currently happening in our world, I think it is more important than ever that our Parish confront, and answer, the question of how we UUs can achieve the Sixth Principle."
  - The two proposed motions for a special congregational meeting are not cast in stone. There is a desire to have folks discuss, change, and amend these motions.
  - If First Parish members sign a petition to have a congregational meeting, it doesn't mean they endorse or support the motions. It just supports the request for a congregational meeting.
- If a minimum of 30 First Parish congregants sign, then the petition with signatures would be sent to the First Parish clerk. A meeting would be held within 30 days of the clerk's receiving the material.

Discussion and questions:

- It was asked whether there is an expected or hoped for date. Jim is open to March 24<sup>th</sup>. If the Parish Committee thinks the annual meeting is preferable, he would hold off until 30 days prior to that. He would want a meeting to happen before the end of June because the Seven principles will not have been replaced yet by the UUA (in reference to Article II, regarding love).
- Clarification was gained around whether the proposed request would require changing First Parish's bylaws or if it were more akin to a policy or covenant. Jim Hall clarified that these proposed statements would not have to be in the bylaws.
- A question about Religious Education was asked: Does Religious Education have faith formation on the Seven Principles, or would this be a directive from the congregation for the curriculum?
- It was mentioned that the process to develop a covenant or policy takes a long time: for example, our mission statement took months. First Parish has other texts that were developed, over time, by the congregation with a lot of involvement from congregants.

The Parish Committee will discern timing as the governing body of First Parish.

The Parish Committee expressed thanks to First Parish member Jim Hall for bringing up his ideas and for being open to further discussion and meetings.

8:53 PM - the Trustees of the Trust Funds - Annette Saywer (10 min.)

The Trustees brought an urgent matter to the attention of the Parish Committee regarding a trunk owned by First Parish. The trunk has been stored at Cambridge Savings Bank, in the basement behind a gate, but not inside a vault. The bank can no longer support holding this trunk and has issued a January 1, 2024 deadline to have it removed.

At the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, a historian was called in to look at the contents of the trunk: silver and pewter items. There might be religious as well as historical importance of the items. A key was found and is with the office manager, Sara Hidalgo.

On behalf of the Trustees, Annette is asking for the following:

- A complete, current inventory is needed.
- An estimate of the value of the contents is needed.
- What to do in terms of insurance, which would be a question that would return to the Parish Committee

The Trustees are working with the Property Committee to determine if there is space at First Parish or if the trunk should go to a locked storage facility.

The Trustees want to make sure the Parish Committee understands the issue and the background of it. The Trustees will continue to be working in collaboration with the Property Committee.

Rev. Marta looked at the contents of the trunk at least ten years ago, and the only item First Parish would use functionally is the chalice, which First Parish is using and keeps locked up here at First Parish.

There are records and descriptions but these are not updated and the value of the items changes based on market value. If the items are of any historical value, sending them to a museum could be considered. If there is no historical value, selling the items could be considered by the Parish Committee.

**Discussion:**

- The Parish Committee indicated that Trustees could move ahead and then return to the Parish Committee with a document outlining what the items are worth.
- The trunk ought to be stored in a location under the control of First Parish, not a municipal place.
- The Property Committee is negotiating for an off-site storage facility for Harvest Moon Festival items currently.
- The trunk itself does not have value.

**MOTION: I move to authorize that The Trustees move forward to work with the Cambridge Savings Bank to remove the chest as long as it goes under the purview of First Parish UU Arlington (John A .) Second (Carolyn) 9 of 9 in favor.**

**Update on the retreat work groups: Volunteerism and Long-Term Planning/Visioning**

**1. Volunteerism Working Group (Jeff Keffer)**

All members are busy interviewing chairs and leaders of groups related to bringing people into groups along with other questions. The working group is meeting again on Thursday night. The intention is to come up with a report by mid-January for the Parish Committee and the LDC to alleviate short term issues as well as look at long-term volunteerism issues and plans.

**2. Long-term Planning Working Group (John Anderson)**

There are scheduled meetings including the December 3rd summit. On December 5th, there will be an open meeting on Zoom for congregation members who want to join online. The group will run some activities to collect input towards long-term planning. The input will then feed into an all-community survey.

**9:09 PM** Calendar review and hosting (all)

AI will host the December meeting. Celia to take January.

It was mentioned that the Finance Committee is getting ready for the budget cycle to start. Stewardship is set for the first five Sundays in March. The first Sunday in April is Easter.

Gratitude was expressed for having the format of the meeting be hybrid with in person and Zoom.

Adjourn: 9:10PM

I move that we adjourn (Joanna) Seconded (Sara G.) 9 of 9 in favor. None opposed.

Attachments: Last month's Minutes, Financial documents, Ministers report

**MOTIONS** (proposed wording that will be adjusted based on the discussion of the Parish Committee)

MOTION 1: I move that we adopt the consent agenda. (Jeff). Seconded (Anne Q.) 9 of 9 in favor. None opposed.

MOTION 2: I move to authorize that The Trustees move forward to work with the Cambridge Savings Bank to remove the chest as long as it goes under the purview of First Parish UU Arlington (John A .) Second (Carolyn) 9 of 9 in favor. None opposed.

MOTION 3: I move that we adjourn (Joanna) Seconded (Sara G.) 9 of 9 in favor. None opposed.

Prepared by Joanna Pushee, First Parish clerk.