

Parish Committee Meeting Minutes

First Parish Unitarian Universalist of Arlington

December 17, 2024 7 - 9 pm

Via Zoom

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

Ministers: Rev. Marta Flanagan, Rev. Erica Richmond, Rev. Stevie Carmody

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

Guests: Daniel Parsley (Music Director); Robin Baker (Music Committee)

Guest: Marie Meteer (First Parish member)

7:02 Call to Order (Anne Q.)

7:03 Reading and Chalice Lighting (Al T.)

Two minutes of silence (let us bring our best selves to this meeting)

7:10 Review of Financial reports & dashboard (Carolyn)

- November financials were reviewed.
- First Parish is in a surplus position; pledges are tracking close to expectations.
- The Treasurer and Office Manager are working with the Town of Arlington which has not paid parking on time. The Town has confirmed that the checks have been mailed. The Town has agreed to timeliness of monthly payment in 2025.
- The Treasurer and Office Manager are working with the tenant, Arlington Children's House (Adventures in Montessori, AIM). AIM has not paid rent for December yet but has caught up through November. The Office Manager met with AIM last week.
 - There will be a meeting in January 2025, according to the suggested protocol, with a Parish Committee member present, to reiterate the terms of the lease and timeliness of rental payment. Rev. Stevie Carmody expressed willingness to join the January meeting.

Questions/Discussion:

A Parish Committee member asked about the terms of the lease with the tenant, AIM, and whether the lease provided a penalty if the tenant does not pay on time. The lease does not include this provision.

A Parish Committee member inquired about the financial health of AIM and if enrollment is on track.

Consent agenda: Minutes, Financials, Ministers' Reports

7:15 **MOTION 1:** I vote that we accept the consent agenda including the minutes from the two meetings in November. (Al T.) Seconded. (Steve M.) 9 of 9 in favor. None opposed.

7:20 **Stewardship & budget overview** (Lissa McBurney, Finance Committee; Amy Speare & Joel Carlton-Gysan, Stewardship)

The Stewardship Committee has reviewed the draft budget at a high level for the 2025-2026 fiscal year, including the cost of living adjustments for staff and wishlist items. Gratitude was expressed for the one-person Finance Committee.

- Preliminary budget (major items) & Initial wishlist (Lissa)

Expenses include:

- Salaries are showing as not going up as much as compared to last fiscal year (under 3%)
- Health care line is showing minister and spouse (current; future)
- Search Committee for a settled minister: funds will be needed for videos and other items as recommended by the Unitarian Universalist Association staff person for First Parish to update the website and show the congregation's vibrancy.
- Summer coverage will be needed in terms of pastoral care
- Property is showing a small increase
- No big significant items to report
- Overall the First Parish budget would be a 3.9% increase (over half of which is salary).

Income:

- The Finance Committee is showing planning as a 5% increase as a placeholder (The percentage will be discussed by Stewardship Committee).
- Trustees: is showing up from last year. Modest increase in the budget for the Religious Education wing/plan
- Placeholder for one-time gifts not recurring
- Interest is going to be flat
- \$56,000 would be the expected deficit from these calculations (initial projection of revenue minus expenditures). This is what gets repaid each year.

Questions:

- There was a question from a Parish Committee member about the numbers for the Trustees and the Wellington fund to be reviewed.
- It was confirmed that preliminary numbers in the budget would be updated in March.
- The Harvest Moon Fair shown in the budget reflected 2023 because the 2024 Harvest Moon Fair is still not closed out yet because expenses have not closed. This information would come in at the end of December.

The Wishlist for Fiscal Year 2025-2026:

- Most of the wishlist items are “budget increases” rather than new items.
 - Reckoning and Repair Working Group
The Reckoning and Repair Working Group has been working with the Treasurer and Rev. Erica, meeting and asking questions about how to best proceed with financial matters pertaining to repair and reparations. The RRWG will submit a proposal to each of the following groups independently: Trustees and Parish Committee. The proposal is in progress.
 - Next few items - ongoing or one time thing?
 - a. Gardening - \$180 for plants, mulch, etc. - There is a line item for groundskeeping. Mulch can be included in the groundskeeping line item. First Parish will still spend only a fraction of the \$1,000 in groundskeeping budget.
 - b. Music
 - i. Music has “rebuilt” their budget
 - ii. Last year, two wishlist items were approved: the family choir accompanist & organist. This year the Music Committee is requesting that these be renewed.
 - iii. Choral Scholars program
Looks like net increase is only \$800.
At first, it appeared that the budget was \$7,000 more, but the Music Committee found that funding in other parts of the music budget by rearranging some items.
It shows a 7 percent increase from last year’s budget. More information will be shared by the Music Director and Music Committee later in the Parish Committee meeting.
 - c. UUMass Action - ongoing level of support
 - d. Religious Education - \$375 for small increase to match actuals.

It was noted that the Religious Education has budgeted for CORI for years, and the Finance Committee has included that in the budget. First Parish plans to do more CORI and then the Finance Committee will look at the actual costs in the next financial year.

The Religious Education committee also recently found out about a donation and is considering putting it towards how RE uses its physical space.

- e. Welcoming Committee
The Welcoming Committee, which has worked on First Parish’s Welcoming Congregation renewal would like to go up to \$1500, to offer childcare at events, for example. Events help reinforce the congregation’s commitment to LGBTQ+ programs.

7:37 Gratitude was expressed to Lissa of the Finance Committee, particularly as a committee of one.

7:38 PM - Initial stewardship plans (Amy Speare)

- Stewardship Committee acknowledges the transition with Rev. Erica going out on leave. It is a committee of five:
 - Joel Carlton-Gysan is co-chair with Amy Speare.
 - New members of the committee are: Maryglen Vincens and Jessica Farman.
 - Rev. Erica available for support until she goes on leave.
- The committee is just getting started for this year and will be running full steam January through March. The kickoff meeting was 12/16 with themes discussed and conversations about what is going on in the congregation. It is a year of transitions: both the election and retirement of lead minister are transitions, plus Rev. Erica's leave.
- Rev. Marta has put us in a position of strength, both financially and spiritually.
- THEME: "Moving Forward Hand-in-Hand". The theme is about community, empathy, and caring as we walk into the future together.
- Stewardship will be working on the goal of 5% (meeting in early January to discuss the goal).
- Attendance has been up at First Parish, which helps.
- Last year, the participation rate for Stewardship was lower than previously, which means the pledge per household was increasing (\$3,100 average, compared to \$2,900).
- This year, there will be a focus on participation.
- The plan is to repeat the program like last year with a kickoff on the last Sunday of February vacation (Feb. 26, 2025) as Stewardship Sunday. Rev. Marta Flanagan will be preaching. There will be a lead donor event in the afternoon. The following Sunday will have an all-congregation lunch. There are plans for another intergenerational pancake breakfast with Rev Stevie Carmody.
- In March, there will be three testimonials.
- The thank you cards from Stewardship will be mailed in January in the new year, with Lyn Fulton John's artwork of the First Parish spire as the front of the card.

Gratitude was expressed from the Parish Committee to the Stewardship Committee; the early work is praised. Fantastic work! Members love the theme of Moving Forward Hand-in-Hand.

There will be visiting stewards training dates again (in person and online). The in-person training will be 2/22 and the virtual around 2/24, with times forthcoming. Finance Committee and Parish Committee representatives will be present.

7:48 - Choral Scholars pilot evaluation and next steps - Daniel Parsley, PhD, (Music Director) and Robin Baker (Music Committee)

- An overview of the Choral Scholars program was provided and a report was previously shared electronically with the Parish Committee.
- The Music Director, staff member Daniel Parsley, provided an overview of the internship program, the Choral Scholars program. The scholars receive a stipend for this educational, pedagogical program.
- The program began in February 2024. There has been enhanced congregational engagement and more younger folks have become engaged with music in First Parish.
- The program has brought a diversity of cultural backgrounds to the music program, including singers and guest conductors.
- Creativity has blossomed within Sunday worship services: for example, with First Parish member Lyn Fulton-John's credo being interspersed with singing from a tenor.
- The program has provided stability.
- A note on the First Parish Music Committee's budget: Two lines in the Music budget before this process; Brava to Robin Baker for working on the budget and showing data that is representative and clearly states which programs are being supported.

Questions/Comments from the Parish Committee:

- A Parish Committee member asked for confirmation that the budget for the scholars program is about \$10,000 for 27 weeks for three scholars. No new funding was needed for the program within the current fiscal year because the Music Committee was able to pull funds from other areas (funds were accounted for in different ways).
- It will be important at this mid-semester point to survey the choir and see how they feel about the Choral Scholars program. It would be helpful to learn from the different sections. (Note: by January 5th, a survey will have gone out to collect this information after the holidays).
- Praise from a member of the Parish Committee towards the Music Director and the Music Committee included gratitude for their leadership.
- A question was raised about whether any significant increases in budget would be proposed. The cycle of the church funding was mentioned.
- The Finance Committee mentioned a conversation to follow up with the Music Committee and Music Director to confirm continuation plans, organ performances, and family choir. A question was asked if the proposed budget includes the organist and family choir, and it does. It was clarified that a continuation of funding is being proposed rather than increased funding.
- A Parish Committee member asked what was not getting funded or if the Music Committee is only using funding in a different way. The latter includes having Choral Scholars as soloists rather than hired instrumentalists.

8:06 PM - Motion 2: I move that we approve continuing the FP Choral Scholars program through the 24-25 program year at a cost of \$10,125, which is already in the music committee budget. After this program year, the Choral Scholars program is subject to the standard annual budget process, like all music-related requests. (Jeff) Seconded (John A.) 9 of 9 in favor. None opposed.

The Parish Committee looks forward to the music itself, to the choir and instrumentalists, and for more wonderful music.

8:08 - Amy Speare, Daniel Parsley, Lissa M., and Robin Baker left the meeting.

8:08 - Marie Mateer joined the meeting.

8:08 Break

The Parish Committee chair welcomed Marie Meteer, First Parish member.

8:13 Flag proposal update, discussion & vote (Rev. Erica)

Vote 3: Approve the updated Flag proposal

After October's listening session, emails, and the Parish Committee tabling in the fall to gather congregation's input, the Defending Democracy Working Group has met and decided to fly the US flag with the pride progress flag underneath it. A great conversation and lots of feedback were passed along to DDWG from a few sources.

Rev. Erica provided a brief verbal summary and reshared the written proposal from the DDWG. All of the feedback from First Parish congregants is available in a shared Google document. On Zoom, there were 23 participants at the listening session. From tabling after Sunday worship services, there were about 24 opinions gathered, and there were over 20 direct emails.

Rev. Erica applauded all the time the congregation took to get feedback and compile it. Hearing different opinions and holding them has been a good process. People had a lot of opinions.

DDWG folks had provided Rev. Erica with an update on the proposal: the US flag and pride progress flag would be flown; the group chose not to put forward the Black Lives Matter flag because the current Black Lives Matter flag is consistent with the national organizations's branding which has different (national org vs the slogan); the idea is that the public witness banner continues to be used to convey solidarity with Black Lives Matter.

DDWG has sent the proposal back to the Parish Committee to vote. The timing has also been decided: to put the flags up before the presidential inauguration. An article will be published in The Spire, the First Parish newsletter, and there will be

information in the e-bulletin about the flags. The proposal would add funding of \$160 to purchase the flags and rope.

MOTION 3;

I move that we approve the updated Flag proposal: to fly both the US Flag and the Progress Pride Flag on our flagpole near the bus stop. It will be accompanied by written information in the E-bulletin and Spire to be created by members of Defending Democracy, with a dedication and flag raising to be held on a Sunday in early January (before the 2025 inauguration). The Parish Committee approves \$160 to purchase the flags and rope from the Parish Committee line item. (John A) Seconded. (Steve M.) 9 of 9 in favor. None opposed.

[Clerk's note: Sunday, January 19, 2025 is the date chosen to fly the flags as proposed.]

8:21 Interim search team vote process & candidates list (Anne)

- Parish Committee Executive had been working on the interim minister search committee team. Invitations were posted in the bulletin so that First Parish members could write to the chair of the Parish Committee to express interest. Eleven people have expressed interest.
- All of the people on the list have spoken with a Parish Committee member at this point.
- The chair of the Parish Committee shared a Google Form to the Parish Committee members so that an interim search team can be selected. The Parish Committee was asked to each choose top five people on the Google Form by 12/20/24.
- Qualities of the people on an interim search committee were discussed: being knowledgeable about First Parish, regular attendee online or in person, trusted, good at collaboration and communication, and keep confidentiality. Good to note as well: no conflict of interest.
- Point of clarification: The Parish Committee appoints the members to the interim search committee.
- Communications to the congregation will go out in January.

This is a wonderful slate! What a wonderful group; a testament to the strength of this community.

Question - A couple people on the list for interim search committee have expressed a willingness to also serve on the settled minister search committee. Does being on interim committee preclude the settled minister committee? (It doesn't; most people don't want to do both, per the UUA). The Unitarian Universalist Association

representative who met with the Parish Committee in early December also mentioned that it is up to the congregation to really decide on the committees and guidelines.

It was reiterated that the Parish Committee hires the interim minister. The congregation votes on the settled minister. Interim group hits the ground running in February.

Question about the settled minister search and whether there will be time to reach out to Religious Education folks to see if anyone would like to be on that committee: Yes! RE folks are to be included in the search and there will be time to do messaging / take time to get the word out.

8:33 **State of the Parish (Marta)**

Rev. Marta Flanagan shared her report via email and highlighted the following:

It was one month ago that Marta told the Parish Committee Executive about retirement plans.

- Gratitude to all of the Parish Committee was expressed for the support and for the extraordinary amount of time put in since the announcement.
- Themes held (see report)
- Thinking about the last 16 years...if you view FP as a system and you take into account how Marta has approached the ministry: look at filling the gaps: what voices weren't being heard? What has the lead minister filled these last 16 years? There is an option to drop items, or staff/ministry continue to hold them, or others/volunteers hold them.

Questions that came up for Marta:

- What is it to be a Religious community and who holds that?
- What groups, explicitly religious?
- What is it to be a pluralistic community?
- What is the place of social justice and turning outward?
- What is at the center of our attention? Are we minister-centered, or are we mission-centered?
- What is a healthy relationship to money? (There was stress, a feeling of stress, around money 16 years ago. More directness was needed.)
- What are the frequent conflicts?
- What are our deepest conflicts?
- What are the tensions we have? Holding things in a healthy tension?
- What are projects left undone or not yet institutionalized?
- Reflections...conversations...who do we want to be?

Rev. Marta asked for the Parish Committee's thoughts and reactions.

It was mentioned that these questions could be great as reflections in upcoming Parish Committee retreat in February.

Executive session - ministerial transition

Rev. Marta, Rev. Erica, and Rev. Stevie - left at 8:45

8:46 PM - **MOTION 4:** I move that we go into Executive session and invite in Marie Meteer. (John A) Seconded (Steve/AI) 9 of 9 in favor. None opposed.

9:12 PM - **MOTION 5:** I move that we leave Executive session. (Steve M) Seconded. (John A.) 9 of 9 in favor. None opposed.

Adjourn 9:13 PM - **MOTION 6:** I move that we adjourn. (Jeff) Seconded (Joanna) 9 of 9 in favor. None opposed.

Motions

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Minutes prepared by First Parish clerk, Joanna Pushee.