

Parish Committee Meeting Minutes
First Parish UU Arlington
Feb. 11, 2025
Zoom 7pm - 9pm

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

Ministers: Rev. Marta Flanagan, Rev. Tricia Brenan, and Rev. Stevie Carmody (MRE)

Guests: Reckoning & Repair Working Group, Racial Justice Committee, and Social Justice Committee representatives: Maggie Carey, chair of the Racial Justice Committee; Bill G. is on both RJCC and RR, and Alan Linov is the chair of the Social Justice Committee

Marie Meteer, chair of the Interim Minister Search Committee (IMSC)

7:01 Call to Order (Anne)

Reminder about signing up to be at the Parish Committee table at coffee hour (currently stepping in to help Stewardship); Potential topics for table at coffee hour for the spring:

- Join the Parish Committee!
- Interim Search Committee and process FAQ

7:04 Reading and Chalice Lighting (Anne)

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

“Holding the Light” - a poem by Stuart Kestenbaum

7:07 Review of Financial reports & dashboard (Carolyn)

· January financials (note: preliminary) - it's pretty close; things needing follow up are small. We are running favorable in most categories for expenses. Pledges are running just about 10% under the plan, but the larger gifts tend to come in the March/April/May timeframe.

- The tenant, Adventures in Montessori (AIM) has not paid rent for January as yet (2/11). First Parish has requested to have the check in hand by Friday, 2/14.
- Jeff and Carolyn: Jeff stepped up and will join a meeting with AIM (First Parish is intending to do regular six-month check in meetings). Feb. meeting. Thank you, Jeff.

- Town of Arlington has not paid their parking. (The total is \$500.) The First Parish Office Manager and Treasurer are working together on this.
- Running under budget in most expenses categories. One item over is Your Part-Time Controller (YPTC). \$3,250 was the total cost of training provided by YPTC to the office staff.

Gratitude expressed by the Parish Committee. A shout-out to Eberie, Allison, and Liz! Hard work in January.

No questions being asked, vote: Consent agenda: Minutes, Financials, Ministers' Reports.

MOTION 1: I move that we accept the Consent agenda. (Steve M.) Seconded. (Susan M.) 9 of 9 in favor. None opposed.

7:16 Ministers' housing allowance vote (Rev. Marta, Rev. Erica, Rev. Stevie, and Rev. Tricia)

Vote 2: Approve requested housing allowances (see letters in the shared folder)

A member of the Parish Committee noted two typos to resolve in the housing allowance letters: near the dollar amount - "is" to be removed and "and" to be removed for clarity.

The housing allowances are:

- For Rev. Marta Flanagan: \$54,000.00
- For Rev. Erica Richmond: \$50,000.00
- For Rev. Stevie Carmody: \$30,000.00

MOTION 2: I move that we accept the ministers' housing allowances, with the proposed two edits, for Rev. Marta Flanagan, Rev. Erica Richmond, and Rev. Stevie Carmody. (Jeff K.) Seconded (John A.), 9 of 9 in favor. None opposed.

Note: the Parish Committee approved Rev. Tricia Brennan's housing allowance in January.

7:19 **State of the Parish** (Rev. Marta and Rev. Tricia)

Rev. Marta provided the Parish Committee with a summary of what she has been seeing and hearing: What is the "buzz" in the First Parish Community?

- One element is Rev. Marta's retirement: There is grief and some anxiety.
- Rev. Erica's leave and pleasure around hearing of Rev. Erica's daughter's arrival
- Rev. Tricia's arrival
- Rev. Marta's counselling load was three times that of the previous four weeks; it may be because of the news of Rev. Marta's retirement or other reasons: themes have included marital tensions in more than one household and loss/grief.

- Overall, in Lectio Divina, Covenant Groups, counselling and other areas, the biggest concern is what is happening in Washington. It has been 21 days since the inauguration.
- Each of the last five Sunday worship services have responded in some way to what is happening politically.

[Marie Meteer arrived at about 7:19 PM]

The need is so loud in our community right now for balance and listening.

First Parish member Lori Kenshaft has led one sharing circle so far on the day of the inauguration and has another one planned this upcoming Sunday.

State of the Parish as seen by Rev. Tricia Brennan:

Rev. Tricia Brennan and Social Justice are working on a Zoom meeting component for a listening session. We, the congregation, need to keep our attention on what we value amidst the flood of news.

Today, 2/11, the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) joined a number of other religious organizations in a lawsuit: U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is in violation of church versus state in going after immigrants who seek sanctuary and refuge in religious houses of worship.

- Protect immigrant and refugees
- LGBTQ - protect and provide affirmation to LGBTQ members of our community
- Contact your senator and congresspeople
- Encourage divestment in Tesla and SpaceX
- Take care of ourselves and our loved ones; this is not a sprint. This is a marathon.
- Keep the faith. Act in love.

What is First Parish's role and call right now?

- Continue community events. The Parish Committee applauds Lori Kenshaft and her listening circles in response to our times
- Do some heavy listening in and outside of our communities; what we as a congregation want/what other people are saying what they want across the state
- Underlying the fear is the idea that the church is a sanctuary, a refuge; this is a place people can go and be safe: an important theme
- The challenge of being part of First Parish and being reminded of all the things possible to do, whether or not one agrees with them: it is important to life up the feeling of being safe enough to talk about things that are hard to figure out
- Bring people together
- Mention that no space can promise 100% safety this day in age; what we can do to remind people of the beauty and the good that is still with us.
- Be out there in the community

- Support our ushers. Leadership - good safety plan. Ways to communicate with one another. We don't have the luxury to ignore. Keep our space as safe as possible.

Maggie arrived at 7:29 pm

Bill Gardiner arrived at 7:30 pm

Alan Linov arrived at 7:30 pm

7:33 **Reckoning & Repair Working Group** - reparations funding proposal (representatives from the RJCC / R&R and SJCC: Maggie Carey, Bill Gardiner, and Alan Linov)

Racial Justice Coordinating Committee (which is an appointed committee) - Maggie C., chair
Reckoning & Repair Working Group - formed in 2022 - (R&R) - Maggie Carey and Bill G.
Social Justice Coordinating Committee (which is a standing committee and the umbrella group under which RJCC and R&R reside): Alan L.

Purpose of joining this Parish Committee meeting is to really understand what the R&R working group is doing in terms of reckoning, repair, and reparations. When Stewardship numbers come in, FP would be better able to see what kind of budget for FY 25-26 is available.

Maggie thanked the Parish Committee for inviting her, Bill, and Alan to talk about the groups' work. Last May 2024, First Parish adopted the Reckoning & Repair affirmation, which was supported by the majority of the congregation in attendance at the Annual Meeting.

Background: Education and research around the original pew owners of First Parish showed that over half of the families were slave owners. The R&R group has done a few years' worth of work around acknowledging and understanding that there were enslavers here in the Commonwealth and how First Parish benefited from slavery. The commitment to make some sort of reparations has been made, and the next steps are about how to proceed. Maggie proposed the question: To whom does First Parish give what?

Working with people in the community in Massachusetts, the R&R group proposes that First Parish include the Black and POC community. R&R is looking to partner with a Black-led organization in and around our geographic area.

When Michael Curry came last May 4, 2024 - President and CEO of MA League of Community Health Centers, the idea given was to expand out of Arlington itself with this effort.

The R&R Working Group is in the midst of identifying organizations with which First Parish could work.

First Parish is putting efforts in with the UU Urban Ministry: they already have significant relationships with Black-led organizations. Before Rev. Erica went on leave, Rev. Tricia came on board for the transition and is serving as a point person for First Parish.

A number of organizations are in relationship with the UU Urban Ministry: Lewis D Brown Peace Institute, DeeDee's Cry (suicide prevention and mental health), Vida Urbana (housing), and the Refugee and Immigration Center (which assists families).

RJCC will be meeting with Robert Jones at UU Urban Ministry this week to hear about organizations. The R&R Working Group will list the top top ideas and take the list back to the RJCC. Does the congregation then vote on this? Do we make our recommendation as a committee? Not sure about that part of the process yet.

Bill Gardiner lifted up that the First Parish groups are working on identifying partners in the community.

Questions from the Parish Committee:

- At this point, is the R&R group looking for organizations for partnerships or organizations to provide money to?
 - More the latter; but there is always opportunity for First Parish people to volunteer with the UU Urban Ministry. RJCC / R&R have been focusing on funding.
- Can the Parish Committee make a significant statement by adding a line item in the budget of FP?
- Also asking the Trustees for funding? Yes.
- Instead of supporting an organization, what about scholarships?
- Gratitude expressed by a Parish Committee member for the activities and work being done
- Where do we go next? First Parish has been very engaged in advocacy. Service is something we could bolster. Getting us outside of First Parish would be a really good thing for us to focus on. One thought could be re-creating the service day we used to have before the COVID-19 pandemic (Action Sunday) and focusing on the groups that Maggie had mentioned.
- Part of reparations is getting to know the people, to build actual relationships.
- The Parish Committee encourages R&R to think big.

The Parish Committee gave the Reckoning & Repair Working Group encouragement to stay engaged: Keep going!

Alan, Bill, and Maggie left the meeting at 7:52 PM. Rev. Tricia left at 7:52 PM as well.

7:52 - Additional thoughts about ways First Parish can be open and sustain safe spaces:

- Finding the right balance in sermons: the political goes on; what's in people's hearts
- Keep people who have families in mind
- Keep trans people in mind - politically and spiritually at risk

- Rev. Stevie spoke about a lot of connection with parents of trans children or youth and non-binary staff. First Parish has members of the trans community including non binary adults: what are we practicing right now with the kids? The day before the inauguration, we were in the Bailey Room practicing being upstanding, meaning figuring out what our values are.
- A Parish Committee member brought us back to what Rev. Marta spoke of regarding finding balance in sermons and finding the pulse of the community. Leadership is looking for an interim minister. Let us highlight the need for finding balance.
- A Parish Committee member highlighted a theme of asking for help - we cannot do this work alone; we need to reach across the aisle and model what it looks like. There is still loneliness and isolation. We can model being generous: extending and accepting help.

Break (7:58 - 8:05)

Jeff reminded people to sign up for tabling at coffee hour after Sunday worship services.

8:07 Interim Search Committee report (Marie Meteer)

The Interim Minister Search Committee (ISC) is doing great!! Keeping calm and carrying on. We are in this world. We are doing our thing. We have a web page up. Carolyn assisted with getting information in the e-bulletin with a link. Our job, our dates, who we are as IMSC. Why do we need an interim minister? Marie used the language from John Anderson's time in the pulpit to create the information sheet.

The ISC already talked with Rev. Erica before she went on leave and has set up meetings with the UUA, Rev. Marta, Rev Tricia; Rev. Stevie and Marie will be talking. A lot going on!

The ISC's current main task is answering the questions given to us by the UUA. The group is working on how to show FP as putting our best foot forward.

Interim Minister Search - First Parish Unitarian Universalist of Arlington, MA - website link provided: <https://www.firstparish.info/interim-minister-search/>

Lori Kenshaft is on the committee and is managing the UUA document collection.

We have all the materials from the same process as the second minister search which resulted in bringing in Rev. Erica - the search process is basically the same.

The ISC folks are in this early phase. Making sure we are talking to people. Getting ready for the big task.

Marie is connecting with Kiki G. of the Leadership Development Committee and attending the LDC meeting: representatives talking to leadership at FP and looking for any other suggestions of smaller groups.

Questions / Comments / Suggestions for the IMSC:

- Connect with the Covenant Groups (Kate Lenox is the coordinator of Covenant Groups).
- The FP website is currently directed to FP members; What about the web page to be outward facing? Include what a prospective candidate would find and be honest.
 - A Parish Committee member suggested an idea for communicating about the interim minister search and broader ministerial leadership transition: "we've got this" to be conveyed, and Stewardship is a great time - with visiting stewards - Marie's one pager to be shared with visiting stewards.
- What's come up: congregation is asking "How does this process get us to the settled minister?"
- Additional resource: survey results from Charting the Course (start articulating that out to the Congregation) - what the trends are from those responses.
 - The ISC did a raw first pass over the information.

Main job of interim minister: how do you get your successor set up for success?

Marie Meteer noted that Marilyn Downs, First Parish member serving on the ISC, will help by writing an article for *The Spire*.

Hilary Allan of the Unitarian Universalist Association has provided the nuts and bolts part of the process. Marie M. and Carolyn H. are doing a follow up meeting with Hilary Allan. FP asked for some materials. For example: budgeting for this properly, representing the appropriate salary range and right geo index (Geo Index system aligns with communities based on location and local wages). Template for contracts. Parish Committee will negotiate the contract. The search committee makes the recommendation.

ISC - meeting with Hilary Allan as a group.

Gratitude was expressed to Marie and ISC by the Parish Committee.

8:28 pm - Database / Realm skills project (Susan Moore, Parish Committee working group)

Anne, Steve, and Kiki Giatis met with Susan. What would we like to get out of a FP database of skills of members? We got a pretty good list. Two things: Kiki Giatis is grouping it into categories. Carolyn H and Susan M to connect to put in a proposal / request to Your

Part-time (YPTC). Good news! Realm is adaptable to provide this database. We can build it on Realm.

In thinking about the survey data for Charting the Course, one thing a Parish Committee member recalls is: one reason people stay engaged is that they get an opportunity to volunteer. It's one of the reasons. This database work fits with that aspect of keeping people engaged in the community. As we move along with this: that will be a nice point to make.

Gratitude to Susan and the working group.

8:31 - Rose of Recognition nomination for March:

Spreadsheet shared by Anne and John (Parish Committee Executive)

Two for Tuesdays (Mary Cummings and Joanne Pohl) - call out recognition of people in our community who are engaging with our values! A double rose. Kate T. to write the Rose of Recognition.

Rev. Marta left at 8:38 pm

Stevie still on the call. Marie M. is still on the call.

8:38 PM - Marta "Good Goodbye" updates (Anne/all)

- Funding needs estimate: original estimates for a party: \$2000, Other: \$1000
- Anne Q and Tina S talked. Martapalooza discussion / Congregational Celebration
 - at the time \$1200 - 1500 for Martapalooza. The Parish Committee is not asking for donations for this celebration event as was done for Martapalooza. Propose funding from the ParCom discretionary budget.
- We have 10k allocated to the Parish Committee budget. We have spent 3,000 to date. Amendment: 3k to 5k - friendly amendment: change from 3k to up to 5k.

MOTION 3: I vote we approve allocation of up to \$5,000 from the Parish Committee Discretionary budget for various Good Goodbye elements for Marta's congregational celebration at the end of May. (John) Seconded (Steve M.) 9 of 9 in favor. None opposed.

- Art Exhibit (Art Team said yes)

Anne asked the Art Team to find a congregant to take some pictures to go in the Memory Book.

- Memory Book (Kate) It's a physical book. People can submit things digitally - writing, art, photos VIDEO side: Kate/Julius - approached - not sure how much energy to put into a video.

- Emerita process (Joanna) - provided information and the group discussed it. Rev. Stevie chimed in.
- Photo (Steve M) - for the gallery wall

9:06 **Adjourn**

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

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