

Parish Committee Meeting Minutes  
First Parish Unitarian Universalist of Arlington  
February 20, 2024: 7 - 9 pm  
Online via Zoom

Sara Galantowicz (Outgoing Chairperson/continuing member), Anne Quaadgras (Vice-chair/Incoming Chair), Joanna Pushee (Clerk), Carolyn Hodges (Treasurer), Celia Wcislo, John Anderson (incoming Vice-chair), and Al Tosti.  
Absent: Jeff Keffer

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

**Guest members:** Ellen Leigh (Indigenous Peoples Justice Working Group); Daniel Parsley (Music Director, interim); Alan Linov, Maggie Carey (Social Justice Committee)

7:03 Call to Order (Sara)

7:04 Reading and Virtual Chalice Lighting (Al) Chalice (Rev. Erica)

7:05 Two minutes of silence

7:07 Presentation from the Indigenous Justice Working Group (Ellen Leigh)

- The Indigenous Justice Working Group is committed to moving forward with a land acknowledgement, education, repair, and engagement of the congregation around issues of indigenous peoples' justice.
- Beginning about three years ago, Ellen Leigh was tasked by the Social Justice Committee to pull a few people together as a call to Action of Immediate Witness. The work goes beyond a land acknowledgement, which is just part of the process.
- At the UUA level, an Action of Immediate Witness was passed [during the General Assembly in 2020]. Unitarian Universalists are called to turn our own ignorance into education, which is the first goal.
- The work started with education internally within the Indigenous Justice Working Group (IJWG), which is now educating, and engaging with, the congregation and connecting with other groups in the community.
- There is work being done to amplify indigenous voices at the state level.
- Ellen mentioned the Wôpanâak Language Reclamation Project which works to return language fluency to the Wampanoag Nation. First Parish's Social Justice Committee had selected the WLRP as a recipient of FP's Giving First program.
- The Indigenous Justice Working Group worked with Lorén Spears [of the Narragansett Tribal Nation] and Silvermoon LaRose [also of the Narragansett Tribe] of the Tomaquag Museum. There was an intergenerational art project and meeting with FP parents.
- First Parish has included indigenous books in its library.
- First Parish member Jennifer Davis-Kay has a pilot Religious Education program for 5th graders. The children have worked with her and previous teachers. The pilot program is moving forward.
- There have been programs sponsored by First Parish groups such as the Alliance, STAR Adult Education, and Climate Action which have provided so many ways to connect around indigenous justice education and action.

- One of the main issues in indigenous justice work is that of “unerasure” and supporting unerasure. As a result of working with Lorén Spears, the Indigenous People’s Working Group listening to ideas such as: installing a plaque on the meeting house wall, having a land acknowledgement and displaying it on the First Parish website, and engaging and taking actions so as to not be just performative. There is a commitment to move forward.
- The text of the current (as of January 2024) land acknowledgement (which has not yet been adopted by the First Parish congregation) is as follows:

***The First Parish meetinghouse is located on the ancestral lands of the Massachusetts people, whose name was appropriated by this Commonwealth. The White Europeans who took land from its inhabitants through coercion and violence also subjected Indigenous people to forced labor, relocation, and genocide. Our faith calls us to acknowledge the truth of our history, to name the ongoing harms of settler colonialism, and to work toward repair. We commit to being in right relationship with the Massachusetts and other Indigenous peoples, particularly the Mashpee and Aquinnah Wampanoag, and to finding meaningful ways to offer our resources as we work in solidarity to build a more sustainable future for us all.***

Ellen Leigh noted that the work that the Indigenous Justice Working Group has been doing is spiritual: the work is journeying to spiritual wholeness, connecting with, and being in right relationship with.

Discussion and Questions followed (7:22 PM)

- The Parish Committee chair thanked the Indigenous Justice Working Group for the incredible amount of work and for making the information available.
- A question about how many First Parish members have attended listening sessions and other engagement activities was asked. Approximately 35 people have been attending these sessions. The next one is on February 29, 2024.
- Ellen Leigh is hoping to get the Land Acknowledgement on the agenda of the Annual Meeting. The decision does not have to be made at present. There is still some work to be done on the language of the acknowledgement.
- The decision about the Annual Meeting agenda should be part of the agenda at the next Parish Committee meeting in March.
- The Indigenous Justice Working Group had wanted to place the acknowledgement on the Annual Meeting agenda for 2023, but the group was told to wait.
- Some questions around logistics for more publicity were answered. Rev. Erica, as point minister for the Social Justice Committee, has these needs on her radar.

## **7:35 pm      Choral Scholars pilot program (15 minutes, interim Music Director Daniel Parsley)**

*Prior to the Parish Committee meeting, a document outlining the proposed program was shared and can be found in the Parish Committee shared drive. The following paragraph is excerpted from the document:*

***The First Parish Choral Scholars Program*** *is a unique opportunity for area college students to experience hands-on training in management, administration, and pedagogy of community ensembles while sharpening their administrative and professional skills as related to church and community informed life. The Choral Scholar program provides college students with opportunities for unique choral*

*experiences and leadership while building their resume. Scholars receive a small monetary award for this service. First Parish is proud to engage these emerging future leaders and shape their experience and future curiosity for community engaged, church based, and religiously informed music.*

- Daniel Parsley is proposing the program for choral scholars. It is an internship program supporting music education. It is a way to provide the next generation of students/teachers to engage around a specific, real intention to learn about making community music.
- The program would be a way to engage with college-aged people in Arlington and the surrounding communities.
- Daniel Parsley is a product of this type of program.
- The program would be funded through the existing Music Committee budget (which is approximately \$17,900). [Clerk's note: It was previously cited in these notes that the Music Committee had \$10,000. The correct amount is \$17,900.]
- The Human Resources committee is reviewing how stipends or funding might work, specifically whether to treat the individual(s) as an employee or not.
- The Music Committee fully backs this proposal.
- There would be evaluation tools developed to assess the success of such a pilot program.
- The program would run from now until May as a pilot.
- The annual cost would be \$7,500.
- The main question would be whether students/college-age folks could be recruited and funded (probably at half of the annual cost, with an estimated \$2,750 to \$3,000 funds to be made available).

#### Questions/Discussion:

- What is the pool of students/college-aged people? Would First Parish's youth program be invited to apply? Would the group be diverse people? How will recruiting be done?
  - Recruiting could be done on social media at local colleges in Massachusetts.
  - One challenge would be that the funding proposed would be half of what other programs typically pay.
  - It is hard to tell how many people would be in the pool of applicants. An audition process would also be needed.
  - There is an intention to have a diverse group of applicants. However, the barrier would be the low stipend or pay rate.
- With budgeting happening February/March 2024 for fiscal year 2024-2025, \$7,500 seems like a big number. This decision would not be made later in the year, in June or September.
- The Parish Committee expressed gratitude and stressed the importance of doing a pilot.
- A question was asked whether the program would be scalable, from one person to a few.
- Advertising in ways that might reach communities where there are people of diverse backgrounds such as BIPOC communities.
- There is a concern about the time investment that might be taken from the interim Music Director and whether that time would already be part of the job or not.
- The Parish Committee highlighted that this age demographic is one that First Parish needs to connect with deeply.

**The Choral Scholars Pilot Program is approved. The Parish Committee will anticipate receiving an evaluation of the success of the pilot before continuing a full year program. The Parish Committee will have additional information to consider before approving a full annual program as proposed.**

**8PM Monthly Rose of Recognition nomination (Anne Q.)** - John Galantowicz and the Property Committee were nominated for the Rose of Recognition. John has been the Property Committee chair for three years. His term ends in May 2024. The Parish Committee applauds John and the Property Committee for their dedicated work.

The Parish Committee turned its attention to a slate of administrative actions as stated below.

- Appoint Tish Miller to the Social Justice Committee
- Empower Trustees to extend the loan of First Parish artifacts to the Historical Society
- Approve Parish Committee position “job description” and charter

Appointing a new member to the Social Justice Committee:

**(MOTION 1)** I vote to appoint Tish Miller to the Social Justice Committee. (Anne) Seconded (Celia) 7 of 7 in favor. None opposed.

First Parish artifacts that had been lent to the Arlington Historical Society:

Discussion included a friendly amendment to include “extend the loan and determine a reasonable time frame that is not indefinite”

**(MOTION 2)** I vote that the Parish Committee empower the Trustees to extend the loan of First Parish artifacts to the Arlington Historical Society and determine a reasonable time frame of the loan that is not indefinite. (Sara Galantowitz) Seconded (John Anderson) 7 of 7 in favor. None opposed.

Approval of job description for Parish Committee members and the Parish Committee charter

**(MOTION 3)** I move that the Parish Committee approve, and adopt as proposed, the job description for Parish Committee members as well as the Parish Committee charter that will get updated each year with the calendar and key working groups. (Anne Q.) Seconded (Joanna, Al, and John). 7 of 7 in favor. None opposed.

**8:09 through 8:13 PM: Break**

**State of the Parish (Ministers, 20 minutes)**

- The ministers highlighted the Stewardship campaign: “Investing in Vibrant Community”
  - There are two upcoming trainings for stewards: Feb. 25th in person and Feb. 27th online
  - Rev. Erica and Maryglen Vincens will be hosting and leading the trainings.
  - 130 households will be visited by stewards
  - March 3rd is the kickoff, Stewardship Sunday. There is a lead donor luncheon on the 10th
  - The campaign goal is \$775,000 which is a 3% increase from last year’s pledges.
- First Parish has experienced more than 8% attendance growth at worship services this past year.
- First Parish celebrates our new people, Rev. Stevie Carmody and interim Music Director Daniel Parsley.

8:20 PM - Rev. Marta Flanagan spoke about taking prophetic stance. She spoke about religious communities making values real, such as in loving your neighbor. In our time, for example, LGBTQIA+ communities are welcomed and embraced as part of First Parish. Rev. Marta Flanagan provided the following background and points:

- While First Parish does not ally with political candidates, First Parish is a religious community that takes a stand.
- Religious communities across the spectrum in the United States take stands. How does First Parish decide which issues? How does First Parish determine?
  - The extent of volunteer engagement and the involvement of the congregation at First Parish helps determine these issues.
- A social justice policy some years ago arose. Alan Linov of the Social Justice Committee came to the Parish Committee last year and spoke about levels of support: a banner on the First Parish lawn, a vigil, a demonstration, advertising events through literature, etc.
- Typically, committees like the Social Justice Committee weigh in on the umbrella of issues if asked, as is the Parish Committee.
- Recent actions and events in and around First Parish have come up regarding Israel-Palestine concerns. At its most recent meeting, the Social Justice Committee created the idea of the “Soap Box Table” where individuals can put forth a petition, for example, to legislators. The topics of these Soap Box Tables would be around issues which do not currently have a working group at First Parish. One example could be abortion.
- There was an external group to First Parish which was based in Arlington but had no affiliation to First Parish: it is called Arlington for Palestine. There was a Sunday afternoon request to use the lawn in front of the meeting house for a vigil or demonstration. The group was interested in going inside the meeting house and using the building to create signs for demonstrations. Partly due to the short notice, First Parish leadership including Parish Committee Exec and members of the Social Justice Committee denied the request to use the building. It was not clear at the time that the demonstrations occur weekly.
- With the urgency of what is happening in Israel-Palestine, there might be a need for a policy defined by the Parish Committee and fielded by the committee along with the Social Justice Committee. Input is needed from the leadership and where the congregation stands.

#### Discussion and Questions:

- The Parish Committee would want a better read on the full diversity of opinions in the congregation. The Middle East emerging issues task force could engage with the congregation.
- Recently, other issues of public witness have had the majority of congregational support.
- The Parish Committee would want a policy that helps First Parish communicate that a 24 hour decision is not the preferred time frame. It would be helpful to set a minimum time frame in which to respond.
- There is a sentiment to keep communicating when there is a variety of opinions within and to turn to thoughtful clarification. Seeing internal communication develop more, getting more comfortable with discomfort, and seeing how our Unitarian Universalist beliefs guide us would help us not shy away from hard conversations.
- The request to come into the building to get warm is different from the request to use the meeting house to make banners. When the request to make banners inside was denied, the member of Arlington for Palestine was very gracious.
- There seems to be a need to have a forum to hear folks.
- Ellen Leigh of the Indigenous People’s Working Group added that there is a need to amplify voices and to be careful about reacting to another group’s proposal.

- Rev. Stevie Carmody invoked Adrienne Marie Brown's "move at the speed of trust," in other words: if we have done the work of trust, we can move quickly. When trust needs to be fostered, it's an indicator to slow down.
- Rev. Erica highlighted that there can be many hard things that exist at the same time, and there is a responsibility to pay attention when people feel unsafe or in the line of harm. Take anti-semitism seriously. Take anti-Islamophobia seriously. Immense suffering is happening. There is an obligation to each other and towards living our faith.
- Among the members present, Rev. Marta is hearing a counsel of caution and courage, when needed.

8:47 PM - The Parish Committee acknowledged the news of the Office Manager sending in her resignation.

- Gratitude was expressed for Sara Hidalgo. Her last day will be March 22nd.
- The ministers expressed both celebratory congratulations for Sara Hidalgo moving to another religious community as well as disappointment at seeing her leave our community.
- The Parish Committee asked whether FP would have an opportunity to acknowledge Sara H in the pulpit during Sunday worship.

#### 8:51 Finances (Carolyn)

- First Parish remains in a good position financially.
- Expenses are lagging. Revenue has caught up to seasonalized expectations.
- The Treasurer will be doing another re-forecast for March, which is when First Parish gets ready for the budget and its many moving parts.
- Budgeting process:
  - Lissa McBurney and Eric Segal are keeping a list of the moving parts. The Treasurer will be meeting with them at the end of February. Questions can be submitted from the Parish Committee to the Treasurer or to Lissa and Eric directly.

**(MOTION 4)** I vote to adopt the consent agenda. (Sara G.) Seconded (Celia). 7 of 7 in favor None opposed.

#### 8:55 PM: Cost Sharing for First Parish Staff Health Insurance

Endorsing the recommendation from the Human Resources Committee of First Parish for cost sharing of health insurance of First Parish staff:

- There have been multiple conversations among Parish Committee Exec and the Human Resources Committee.
- If the Parish Committee wants to adopt the Unitarian Universalist Association's guidelines but are concerned about the financial impact to phase it in, here is what was originally proposed: First Parish would pay 50% of the cost of a partner or spouse, then it might pay 30% the first year and then phase towards the 50%. The Treasurer just solidified these numbers this afternoon.
- To clarify, the 50% cost would be for any family structure of a staff member (employee-partner, employee-child, employee-family).
- Together with the Treasurer and Kay Snowden, a cost estimate was constructed. If all full-time First Parish staff took the cost sharing option, what would it cost First Parish?
  - If 50%, the cost would be approximately \$24,400 for the year. The timing is such that it would be effective January 1st. The first year would be a portion, then the following year

would absorb the full cost (the timing aligns with the calendar year, not the First Parish fiscal year; or, if an employee has an “event” that qualifies to reconsider the coverage).

- The start would fall inside the budget for 2024-2025 as coverage would start January 2025.
- 30% is \$14,600; 50% is \$24,400 for the year (so for 2024-2025 the costs would be \$7,300 and 12,200, respectively)
- For context, health insurance currently costs (for all staff) roughly \$60,000.
- To reiterate, First Parish did not know we were not meeting the UUA guidance. The Treasurer’s opinion is: let’s rectify something from the past that wasn’t addressed.

Discussion:

- A point of clarification: The estimates are the maximum potential cost.
- The ramp up is going to happen naturally. The first year would only cover half a year. The fairness question of covering all family types is important.
- The Parish Committee echoed the Treasurer's opinion to set something right that First Parish was not doing in the past.
- A question about whether a staff member has a partner: If the partner opts out of First Parish insurance, does First Parish pay a portion? The Treasurer acknowledged this point from the previous Parish Committee meeting and asked that we table this as a separate concern to be discussed.
- Budgeting conservatively, at the maximum potential cost, would inflate the staff costs in the budget. If First Parish budgets for 50% for all staff and this portion is not used, it should be noted.
- To take a vote among the Parish Committee would then put this item as part of the First Parish base budget.

**(MOTION 5)** I vote that we adopt, beginning in the ‘24-25 budget year, effective calendar year January 2025, to subsidize the family cost of insurance at the 50% option, per the Unitarian Universalist Association guidelines (Sara) Seconded (Celia). 7 of 7 in favor. None opposed.

It was noted that the First Parish Human Resources Committee would not recommend the payout alternative if a staff person chose to opt out of First Parish insurance. The reasons are due to the small staff size and the fact that the Unitarian Universalist Association did not recommend the payout option either.

There was a consensus among the Parish Committee that it would be advisable to close out the question of opting out of insurance being tied to a payout.

The Parish Committee expressed gratitude towards the Human Resources Committee for dealing with many open-ended issues.

**9:13 PM      Review Spring Fundraiser proposal (Sara, 15 minutes)**

- Parish Committee Executive has been in conversation, and Sara G is willing to take on coordinating the brand new Spring Fundraiser.
- The fundraiser will be on May 3rd. The building has been reserved for this date.
- One musical group is already being asked to perform and is available.

- Sara G as coordinator is navigating who will share in sponsoring: for example, World Kitchen seems like a good candidate for their values, reach, and being food-related.
- There was a suggestion that the Reckoning and Repair Working Group help nominate an organization.
- There is a huge hunger for social gatherings in the congregation.
- Our budget looks good for the remainder of the year.
- A question of whether First Parish has the energy to hold two fundraising events in a church year arose. The model of breaking coordination into smaller pieces, like Stewardship and the Tinabration committee, seems to work well.
- The Parish Committee has been using Jamboard, an online collaboration tool, to generate ideas and can continue to do so.
- Sara G will be making the announcement for the fundraiser in early March.
- The Parish Committee members are grateful and in support of this fundraiser.
- While this is a fundraiser and will have a meaningful price tag, the Parish Committee is attentive that there be no cost barrier to anyone. There could be sponsored tickets from others or a sliding scale in place. Inclusion is important.

### **Parish Committee leadership election (10 minutes)**

As set in the First Parish charter, members of the Parish Committee are elected by the congregation at Annual Meeting. However, when it is time for the Chair and/or Vice-Chair to end their terms, the Parish Committee votes to appoint these positions from within the committee. Neither the current Clerk nor the Treasurer can be appointed as Chair or Vice-chair.

- There have been some meetings among Parish Committee Executive and the Leadership Development Committee. There will be another meeting on March 9th.
- There will be at least two open seats on the Parish Committee that will need to be filled.

Anne Quaadgras, currently serving as vice-chair, has expressed a willingness to run for the chair position.

John Anderson has expressed a willingness to run for the vice-chair position.

The floor opened for other nominations. None being made, the Parish Committee voted to appoint the new chair and vice chair.

**(MOTION 6):** I move that we elect Anne Quaadgras as the chair of the Parish Committee. (Sara)  
Seconded (Celia) 7 of 7 in favor. None opposed.

**(MOTION 7):** I move that we elect John Anderson as vice chair. (Sara) Seconded (Carolyn). 7 of 7 in favor.  
None opposed.

The Parish Committee thanked Sara G for being a wonderful example and for leading the committee with incredible calmness, poise, and flexibility. Sara remains on the committee through May 2024.

[The clerk notes that flowers appeared on Sara's Zoom screen, thanks to John Galantowicz being able to present the bouquet to Sara on behalf of the Parish Committee.]

**(MOTION 8)** I vote that we adjourn (Anne). Seconded (Carolyn.) 7 of 7 in favor. None opposed.

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

**MOTIONS:**

**(MOTION 1)** I vote to appoint Tish Miller to the Social Justice Committee. (Anne) Seconded (Celia) 7 of 7 in favor. None opposed.

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Parish Committee minutes prepared by Joanna Pushee, volunteer clerk.