

# Parish Committee Meeting Minutes

First Parish Unitarian Universalist of Arlington

April 29, 2025 7 - 9 pm

**via Zoom**

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

**Ministers:** Rev. Marta Flanagan, Rev. Tricia Brennan, and Rev. Stevie Carmody

**Guests:** First Parish members Marie Meteer (Interim Search Committee), Amy Speare (Stewardship), and Andrea Winslow (Committee on Ministry)

7:02 and 7:04 Call to Order (Anne)

Parish Committee tabling sign-up reminder

7:05 Reading and Chalice Lighting (Susan); Two minutes of silence

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

The Treasurer reported on the March financials and an updated reforecast

- First Parish remains in a surplus position year-to-date
- Pledges are currently 2.5% below plan and are being monitored
- Revenue is working its way toward the expected plan
- Expenses are running favorably to what was originally budgeted.

In the re-forecast, First Parish is still in a net surplus position. The amount that First Parish expects to borrow from ourselves will be lower than what was expected: First Parish will dip slightly into the contingency or contained earnings.

First Parish tends to see a lot of activity at this time in the program year. There was a payroll meeting with the Treasurer, office manager, a First Parish Human Resources volunteer, and Liz - with the large amount of payroll transitions (including Rev. Tricia completing her time and Rev. Erica Richmond re-joining after her leave), the Treasurer has kept staff apprised of these transitions.

Discussion / questions:

- A Parish Committee member commented that the financials and reforecast both look great.
- The Parish Committee chair expressed gratitude for the Treasurer's work and the indicator template.

- A Parish Committee member commented on the good practice of having two months of emergency funds to keep operating and how that amount is recalculated to be sure to cover those costs each year.
- The Treasurer highlighted that First Parish is operating from a place of abundance: congregants are so engaged! First Parish has a variety of ways to engage in spiritual growth and to be active with social justice. First Parish is very fortunate and we continue to thrive.
- First Parish's social justice activism remains policy-based and not aligned with any partisan matters.
- The Treasurer commented that the numbers presented will be the ones shared at Annual Meeting, which occurs before the end of the fiscal year.
- A First Parish member asked a question about pledges: it is the first year since the COVID-19 pandemic that we, the Treasurer and Finance Committee, factored in a lower number for pledges (using the 2.5%); If First Parish receives all of its pledges, that would be fantastic. Amy Speare, First Parish member and Stewardship Committee member, said that those people who could not complete their pledges were up front about that.
- The Parish Committee vice chair highlighted the significance of First Parish's practice of asking the congregation to pledge early: how useful and integral to planning that those early pledges can be, and how this practice is not new. First Parish publicly addresses the idea that we celebrate generosity and giving with joy.
- The Treasurer concluded that she submitted the annual report to the First Parish office manager.

First Parish member Marie Meteer arrived at 7:21 pm.

A Parish Committee member acknowledged the minister's report from Rev. Marta Flanagan, including the incredible number of pastoral visits.

A Parish Committee member acknowledged Minister of Religious Education (MRE) Rev. Stevie Carmody's report, including the announcement of Rose Sawyer's departure, and the update with the photos from the youth group's service trip.

### **Consent agenda: Minutes, Financials, Ministers' Reports.**

**MOTION 1:** I move that we accept the consent agenda (Steve M.) Seconded (John A.) 8 of 8 in favor. None opposed.

### **7:27 PM Interim (Minister) Search Committee (ISC) progress update (Marie Meteer)**

Marie provided an update to the Parish Committee on the progress of the Interim Search Committee. First Parish has submitted its profile to the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) and that profile has been approved by the UUA. At least two people have expressed interest in the interim lead minister role already.

The ISC expressed gratitude to the Parish Committee for preparing the contract.

The Interim Search Committee's next step will be to set up standard interviews of about one hour each. The ISC has created a list of questions to ask candidates.

The ISC is ready and prepared for the next steps; currently, the ISC is in waiting mode and looks forward to being able to set up interviews with candidates.

Questions/discussion:

- A Parish Committee member asked if there would be an update made at Annual Meeting on May 18th. While the name of a candidate would not be shared, the ISC would be able to provide the congregation with an update on the process and the number of people interviewed.
- A Parish Committee member expressed deep gratitude to the search committee.
- A Parish Committee member expressed great confidence in the team of people on the ISC and confidence in the process.
- More gratitude was expressed by various members of the Parish Committee.

**7:37 PM Nursery school update (Carolyn)**

The First Parish tenant, Adventures in Montessori (AIM), and a group of First Parish folks comprised of Parish Committee members Steve McMullin, Jeff Keffer, and Carolyn Hodges, along with Rev. Stevie Carmody, and the office manager met with the head of the nursery school.

Topics of the meeting included the discussion of installing a temporary, portable wall. The wall would be installed at the expense of the nursery school. It will be important and required by First Parish to ensure that the impact of the wall on sound quality would be minimal. Someone from First Parish would need to be physically present to inspect and assess such a wall. Rev. Stevie would need to be updated.

Another topic was the replacement of some carpet in the hallway on the first and second floor at the nursery school's expense. The First Parish Property Committee is in favor of this replacement: the quality of the carpet could be improved.

Tiling and moulding, at First Parish's expense, was also listed as needing updates and improvements. The Property Committee will check the quality of, and safety of, the tile and mastic. The chair of the Property Committee is in the process of weighing in and others on the Property Committee are involved.

The lease is being negotiated and at the time of this Parish Committee meeting has not been signed yet. First Parish's Parish Committee member Jeff Keffer has updated the lease with all items except the portable wall. AIM will be paying slightly higher rent in the lease since they will be using the Peirce room as their office. The Peirce room is not included in the current lease. The security deposit will also increase to incorporate the Peirce room.

The portable wall item could be added as an addendum after the main lease is signed.

Questions:

- A member of the parish Committee asked if the head of AIM provided the requested bank statement. Yes, she showed us a current statement, First Parish did not retain a copy nor any banking information.

- Gratitude was expressed for the work of Jeff Keffer, in particular, on updating the lease agreement and gratitude for the team of folks who have been working hard to mutually meet each other's needs.
- The lease with the tenant is up annually for renewal at the discretion of either the landlord or the tenant.

#### **7:40 Annual Meeting Warrant - Approve warrant for Annual meeting**

The Annual Meeting will be held on May 18 in the sanctuary after the Sunday service.

A Parish Committee member recommended that the clerk coordinate with the office manager to send out the warrant on May 6th rather than May 9th due to the schedule for listening sessions in person and on Zoom beginning on May 7th. Listening sessions will enable congregants to ask questions about the finances and budget as well as the warrant item on conferring emerita status to Rev. Marta Flanagan.

**MOTION 2:** I move that we approve the warrant for annual meeting (Kate) Seconded (John A) 8 of 8 in favor.

**7:50** Scheduling & recognition of hellos/goodbyes in the next six weeks; Parcom schedule after annual meeting, ParCom June retreat

The Parish Committee will set aside time to say good-bye to outgoing committee members and express gratitude for their service.

The Parish Committee retreat was originally scheduled for June 7th, but two members are unable to attend. The retreat is being rescheduled for Sunday, June 1 in the afternoon at the meeting house.

Andrea Winslow joined the meeting just before 8 pm.

**8:02 - 8:09 PM** Break

#### **8:09 Rose of Recognition nomination**

The nomination is for Barbara Tosti who coordinates prayer shawls and is the champion of the memorial garden, and gardening in general; Barbara is so supportive of spiritual life; the memorial garden and prayer shawls are beautiful unique things that First Parish has. Barbara has spent many, many years of behind the scenes effort, with no real committee for this work.

Rev. Marta commended this nomination. There is no Memorial Garden Committee that is active because Barbara Tosti functions as the committee. The memorial garden pre-dates

Marta. The prayer shawl was introduced by Marta a dozen years ago: Barbara took it right up. Barbara has kept at it as an individual and has kept it up. The work is critically important and it has been a busy time this year. Barbara handles the busy times in grace.

For the next nomination, there was a shout out for the Religious Education group, and a special highlight for a group of long-time volunteers including Bill Licea-Kane, Andy Kobayashi, and Paul Franzosa who are very committed to RE and did a fabulous job bringing the youth on the service trip this spring.

8:15 Congregational party on May 31 - vote to allow youth to attend in area where alcohol is served, exception to policy:

**Vote 3: Approve alcohol policy exception with appropriate safeguards**

- The alcohol policy prohibits teenagers be around in areas where alcohol is being served.
- The party planners want to be inclusive of youth at the party, and think many youth would want to be present at the party. However, it is important to have safeguards while alcohol is present.
- The Parish Committee has the ability to vote on an exception to the policy.

The Parish Committee chair asked Rev. Stevie for input and insight.

Parish Committee members reviewed the alcohol policy before the meeting.

The Parish Committee would make a general announcement about the congregational party being an all-ages event, that adults must supervise the drinks and that volunteers would be monitoring full or partially empty cups.

There will be a First Parish member who has a bartending license and she will be using her skills and qualifications to manage the operations along with other volunteers who are adults working with her.

A Parish Committee member asked about the fundraiser last year - A Taste of First Parish - which had an outside official present: are we bringing in an outside official for this congregational party? No - because last year, the event had alcohol for sale. This event will not have alcohol for sale. The congregational party for Marta's retirement is by invitation only. The Taste of First Parish was open to the public.

Parish Committee member asked Rev. Stevie if he thought the safeguards proposed would be sufficient. Rev. Stevie shared that the volunteers should not leave any bottles in the fridge in the kitchen or any leftover alcohol. It would need to be cleaned up and removed.

Andrea Winslow of the Committee on Ministry (and congregational party planning group) thanked everyone for their input.

**MOTION 3:** I move that Parish Committee approve an exception to our alcohol policy to allow youth to attend the celebration for Rev. Marta. This approval specifically emphasizes that:

1. A general announcement will be made to remind everyone this is an all ages event and alcohol is restricted to adults over 21 years of age who must supervise their drinks;
2. youth may not be served alcohol;
3. any bottle or drink will be supervised by an adult at all times;
4. At least one certified bartender will be on duty who will card any young adult and will refuse serving any individual who appears to be inebriated;
5. all alcohol will be supervised from the time it is delivered until the end of the party at which time all alcohol will be removed from the premises.
6. We will offer attractive non-alcoholic beverages

The motion was so moved (John Anderson). Seconded (Kate Tranquada) 8 of 8 in favor. None opposed. The motion passed unanimously.

#### 8:21 **State of the Parish** (Rev. Marta)

Marta shared her screen and ceded the first 3-4 minutes to Rev. Stevie: news to elaborate on with Parish Committee members.

Rev. Stevie: On April 13, Rose Sawyer Marsh announced that she is leaving First Parish. She is at a turning point in her career. It has been a wonderful tenure. Rev Stevie has seen that Rose has been able to creatively sustain community. The continuation of RE programming that we are so proud of has been strong. Over the next couple of months, Rev. Stevie will shepherd the hiring of a new Youth Program Coordinator. First Parish Religious Education prioritizes working with high school teens on the hiring process. This is a position with lots of pastoral care and counseling support. A big part of the job includes youth gatherings: there are 28 members in the youth group! The goals are to keep sustaining and growing coming out of the pandemic years.

An adult from the RE committee will be on the hiring team. The group will be assembled by this Sunday, May 4th. Meetings will begin next week to review candidates, schedule interviews, and ask for input from people in the congregation who have HR backgrounds. Even in our hiring process, we are doing faith formation and leadership development.

The job was posted on April 18th. The UUA, professional networks, and First Parish office staff support to get the job posted on sites like Indeed; Rev. Stevie has three applications already.

MRE Stevie applauds ParCom in supporting good staffing. The hiring committee starts up in early May, interviews will be held in mid- to late-May, and Rev. Stevie will be doing some

screening. Ultimately, the decision on a candidate lies in the Parish Committee's hands. In June, the hiring committee will be making a recommendation to the Parish Committee.

Thumbs up to Rev. Stevie. The Parish Committee commended Rev. Stevie for a good process.

8:28 - Rev. Marta, State of the Parish

Rev. Marta remarked on how many balls are in the air at First Parish.

- Annual Meeting
- Finalizing the budget
- Wishing a minister farewell
- Hiring for Youth Coordinator
- Active Interim minister search
- Getting all the trains running on time so First Parish operates smoothly

Rev. Marta remarked that she is with First Parish for 5 ½ more weeks; there is so much to do! Marta is pacing herself and "downloading" information to relevant committees and working groups.

An example of a procedure and tradition downloaded is the State of the Parish itself, and how the lead minister submits a written report rather than verbally walking the Parish Committee through it. Marta had asked for a State of the Parish item on the Parish Committee agenda to keep members of Parcom informed and educated when she first started with us.

Worship at First Parish

- Is worship the lifeblood of the congregation? YES! There may be members who do not participate in worship by choice; but overwhelmingly, worship is our lifeblood. Worship is our highest-attended event. (The highest attended services are: InGathering in September, Christmas Eve, Easter, Youth Sunday, Music Sunday, and the preaching of both the Lead Minister and the Parish Minister.
- Worship takes up the greatest staff and volunteer efforts: the number of staff hours needed of any activity (preachers, participating ministers, music staff, office staff and order of service, sexton; it is an enormous effort); it requires the largest number of volunteers: ushers, choir members, worship associates, and more.
- It takes an hour of preparation for every minute in the pulpit.
- Sermon 20 minutes as a rough estimate
- A prayer takes 1-2 hours of preparation
- Time for All Ages takes 1-4 hours in general for preparation
- Choir hours
- Musicians hours
- "What it takes" for 1 hour 15 minute worship is a lot!

Who shapes Worship?

- By letter of agreement and contract - First Parish and Rev. Marta have a standard arrangement: the overall approach is shaped by the called minister who has “freedom of the pulpit” which was hard won over the centuries, we vest a minister to speak; Everything else (liturgy) the people’s work (stones, prayers, spoken memorials - other such elements) - that is what the CONGREGATION owns.
  - Even though there is freedom of the pulpit, we are committed to being non-partisan. We don’t speak from the pulpit in favor of a particular political candidate or particular political party.
  - Living our faith: At First Parish, we do take stands on issues.
- The year Marta arrived; she asked the Parish Committee to create the Worship Associate program (The Parish Committee delegated to the Worship Associates working with Lead minister to shape the ways of worship - have been doing that 15 years)
- WAs are volunteers, like the lay ministers. Unlike other groups - they APPLY and are interviewed by Shared Ministry which is a Parish Committee appointed group (these are not committees in the bylaws). The lead minister attends the monthly meetings of the Worship Associates. (Think about lead Interim minister and role to participate in the WA meetings).
- One piece of magic that happens around this: The Worship calendar
  - A Google document is used by a number of folks who rely on it
    - Worship Associates
    - Office staff
    - Ministers including the Minister of Religious Education
    - Music Director

In late winter, the lead minister asks the First Parish Office to create dates, add national holidays, school vacations. “Guesses” when annual meeting will be; schedule Music Sunday, Coming of Age, senior blessing.

Social Justice committee - Schedule living our faith services and Shinn service

Alliance - schedule Alliance Sunday

Preachers that the Parish Committee has arranged: the Minister of Religious Education preaches at least once a year; Wendy Page gets scheduled to preach once per year. Then, 3-5 guest preachers are scheduled to fill in.

Credo Sunday (Worship Associates)

Then, add all the rituals - spoken memorials, calling directions, ceremonies throughout the year such as installations of the Worship Associates, installation of the Lay Ministers; installations of the membership (we don’t want multiple ceremonies on the same Sunday)

Also have to schedule self and Parish Minister (Marta schedules these last.)

Worship Calendar template - THANK YOU - Marta gifted us with a Worship calendar for 2025-2026. So much gratitude for Rev. Marta bestowing this gift on First Parish.



The Parish Committee chair and vice chair both expressed deep gratitude for Marta.

Questions?

- Marta did not schedule Rev. Erica and interim lead after Christmas.
- Other ministers may do the scheduling as chunks months at a time rather than one year at a time.
- There was a question about the congregational picnic and who would be coordinating (yes it will happen and has a coordinator)

Deep gratitude from the Parish Committee to Marta for her “downloading,” her gift of the schedule and for many other spoken and unspoken gifts.

8:50 - Rev. Marta leaves the meeting

8:51 - Rev. Tricia leaves the meeting

**8:50 Rev. Marta Good Goodbye updates (Anne/Committee on Ministry member Andrea Winslow / all)**

134 people are signed up to come to Marta's retirement party so far. Tina Silberman had suggested to Andrea Winslow to go over the plan for the party: the start of the evening of party 6:30 - 7:45 in the vestry and the courtyard. Speeches between about 8 and 9; Music and dancing after. Wrap up 10-10:30 pm.

Getting the volunteers has been so easy! Thank you, volunteers, for being very very generous!

Andrea asked that two Parish Committee members sign up to volunteer to welcome party-goers at the beginning of the evening.

Childcare will be in the Parlor with two caretakers

Andrea Winslow left the meeting with gratitude and will let the Committee on Ministry folks know that the alcohol policy exception was approved for the congregational party.

9:01 PM - New - Retirement Gift - raising money from the congregation (Al T. provided input)

9:02 PM - Marie M signed off.

9:13 Adjourn

**MOTION 4:** I move that we adjourn this meeting. (Carolyn H.) Seconded (Kate T.) 8 of 8 in favor. None opposed.

MOTIONS:

**MOTION 1:** I move that we accept the consent agenda (Steve M.) Seconded (John A.) 8 of 8 in favor. None opposed.

**MOTION 2:** I move that we approve the warrant for annual meeting (Kate) Seconded (John A) 8 of 8 in favor.

**MOTION 3:** I move that Parish Committee approve an exception to our alcohol policy to allow youth to attend the celebration for Rev. Marta. This approval specifically emphasizes that:

1. A general announcement will be made to remind everyone this is an all ages event and alcohol is restricted to adults over 21 years of age who must supervise their drinks;
2. youth may not be served alcohol;
3. any bottle or drink will be supervised by an adult at all times;
4. At least one certified bartender will be on duty who will card any young adult and will refuse serving any individual who appears to be inebriated;
5. all alcohol will be supervised from the time it is delivered until the end of the party at which time all alcohol will be removed from the premises.
6. We will offer attractive non-alcoholic beverages

The motion was so moved (John Anderson). Seconded (Kate Tranquada) 8 of 8 in favor. None opposed. The motion passed unanimously.

**MOTION 4:** I move that we adjourn this meeting. (Carolyn H.) Seconded (Kate T.) 8 of 8 in favor. None opposed.

Meeting minutes prepared by Joanna Pushee, volunteer clerk.