

Parish Committee Minutes
First Parish Unitarian Universalist of Arlington
September 17, 2024 7 - 9 pm
Online on Zoom

Anne Quaadgras (Chair), John Anderson (Vice Chair), Joanna Pushee (Clerk), Carolyn Hodges (Treasurer), Steve McMullin, Susan Moore, Jeff Keffer, Kate Tranquada, Al Tosti.

Ministers: Rev. Marta Flanagan, Rev. Erica Richmond, and Minister of Religious Education Stevie Carmody

Guests: Alan Linov and Tom Estabrook, representing the Middle East Task Force (under the umbrella of the Social Justice Committee)

7:03 Call to Order (Anne Q.)

7:04 Reading and Chalice Lighting (Steve M.) and two minutes of silence

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

The First Parish July/August financials have been updated along with a link to the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) retirement plan. The UUA has asked First Parish of Arlington to adopt the guidelines before the end of October.

In setting up the budget, a computational error had been identified in one spreadsheet used by the Finance Committee. After it was discovered that someone overwrote some Excel cells by \$10,800, the Treasurer asked the Parish Committee to approve an amendment to the 2024-25 budget to reflect this increase in salary, benefits, and personnel expenses. The Treasurer asked that the Parish Committee approve this remedy formally as the Finance Committee will use the revised numbers to build the budget for the next program year when that committee meets in November.

The Treasurer meets with the First Parish Office Manager every two weeks. Together, the Treasurer and the Office Manager are doing a complete inventory of spreadsheets and are building a good understanding of which spreadsheets exist and are being used. This inventory also has a purpose of identifying any spreadsheets that were not formerly known or utilized.

A Parish Committee member asked for a point of clarification concerning changes proposed to the current fiscal year's budget.

The increase proposed, to address the error from the budget reported in the Annual Meeting materials, is \$10,765.

There was no impact on the 2023-2024 financial results and reporting. The impact is on the salary, benefits, and personnel expenses for the 2024-2025 year.

7:20 **Budget restatement** (Carolyn) - to revise the First Parish 2024-25 budget to correct the error discovered after the May 2024 annual meeting.

MOTION 1: I move that the Parish Committee adopts a revision to the 2024-2025 budget reflecting an increase of \$10,764.00 in Salary, Benefits and Other Personnel Expense. This increase is needed as an error in underlying computations for the salary and benefits expense was discovered subsequent to the May 2024 Annual Meeting. (John A.) Seconded (Jeff K.) 9 of 9 in favor. None opposed.

As a result of the motion, the Treasurer increased the budgeted amount taken from reserves to balance the budget from \$52,474, as presented at Annual Meeting, to \$63,238.

A Parish Committee member asked about the total reserves and discretionary funding. Is it possible to change the balance sheet to reflect the two different reserves? The Treasurer and the Finance Committee are tidying up, but the name/title of the accounts cannot be changed.

The Treasurer reported that the pledge base is strong.

- Pre-paid pledges, for the 2024 to 2025 fiscal year, have many pledges paid before June by many members.

The First Parish tenant, Arlington Children's House, of Adventures in Montessori (AIM):

- For July, August, and September, the tenant did not pay until September. The information the Parish Committee received did not have the tenant's rent reflected in the report; however, the tenant has paid.

- Adventures in Montessori was undercharged in 2023 - 2024 because the CPI inflator was not factored in as per the contract; the amount is a couple hundred dollars a month, so the total is about \$16,00. The Parish Committee vice chair, John Anderson, set up a meeting with the tenant.

The vice chair of the Parish Committee reported that there was turnover both on staff of First Parish and at the Montessori school. There is a need for introductions and reviewing the language of the lease, understanding the lease and rent calculations, and how First Parish and AIM are sharing space. The Office Manager is already in direct communication with the tenant. The position of First Parish is that we would like AIM to make up the difference of the undercharged rent; amount.

It was noted that there is complexity in the lease agreement: the rent is dependent on enrollment at the school.

The way rent is calculated is such that there is a flat base fee (based on enrollment of 20 students); there is also an incremental fee based on the enrollment (the fee is incrementally adjusted). Each month the school provides the current month's enrollment to the First Parish

office manager, who then calculates the rent due, and provides this amount to the tenant. The new office manager inherited the spreadsheet. The office manager is very careful and has been asking very good questions. Gratitude was expressed for this consideration and work.

The Parish Committee gave its blessing for the office manager to start preparing the invoice to bill Adventures in Montessori the updated rental amount.

7:32 PM - Consent agenda: Minutes, Financials, Ministers' Reports

MOTION 2: I move that we accept the consent agenda. (Al T.) Seconded (Steve) 9 of 9 in favor. None opposed.

7:29 - 7:32 UUA retirement plan change (Carolyn) **Vote:** retirement plan restatement resolution

Unitarian Universalist Association retirement plan updates

The Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) has modified and updated the retirement plan. First Parish received a link with 80 pages which was passed to the Parish Committee. The plan is compliant with regulations and laws. The plan had not been updated in a while. The plan does not adversely impact employees who are participating in the plan at First Parish.

Parish Committee member asked a few questions including whether the changes would result in any costs. The Treasurer explained that the plan is a defined contribution plan. First Parish pays a certain amount whether or not the employee contributes. The employee has an option to contribute. For part-time employees above a certain level, these individuals are eligible after one year of work at First Parish.

I move we accept the following resolution on the restatement of the UUA retirement plan:

Retirement Plan - September 17, 2024

Whereas the First Parish Unitarian Universalist of Arlington, MA (First Parish) is committed to assisting all of its employees 18 years and older prepare for their retirement years, and;

Whereas the Unitarian Universalist Organizations Retirement Plan (the "Plan") is the retirement plan sponsored by the Unitarian Universalist Association, therefore;

Be It Resolved that First Parish hereby adopts the 2025 Restatement of the Unitarian Universalist Organization's Retirement Plan with an implementation date of January 1, 2025 and commits to complying with all the provisions of the Plan and the elections made by First Parish in the 2025 Employer Participation Agreement that we submit to the UUA Retirement Plan Committee and they acknowledge receipt and approve via counter signature of same.

7:35-7:37PM **Rose of Recognition for October**

A Parish Committee member nominated Jeff Roberts, who has been on the Parish Committee twice in the past and who is currently the church archivist. He has done a lot of work taking care of the First Parish grounds, including watering, as well as a lot of work ushering.

A Parish Committee member nominated John Shriver, who is a one-man tech wizard: when it comes to the cameras and related technology for making the Zoom services possible, John Shriver has been essential. He fixed the hardware, the software, and various computers. John purchased the camera equipment through the First Parish office, installed it, and tested it. If First Parish did not have John Shriver, First Parish would not have nearly as seamless a service. John has made the process simpler for the other operators as well.

A Parish Committee member wholeheartedly supported the recommendation above.

Another Parish Committee member suggested that September's "Rose of Recognition" be John Shriver, and that October's be Jeff Roberts. (Carolyn and Anne will put together the e-bulletin article for John Shriver; Al Tosti and Kate Tranquada will put together the e-bulletin article for Jeff Roberts.)

7:38 PM **Flag proposal discussion** (Anne)

The Defending Democracy Task Force sent a proposal to Parish Committee Executive regarding use of the First Parish flag pole, which is behind the seat by the bus stop on Massachusetts Avenue. The flag pole has not had a flag on it in many years. The proposal would be to fly the U.S. flag, progress pride flag, and BLM flag. The proposal includes flying all three at the same time, with the U.S. flag at the top per law, and the flag would cost about \$40 each, plus some repairs, and some rope for a total cost of about \$160.

There was some discussion with Parish Committee Executive and one dissenting opinion was provided in writing.

Discussion:

A Parish Committee member asked about proper flag etiquette: it was confirmed that the U.S. flag must fly on top. Rev. Erica also confirmed that with the available proper lighting, from street lamps on Massachusetts Avenue, First Parish would not have to take down the flags at night.

The dissenting opinion was shared with the Parish Committee and in summary included the sentiment that the First Parish member cannot support flying the flag because it symbolizes negative connotations.

Both the Racial Justice Coordinating Committee (RJCC) and Welcoming Congregation Committee have reviewed the proposal.

A Parish Committee member shared that it is important that a statement be published in the e-bulletin, *The Spire* (the First Parish newsletter), and so on, if the proposal were to be approved and adopted.

The Parish Committee Executive discussed that this could be a wonderful opportunity to schedule time to invite the congregation's input. It would be a good opportunity to hear about First Parish congregants' opinions and thoughts connected to symbols, patriotism, and other questions.

The Parish Committee discussed the value of not making a quick decision. While the decision is not a congregational vote, it would be important to gather input and understand differences of opinion. The lead minister, Rev. Marta Flanagan, encouraged the Parish Committee to honor the differences of opinion and to provide space for these opinions.

A member of the Parish Committee suggested holding a listening session to be hosted by the Parish Committee.

The clerk together with the vice chair will reach out to the Defending Democracy Task Force to provide a one-page summary of the proposal. The clerk will set up some reservations for a table at the coffee hours on Sundays after worship; the vice chair will create a document to do sign ups so that Parish Committee members can gather input. There will be information sessions on September 29th and October 6th, and Joanna and John A will collect information. Susan, Al, and Steve will be at the first table. Joanna and John A will be at the table the second week.

The Treasurer, Carolyn H., and Rev. Erica will put together a Listening Session via Zoom for October 21.

8:05 pm to 8:11 PM Break

8:15 **State of the Parish** (ministers)

The lead minister, Marta Flanagan, shared the theme "Looking Beyond" and provided an article: "Want Less Conflict? Look Out the Window!" by David Brubaker (2022).

[Want Less Conflict? Look Out the Window! — Congregational Consulting Group](#)

David B link

For the state of the Parish, the lead minister invited the theme of not looking inward and instead looking outward.

The parish minister, Rev. Erica Richmond reported on the following highlights for the state of the parish:

- In relation to the affirmations approved during May 2024's Annual Meeting, First Parish committees are already making decisions pertaining to those affirmations (Reckoning and Repair; Indigenous Justice Working Group). The Social Justice Committee is using funds for events, co-sponsorships, and for consulting with a leader from the Massachusetts people. With the Dallin Museum and others, there is a music and dance event scheduled for Indigenous People's Day - by being co-sponsors, First Parish is making financial contributions in line with our values and First Parish people are participating in the events.
- The ArCS cluster has been hosting Haitian families throughout the summer. Shelter policies in Massachusetts have changed. At least seven First Parish families have hosted families over the summer, and ArCS is trying out a shorter-term model for hosting. The efforts are allowing for finding community connections and, most importantly, housing.

On behalf of the ArCs cluster, First Parish member Eric Segal requested that the Parish Committee and/or ministers write a letter of support of the Evangelical Haitian Church of Somerville/West Medford. One of the families being housed by First Parish members attends that church. A First Parish member, Sara Galantowicz, has driven the family to the church.

After former President Donald Trump's comments about Springfield, Ohio, and the racism associated with those comments, Eric Segal was inspired to request that the Parish Committee could write a letter of support to the church in Somerville/West Medford. Rev. Erica drafted the letter.

MOTION 4: Letter of Witness for the Evangelical Haitian Church of Somerville/West Medford

"I vote that the Parish Committee send the letter of support to the Evangelical Haitian Church of Somerville and West Medford." (Jeff Keffer) seconded (John A) 9 of 9 in favor. None opposed.

Rev. Erica will send the First Parish clerk a copy of the letter for the record/Google folder file.

Discussion of "Letter of Witness" at Rev. Marta Flanagan's suggestion: Might the Parish Committee add to its agendas a Letter of Witness? This may be similar to an element, such as the Rose of Recognition, which celebrates and can become part of the rituals of the committee.

Rev. Marta Flanagan provided some historical background and ideas related to the Letter of Witness suggestion: The Parish Committee has sent flowers in the past to City Hall and to the Town Clerk's office for the anniversary of the passing of the gay marriage law: the beaming office administrators appreciated the gesture. Might the Parish Committee continue to think creatively?

8:35 Taskforce on the Middle East update & discussion (Tom Estabrook & Alan Linov)

Background: Around the middle of last program year, the Middle East Task Force held educational events. The task force provided a Statement on Israel / Palestine. The group is compelled because of the moral emergency of the situation in the Middle East. The statement is currently one of individuals, not representative of all of First Parish, but 60 people signed in support of the statement in June 2024, including several Parish Committee members. The Middle East Task Force took the statement to the Parish Committee Executive:

- The Middle East Task Force is bringing the issue to the full attention of the Parish Committee:
 - The situation and conflict has grown and events have happened since June. The Unitarian Universalist Association, UUA, came out with a statement of solidarity with Palestine on June 22nd; a study came out in the Lancet medical journal in Great Britain stating that likely 186,000 people have been killed in the conflict.
 - There is moral urgency and emergency. The task force brings this back to the Parish Committee to gauge the committee's thinking.
- On behalf of the Middle East Task Force, Tom Estabrook shared what the task force wrote and reviewed it with the Parish Committee.
- The UUA link was provided, including a history of what Unitarian Universalists have done in the past.
- A resolution at the end calls for the need to be in solidarity; engage in witnessing, organizing, and advocacy; and shows the development of where events in the conflict have led.
- [Solidarity with Palestinians | Action of Immediate Witness | Social Witness Statements | UUA.org](#)
- The Middle East Task Force acknowledges that there are a variety of positions and opinions at First Parish.

Discussion:

- The Parish Committee discussed the statement and the information provided.
- At an event last spring, one Parish Committee member reported witnessing the opinions shared and stated that no consensus was evident at the event.
- A Parish Committee member mentioned that the committee's obligation as Parish Committee is to our membership, our congregation, and to continue to have dialogue.
- Some of the Parish Committee members expressed the sentiment that the committee is not ready to make a decision.
- A Parish Committee member pointed out that not all First Parish congregants would be able to agree with the Unitarian Universalist Association's statement as presented on the website. It would be best to continue the dialogue and to express a variety of views.
- A member of the Middle East Task Force mentioned that the task force is not proposing something along the lines of what the UUA General Assembly adopted. The statement signed by 60 First Parish people is a starting point.
- One member of the Parish Committee reiterated support for the statement and that his name is added to the list of 60 people, and mentioned reflecting on "thinking beyond

ourselves,” trying to understand ourselves inwardly, and paying direct attention to the reality of the atrocities happening in the world.

- A Parish Committee member asked if the committee feels that the congregation is unified. The fact that 60 people have signed on in support of the statement is a wonderful thing.
- Another Parish Committee member stated that signing the statement as is would not be possible and voting in favor would not be possible.
- There will be a silent vigil of grief on October 7, 2024, in Arlington along Massachusetts Ave.

The Task Force on the Middle East asked the Parish Committee to endorse a silent vigil on October 7th on the First Parish lawn to grieve all lives lost and captured in the Middle East over the last year. The message is “Peace and Justice” and calling for an end to violence. It is suggested that the vigil begin with a welcome and a prayer. Candles could be passed out. The message would be:

- *We gather in moral grief.*
- *Together we mourn every life lost in Israel and Palestine over the last year;*
- *We pray for the release of all those held captive;*
- *We call for an end to violence.*

The Parish Committee discussion included a concern on the language, and it was suggested to replace “every life lost in Israel and Palestine” with “every life lost in the Middle East”.

It was mentioned that the task force does not need a response from the whole of the Parish Committee, but the Parish Committee Executive does need to sign off on the use of the lawn in front of the First Parish meeting house.

One of the members of the Middle East Task Force highlighted that the vigil and statement are not necessarily from the Social Justice Committee, but only the task force.

The social justice policy was brought to attention: using the lawn in front of the First Parish meeting house is something that can only be done by decision of the Parish Committee or the Parish Committee Executive. The Parish Committee can also overrule or direct Executive.

The Parish Committee discussed endorsing the vigil with the language change from “Israel and Palestine” to “Middle East”.

MOTION 5: I move that we support this proposal with the wording changed to “every life lost in the Middle East” for the vigil. (John A.) Seconded (Al T.) 9 of 9 in favor. None opposed

Gratitude was expressed for Tom and Alan bringing this issue to the Parish Committee.

9:10 PM

MOTION 6: I move that we adjourn the meeting (John A) Seconded (Jeff K.) 9 of 9 in favor. None opposed.

Motions

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Meeting minutes prepared by First Parish volunteer clerk, Joanna Pushee.