

Parish Committee Meeting Minutes
First Parish Unitarian Universalist Arlington
August 26, 2025
Format: Online via Zoom

Attendees: Marie Meteer (Chair), Kate Tranquada (Vice chair), Carolyn Hodges (Treasurer), Joanna Pushee (Clerk), Al Tosti, Amy Speare, John Anderson, and Susan Moore

Ministers: Rev. Dr. Jonipher Kwong (Interim Lead Minister); Rev. Erica Richmond (Parish Minister); Rev. Stevie Carmody (Minister of Religious Education)

Guest: Kiki Giatis

7:02 Call to Order (Marie)

Parish Committee chair Marie Meteer called the meeting to order and welcomed Rev. Dr. Jonipher. Marie welcomed Amy Speare to her second meeting as a Parish Committee member.

7:06 Reading and Chalice Lighting (Carolyn)

Two minutes of silence; Poem by David Whyte

7:11 Review of Financial report & dashboard (Carolyn, 15 minutes)

- FY2024-25 and August financials
 - First Parish is in excellent financial health. We needed just over \$12,000 rather than the budgeted \$63,000 set aside for contingency funds.
 - Expenses were favorable in most categories.
 - Despite the economic forecast and uncertainty last year, pledges were only 1.1% below what First Parish planned.
 - Expenses included Rev. Erica's baby shower.
 - Fundraising included hurricane support in the Carolinas (\$2,800) and the women's shelter, Renewal House, (\$4,700) in December
 - Incredible sendoff for Rev. Marta Flanagan with tangible and intangible gifts this past spring
- Adventures in Montessori (AIM) is paying a larger amount of rent. Everything is fine with the tenant; there are no issues at this time.
- Trend data: Where First Parish was running overbudget was with the Music Committee. Music Director Daniel Parsley sent a summary: Music had not planned for some extra music offerings associated with Good Goodbye and the

Indigenous Working Group offering with the family orchestra to include an indigenous composer.

- First Parish was slightly over budget in a couple other categories: UUA quarterly dues (we had budgeted an amount that was slightly less than what was billed); there was one other committee which spent a little more than expected (Social Justice). Goals have been set in the First Parish office: picking apart some larger expenditures and seeing if there might be any places to trim during the period of discernment.

Questions/Comments:

A Parish Committee member pointed out one item on the scorecard under the Town Day and fundraisers: it looks like First Parish did better than expected (the variance is showing as zero).

A Parish Committee member asked if, regarding the overages, if there was a way the Parish Committee could find out ahead of time rather than at the end of the year about overages. The response included a reminder that at the April/May meeting, there was an oral warning that the Music Committee was going to be over their budget. The Treasurer also does check in periodically with committees.

The Parish Committee chair pointed out that the Parish Committee approved a budget for the Good Goodbye. The Parish Committee shows on the template that we spent a little over \$2,000 in general for things related to the party and then there was the financial gift which was separate.

The member database costs total less than \$500 for Your Part-Time Controller (YPTC); The Treasurer continues to track the costs for the member database.

- Review and discuss budget overages
 - **Vote 1:** Funding budget overages for the Music Committee

MOTION 1: I move that we approve and fund the 2024-2025 budget overages for the Music Committee. (John A) Seconded (Kate T) 8 of 8 in favor. None opposed.

7:24 PM Consent agenda items:

- **Vote 2:** Consent agenda: Minutes, Financials, Ministers' monthly reports

MOTION 2: I move that we approve the consent agenda. (John A) Seconded (Al T) 8 of 8 in favor. None opposed.

7:26 Short items: (Marie)

- Rose of Recognition: Interim Search Committee (ISC) had been nominated.

John A is on top of it! He drafted a statement over the summer and made a tab called “write ups” in the spreadsheet to leave the blurbs.

The Parish Committee reached a consensus on celebrating the ISC and we have a spreadsheet to track and/or nominate others.

- Church picnic September 14 - Julius Perili will be the leader along with Scott. The space is reserved, and the office knows about it. Communication to the congregation will include announcements from the pulpit, coffee hour sign up sheet, and more.
- (7:31) Town Day, Sept 20, 2025
The Parish Committee Executive approved a “Defending Democracy” table at Town Day. The table will include information on what First Parish does in general, not just the Defending Democracy Working Group.

Rev. Erica noted that the Membership Committee will have a table, too. Membership is often looking for materials / flyers. Amy Anderson is the chair.

The quilt is done! Carolyn Hodges orchestrated the quilt with Sarah and Logan, the dream team!

- Preschool request for permission to upgrade the playground
 - Need point people - We don’t know the timetable at this time; First Parish needs to know what the tenant AIM is looking at for a timetable.
 - There will be a Property point person.
 - Ebiere, office manager, is on top of things, getting more information.

Committee on Ministry in the Interim period:

First Parish will not have a Committee On Ministry (COM). We’ll have a Transition Team.

We are following the UUA guidelines on the interim period. The Parish Committee appoints the members and empowers the Transition Team to assist Rev. Dr. Jonipher and be his “eyes and ears,” remaining attentive to the needs of the congregation.

Rev. Dr. Jonipher noted that in terms of what the Committee on Ministry did in their role of evaluation: Rev. Dr. Jonipher will be part of the whole process, but Rev. Erica’s evaluation will be done by Rev. Dr. Jonipher.

The Transition Team communicates with the congregation.

7:36 State of the Parish & RE Update on staffing and plans for the year (Ministers)
Rev. Dr. Jonipher

State of the Parish snapshot of how this last month has been:

What’s really different and unique about First Parish is that it is all about relationships. For the first day on the job, activities did not start with getting keys and doing lots of paperwork. It started with a lunch with the Parish Committee Executive. Three hours were spent at Kickstand talking about the history of First Parish and the congregation.

Rev. Dr. Jonipher went to Vermont and met with Rev. Marta Flanagan, minister *emerita* of First Parish.

There have been lots of meetings and hearing people’s stories.

The summer was full of retreats such as the Worship Associates retreat and the Social Justice retreat.

One item not included in the written report from Rev. Dr. Jonipher was forms. Rev. Dr. Jonipher has been reviewing forms and working with both the Worship Associates and the Office Manager, Ebierre, to make some forms more efficient to facilitate communication. They are not re-inventing the wheel; they are making sure knowledge does not rest in one person or two people’s heads.

7:41 PM - Rev. Erica - State of the Parish

- Launching of the programmatic year includes a lot of retreats with committees and meetings with committee chairs in August and September to set goals for the rest of the year. Rev. Erica has attended four retreats so far this program year. They are about 3 hours each: Reckoning and Repair today; Social Justice Committee; and the Defending Democracy Working Group.
- Goal-setting with committee: For the Reckoning and Repair Working Group, the main topic was about which organization with which to partner regarding

reparations - both financial and relational. Additionally, there being a sense of overwhelm in the world, there was a tenderness in updating each other at this retreat. Rev. Erica highlighted a sacredness of the work. The Reckoning and Repair group is in conversation with the Unitarian Universalist Urban Ministry in Roxbury as a potential partner.

- There is a Membership Committee retreat coming up.
- First Parish member Sharen Leonard's memorial service was on July 12 at 10am. Rev. Erica officiated the service at the meetinghouse.
- There are two First Parish folks on hospice currently. [Note: Dick Terry passed away on September 5, 2025. A date for his memorial service was announced as September 27, 2025 at 11:00 am.]

Rev. Stevie's update (7:44 pm)

- Rev. Stevie spoke about growing into and experimenting with how to move as a unit of three ministers.
- For Rev. Stevie's portfolio, he mentioned potentially being point minister to some committees. For example, some good fits may be point person to any adult education such as STAR. First Parish has so many great lay leaders, such champions of endeavors like adult education, Lectio, etc. It will be easy to collaborate with and support these champions and groups. There is excitement around education at First Parish!
- Update on Religious Education (RE) staffing:
 - What is staying the same? There are two nursery associates who are part-time.
 - Bella Jaffe is very capable of supporting volunteers and children. It is so great to have Bella back in RE.
 - Big change: Religious Education welcomed K Milano after Rose's departure. As Youth Program Coordinator.
 - K is meeting with Youth leaders, jumping right in this week and last; They are working with co-leaders such as Conard Anderson.
 - RE is bringing back some regulars and giving some new folks the opportunity to engage with the youth community.

Potluck:

Rev. Dr. Jonipher got to enjoy the potluck on Aug. 6th and met many First Parish folks there by making different rounds in the courtyard. An informal receiving line was started. Many thanks to Marie Meteer for offering guidance.

Questions/Comments:

A Parish Committee member asked Rev. Stevie a question about how to invite people who were in the youth programming but did not stay, to re-engage them. How are young people invited in? Rev. Stevie explained that for juniors and seniors, it's an invite from a peer within that group. With people who are sophomores, the invitations include some peers reaching out and some other reaching out to families and talking about opportunities to engage.

A Parish Committee member mentioned “young adults,” people in their 20s/30s. Is there a way to pull this group into more First Parish activities, for example board games? Rev. Stevie is thinking about it! He was working on this very thing prior to this! Rev. Erica has worked on this in the past, too, including offering programming and social time for young adults.

Two Parish Committee members mentioned a somewhat recent cohort of youth which was big and which had a lot of cohesion among about 10 people: they all just graduated from college!

The Parish Committee extended congratulations and applause for Rev. Stevie’s announcement that he and Liz are expecting in 2026!

Much gratitude to all our ministers for kicking off the program year with enthusiasm, care, and dedication!

7:57 pm - 8:02 pm Break

8:02 Engage! Review of skills & Rollout (Amy & Susan & Kiki representing)

[Full working group includes: Amy Speare and Susan Moore of the Parish Committee, Steve McMullin formerly of the Parish Committee, and Kiki Giatis who also serves as Leadership Development Committee chair]

Marie introduced Amy, Susan, and Kiki and the project which is now being called Engage. “Wouldn’t it be so nice if we knew...xyz?” First Parish does really well with its engagement and we want to do even better.

The volunteerism and engagement theme emerged as a topic and priority of a former Parish Committee retreat. Susan Moore welcomed Amy Speare to the working group this year.

8:03 Amy S.

The working group has taken advantage of the quiet summer and got a lot of work done over the last couple of months. Here is the update! It’s changed. The codename for this project is “Engage!”

The Working Group had been thinking of it as a database of skills and interests that committee leaders can go into so they can find the next person for their committee” - but it is really MUCH broader than that. It has the potential to have a big cultural shift in the way First Parish does Engagement and Volunteerism.

Engaging in First Parish isn't necessarily for a standing committee. It could be going to the Alliance, a book club, etc.; chances are high that participation will lead to other things.

Project Summary

First Parish ENGAGE fosters a culture of connection and engagement by helping congregants find meaningful opportunities to participate in our spiritual community. By collecting individuals' Skills & Interests in our secure Realm portal, we can match them with groups, teams and events, thereby increasing their enjoyment of the community.

The working group has excitement around the phase we are entering: how people are open to this change and working with the congregation to launch it this fall.

People who have been here for a while could try new things; people who are new can get into the process of participation.

Functionality in Realm - Thus far, this feature hasn't been used in Realm yet. The working group saw that the feature already exists in Realm. We just needed some access for it to be used. That is the good side. The challenge is around education at this point: we don't know how people use it already or how people think of Realm: it's a way to pledge. Some people know it's a directory. There will be benefits to the whole congregation.

In order to build the database, information will be needed to populate Realm. Ideally, we will need to have someone fill out a form and someone does data entry. A partnership with Membership would make sense. What is Realm? A How-to sheet: How to change your picture, or add one.

A Parish Committee member made a comment that Realm shows up with a front page that is a little better now. When you log in, the first announcements were very much out-of-date. It will be important to create a positive experience for users of Realm to have an updated landing page.

Another Parish Committee member noted that only a few people use Realm to get the word out about things. First Parish is slowly making it a thing for committees to use. Kiki Giatis mentioned that we know a whole lot about what's not good about Realm. The volunteer team with Allison Sillers, office associate, and Amy Speare have worked on some items. It should look cleaner now.

If all this was was list of skills, we could do it now. But it's not just skills. We want this to not be "a blip". The working group has reached out to other congregations to ask how their efforts have gone and to make sure First Parish is doing a process that is going to be supportable and maintainable with Realm as a tool.

Being mindful of when a new Realm account is created with a new member or family: how can Engage be a part of the onboarding? Finding a path beyond the first steps of Membership; once someone goes to the new UU class and then decides to sign the book, what is next? There is currently no one at First Parish who owns that step. Some people find a home in three months, some find something in a year. Engage has the potential to bridge that gap.

The group mentioned a lack of education on how to use Realm and the importance of getting a feel for that. How many people give their pledges in Realm vs via paper? How many people go into Realm to use it as a directory to find contact information?

People need to have confidence in the tool.

We are down to 80 groups on Realm now as the tool was used differently by different office staff over the past several years to create groups and message them.

Gratitude for Allison Sillers. She really understands Realm. She understands what the Parish Committee is trying to do. She is crucial to this rollout. We have identified 10-20 ways that Realm needs to be cleaned up before launching Engage. Need to make sure things are up-to-date including events and information. A noted cultural shift will be if something is added to the e-bulletin, the events on the website, etc., then there should also be a news item created in Realm associated with it.

Skills and interests work is about connecting (connecting among members) and serving (serving groups and the congregation). The "Skills and Interests" tab is already completed in Realm. The initial part of the project is done.

TIMELINE:

- Working group is saying mid-October (aiming for Oct. 19th) for the launch
- Rev. Dr. Jonipher will give a sermon that Sunday: Engagement as a Spiritual Practice.
- The Working Group will roll Engage out over the course of 2-3 Sundays.
- Communication: Spire article for October, FP connection board, coffee hour, bulletin board, e-bulletin.

Kiki mentioned the Leadership Development (LDC) roundtable in the fall. It is an opportunity to teach lay leaders about the benefits of the Engage project. Two phases: first, gather information - tell us what your skills and interests are. That information would allow for taking action by having the committee chairs go into Realm and pull reports: someone who likes gardening, for example: a list of people will pop up: 10 people said gardening. The committee chair can ask if they would be willing to water in the summer.

Phase 2: With the caveat that the jargon of Realm is rigid: "Serving Opportunities" - for example, the ushers: the leader posts in Realm that we need more ushers. A report would be generated with all the people who would be interested in being ushers. Realm has the ability to schedule the ushers, too.

In January, there could be an Engagement Fair. Committee leads will have put things up and can do a trade show of sorts in a social and friendly way in the vestry, for example.

Feedback, Insights, and Questions:

- A Parish Committee member asked about an earlier idea of hiring someone to do some training. Is it still in discussion to pay a part-time person or people?

The Treasurer mentioned that Your Part-Time Controller could only take the working group so far. The Parish Committee had allocated about \$10,000; the Treasurer recommended that the amount be divided and allocated somewhat differently than originally thought. There had been some advising done with YPTC and First Parish, including office staff. YPTC is not an expert on Realm.

- The Parish Committee working group for Engage is working on a scope of the specific part of the project to do the setup and training. Training materials would be needed (beyond the instructions for members on how to update information).
- As First Parish goes through this project in next year or two, ENGAGE will need a home. It's the Parish Committee now, but it ought to spin off into a committee of its own in the future to make it successful beyond 1-2 years.
- Our request of ParCom by the Engage working group: if Engage sends some pilot material out, please let us know what you think.

Kiki thanked Amy Speare for her leadership and incredible amount of gathering and synthesis of opinions. Thanks to Susan Moore for getting the working group going!

The Parish Committee thanked Kiki. Kiki left the meeting.

8:34 pm **Executive session: Parish Committee Members + Ministers for votes on dates, etc.**

8:35 PM - For personnel matters, the Parish Committee goes into executive session. There are no minutes taken during executive session. No motions can be moved during the session.

- Ministers' leave, sabbatical, vacation: (Rev. Dr. Jonipher)
- Transition Team for the Interim Minister

MOTION 3: I move that we go into executive session and invite the ministers, Rev. Dr. Jonipher, Rev. Stevie, and Rev. Erica. (Carolyn) Seconded (John A) 8 of 8 in favor.

MOTION 4: 9:17 PM - I move that we leave exec session. (Carolyn) Seconded (Joanna and John) 8 of 8 in favor. None opposed.

Executive session with the ministers lasted from 8:35 pm to 9:17 pm.

9:19 PM

MOTION 5: I move the slate of votes numbered 3 through 7 on the agenda (John A.) Seconded (Amy S.) 8 of 8 in favor. None opposed.

- **Vote 3:** Rev. Stevie's parental leave dates
I move that we approve the dates of Rev. Stevie's parental leave as specified by Rev. Dr. Jonipher's document showing 3 months of leave split into two parts: January 15 to March 12, 2026 and April 15 to May 15, 2026.
- **Vote 4:** Rev. Erica's contract modification: I move that we approve the contractual language change in Rev. Erica's Letter of Agreement to allow Rev. Erica to take two pieces of sabbatical time.

The most recent contract stipulates that Rev. Erica's sabbatical would need to have a longer time left on the contract than would be feasible if she were to split her time into two pieces to ensure coverage without any gaps by the three ministers in 2026.

- **Vote 5:** Rev. Erica's Sabbatical dates

I move that we approve the dates of Rev. Erica's 2026 sabbatical as specified by Rev. Dr. Jonipher's document showing five months of sabbatical leave broken into two parts: April to June 2026 and October to November 2026.

- **Vote 6:** Rev. Dr. Jonipher's vacation dates.

I move that we approve Rev. Dr. Jonipher's vacations as specified by Rev. Dr. Jonipher's document showing requested vacation time as February 11 - 21 And May 17 - 27.

- Transition Team candidates (Kate)
 - **Vote 7:** Transition Team members (Transition Team mission & responsibilities - long and short versions)

The Transition Team for the Interim Lead Minister which Parish Committee Exec is recommending are:

- Marilyn Downs
- Lois Fine
- Julie Gary
- Marc Jacobson
- Lida Junghans
- Kay Snowden

I move that we approve the Transition Team nominees as listed:
Marilyn Downs, Lois Fine, Julie Gary, Marc Jacobson, Lida Junghans, and Kay Snowden.

Gratitude for Parish Committee Exec!! Gratitude was expressed by the Parish Committee to the three ministers for arranging their leaves, sabbaticals, and vacations in a way that ensures uninterrupted ministerial coverage in 2026.

9:20 Adjourn

MOTION 9: I move that we adjourn (Kate) Seconded (John A) 8 of 8 in favor. None opposed.

The meeting adjourned at 9:20 pm.

MOTIONS:

MOTION 1: I move that we approve and fund the 2024-2025 budget overages for the Music Committee. (John A) Seconded (Kate T) 8 of 8 in favor. None opposed.

MOTION 2: I move that we approve the consent agenda. (John A) Seconded (Al T) 8 of 8 in favor. None opposed.

MOTION 3: I move that we go into executive session and invite the ministers: Rev. Dr. Jonipher, Rev. Stevie, and Rev. Erica. (Carolyn) Seconded (John A) 8 of 8 in favor.

MOTION 4: I move that we leave exec session. (Carolyn) Seconded (Joanna and John) 8 of 8 in favor. None opposed.

MOTION 5: I move the slate of votes numbered 3 through 7 on the agenda (John A.) Seconded (Amy S.) 8 of 8 in favor. None opposed.

1. I move that we approve the dates of Rev. Stevie's parental leave as specified by Rev. Dr. Jonipher's document showing 3 months of leave split into two parts: January 15 to March 12, 2026 and April 15 to May 15, 2026.
2. I move that we approve the contractual language change in Rev. Erica's Letter of Agreement to allow Rev. Erica to take two pieces of sabbatical time.
3. I move that we approve the dates of Rev. Erica's 2026 sabbatical as specified by Rev. Dr. Jonipher's document showing five months of sabbatical leave broken into two parts: April to June 2026 and October to November 2026.
4. I move that we approve Rev. Dr. Jonipher's vacations as specified by Rev. Dr. Jonipher's document showing requested vacation time as February 11 - 21 And May 17 - 27.
5. I move that we approve the Transition Team nominees as listed:
Marilyn Downs, Lois Fine, Julie Gary, Marc Jacobson, Lida Junghans, and Kay Snowden.

MOTION 6 : I move that we adjourn (Kate) Seconded (John A) 8 of 8 in favor. None opposed.

Minutes prepared by Joanna Pushee, volunteer clerk.