

Parish Committee Meeting Minutes
First Parish Unitarian Universalist of Arlington
January 16, 2024: 7 - 9 pm, online via Zoom

Sara G., Anne Q, Joanna P., John S., Al T., Carolyn H., Celia W., John Anderson, and Jeff K.
Rev. Marta Flannagan, Rev. Erica Richmond, Rev. Stevie Carmody
Guests: Elizabeth Hunter; Maggie Carey, Mary-Glenn Vincens, Ellen Leigh, and Lois Fine

7:03 Call to Order (Sara)

7:04 Reading and Chalice Lighting (Celia)

Two minutes of silence

Rose of Recognition: The nomination for January's Rose of Recognition goes to the Reckoning and Repair Working Group.

The Reckoning and Repair Group has been working patiently and thoroughly throughout the past year on many congregation-wide educational opportunities regarding the exploration of First Parish's congregational history, the ties of the congregation's founders to slavery, and the continuing conversation around reparations. The Parish Committee expressed its gratitude to the working group, whose members include Amy Anderson, Pamela Baldwin, Sibylle Bosslet, Jim Brown, Maggie Carey, Ricky Carter, Kendall Dudley, Tom Estabrook, Lois Fine, Marc Fredette, Mary Fusoni, Bill Gardiner, Ellen Leigh, Kate Lenox, Clarissa Rodriguez, Sarah Spratt, Maryglenn Vincens, Carolyn White, David Whitford, Sara Whitford, Andrea Winslow.

7:15 State of the Parish (25 minutes) - Rev. Marta Flanagan

- Rev. Marta reminded the Parish Committee about the First Parish mission: turning inward, side-by-side, and outward.
- Rev. Marta shared an experience facilitating connections among First Parish committees and members in which long-time First Parish members Brian Dooley and Jessica Farman approached the STAR Committee about showing a film, which would cost \$250 to show publically. The film is *Join or Die*, which deals with loneliness, connection, and community in the United States. Rev. Marta shepherded a connection with the Social Justice Committee, and together with STAR, the groups will split the cost. The film will be shown on March 9, 2024. A trailer can be seen by visiting John Putnam's website.
<https://putnamdoc.com/#trailer>
- Rev. Marta remarked that she has never seen as many democratic issues being held by a single congregation at once. Among others, the following groups are holding such issues and discussions: the Reckoning and Repair Working Group; the Indigenous Justice Working Group; discussion about UUA purposes and principles; and, very recently, two brand new groups: one on Israel-Palestine [The Task Force for the Middle East] formed

under the umbrella of the Social Justice Committee, and the other on how First Parish might live our faith in the 2024 election year [Living Faithfully in 2024].

Questions posed: What are the opportunities for the Parish Committee, ministerial staff, and lay leaders as these democratic issues permeate the next year of discussions and actions in the congregation? What are the possible pitfalls? How can First Parish members be dissenters?

Discussion highlights:

- Parish Committee members commented on the desire for First Parish to be seen as a moral leader in the community.
- New ways of people coming together organically around passion, energy, and enthusiasm and what action to take. Volunteerism is being energized.
- Named the risks that people may question whether they belong here at First Parish, noting fears of having feelings or attitudes that are too different. A suggested way to mitigate these fears might be having conversations around what a community is, such as the topics that Covenant Groups hold while still remaining in dialogue.
- Another risk is that attention is finite. However, spiritual sustenance is long-term. If all of the discussions are around justice, other elements of a spiritual community, such as spiritual connection and growth could get overshadowed.
- One thing First Parish does well is coming together with clergy and people in other denominations, such as during worship services and lunches. Clergy from Arlington and beyond are invited in and a holding space for community is provided through peace, love, and morality. First Parish has done well in the past in critical moments by coming together.
- Named the need for training around helping people with discomfort and uncomfortable conversations.
- Rev. Marta made two observations:
 - It is tempting to turn inward to the point of engaging in our individual internal fights as well as institutional navel-gazing. First Parish has a mission to venture out, and to keep in balance the inward, side-by-side, and outward. First Parish companions one another.
 - Reform movements historically have people who stay the course, and most of the people do not live to see things happening in their lifetimes. There is a call to lead with love and make a difference. Social justice is most meaningful when combined with spiritual sustenance.

Rev. Erica commented on the Reckoning and Repair Working Group which has offered opportunities for the congregation to connect across a high level of engagement. Yesterday [Jan. 15], about 15 people stood at Massachusetts Ave and Mystic (75 people in total) for a ceasefire vigil for Israel-Palestine. Following the vigil, the group walked along Mass Ave to the annual Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration. Rev. Erica expressed gladness that folks are showing up.

The Parish Committee welcomed back Maggie Carey, Maryglenn Vincens, and Lois Fine.

The Racial Justice Coordinating Committee requested that the Parish Committee place the affirmation on the agenda for the May annual meeting. Updated language for the affirmation has been shared with the Parish Committee. The Reckoning and Repair Working Group (under the umbrella of the Racial Justice Coordinating Committee) continues to hold gatherings so that the First Parish congregation can look at the substance of the affirmation. The language of the affirmation continues to be edited. [At the Feb. 11 event, the Reckoning and Repair Group began requesting that attendees no longer suggest edits to the language and rather focus on any obstacles to endorsing the affirmation.]

The Reckoning and Repair group plans to be ready with the final language for the affirmation before the Annual Meeting in May, and before the warrant for the meeting goes out to the congregation.

Parish Committee members:

- remarked on the clarity of the revised affirmation and the good examples provided.
- noted that taking edits during the Annual Meeting would not be advisable and recommended organizing in a way that places the discussion and possible edits during the educational gatherings.
- Commended the working group for listening and responding to the Parish Committee's earlier feedback and comments for the revision; and expressed gladness for the working group's efforts to reach out and gather input from the congregation.

MOTION 1: I move that the Parish Committee endorse and empower the Reckoning and Repair Working Group to place a vote on adopting the affirmation on the May annual meeting agenda. (Celia) Seconded (Carolyn and Joanna) 9 of 9 in favor. None opposed.

7:50 Update from Trustees (Carolyn and Jeff, 5 minutes)

The Trustees invited Carolyn and Jeff to the Trustees of Trust Funds monthly meeting to discuss three items to address:

1. The computation for minister housing and building maintenance provided quarterly from the trust funds : The Trustees will revisit the computation algorithm before the budget is finalized. The rationale for the current formula aims to maintain a certain level in the fund. March is the deadline to finalize.
2. Residual trust funds that were not moved over when initially scheduled for ministerial housing and/or property: It was agreed upon to close the subfunds and to transfer funds to the operating account at Cambridge Savings Bank account. In short, closing out the two items will remove a redundant administrative step.

3. Require a rider to insure historical First Parish artifacts previously stored at Cambridge Savings Bank and recently relocated to First Parish, and to establish a subcommittee consisting of First Parish members Alan Schweitzer, Carolyn Hodges, and Anette Sawyer. The subcommittee is meeting with Robbie Rinearson and seeking appropriate insurance of these items.

Notes: From the sale of the parsonage about 15 years ago, there are funds invested in the endowment and the interest of that goes into the budget for the ministers' housing. The historical are pewter and silver items that date back to the early years of the First Parish meeting house.

Questions/discussion followed among the Parish Committee members:

- Regarding the residual trust funds and new disbursement process, are some of the funds those that First Parish didn't carry over, or is it more process for the future? Per the Treasurer, it is both.
- Confirmed value for residual ministerial housing and Property funds: \$8,000 for housing and \$40,000 in a subaccount for Property.
- In prior years the funds were not consistently moved over to Cambridge Savings bank. These residual funds will go into the surplus until Parish Committee determines otherwise. When the money moves over, the Treasurer will record it: when it goes to LeaderBank, it will be earning higher interest.

Jeff and Carolyn noted the productive meeting with the Trustees and the partnership, adding that Julie Dunn is the new chair of the Trustees. The Parish Committee expressed its gratitude for the careful financial stewardship, which speaks to the health of our congregation.

7:55 **Vote on Ministers' Housing Allowance (5 minutes)**

Each year, the Parish Committee votes on the portion of the ministers' annual compensation that they each would like to declare as housing costs. This amount does not affect compensation. Because there is no First Parish parsonage, the IRS rules allow ministers to dedicate a portion of compensation towards housing, and that portion is not taxable. The Parish Committee votes on these requests.

- Rev. Erica Richmond, the Parish Minister, is requesting \$50,000 of her compensation be declared and dedicated as housing for the 2024 calendar year.
- Rev. Marta Flanagan, the Lead Minister, is requesting \$54,000 of her compensation be declared and dedicated as housing for the 2024 calendar year.
- Rev. Stevie Carmody, the Minister of Religious Education, is requesting that \$30,000 of his compensation be declared and dedicated for the 2024 calendar year.

Motion 2: I move to vote to approve the amounts for ministers' housing and maintenance. (Anne) Seconded (Celia). All in favor 9 of 9 in favor. None opposed.

8:00 Break

8:07 **Vote on Summer Services (5 minutes) - Elizabeth Hunter.**

Elizabeth Hunter of the Worship Associates provided a report on First Parish summer services being offered online only: First Parish had experimented with the online-only format for the summer of 2023. The Worship Associates is seeking the Parish Committee's response to their recommendation to continue offering summer services online only.

The report and survey show that 35% of respondents are interested in coming to summer services. First Parish averaged about 26 people in person previously. There are often multiple Sundays when the weather is brutally hot and sometimes only 12 people are present. Based on survey results and past experiences, the Worship Associates recommend to continue with online only summer services.

Parish Committee members' questions and discussion:

- A Parish Committee member remarked that the report was comprehensive in citing both the online services and the success of the Wednesday social potlucks. It is hard to separate the two. First Parish would still have in-person community-building if the potlucks continue.
- More people who replied to the survey attended potlucks than who attended Sunday services.
- Doing the potlucks in the evening outdoors is a good use of our facilities.
- There were at least two people who led services from out of state per Elizabeth Hunter. Being online allowed for more flexibility and volunteerism.
- There were two individuals who had volunteered who wanted in-person services and decided not to move forward when they found out services were only online
- There is not universal support in the congregation for online only summer services..
- A decline in total attendance was noted in the report.

A motion that the Parish Committee support and move towards remote summer services and the continuation of the potlucks arose but was not seconded. Further discussion occurred.

- There is additional effort, time, and cost to organize hybrid services including the cost of the sexton and childcare.
- Discussions around using the Parlor or alternative locations to help with components occurred.
- Worship Associates talked about options prior to making their report: for example, holding services in the Parlor. One issue is that it holds up to 40 people. It is hard to predict how many people will be present from week to week. The Bailey Room was not a favorable option.
- Worship Associates discussed shifting what "hybrid" means to include a definition of worship happening online while a "watch party" would be in person in the Parlor.
- First Parish does not have the ability to have a good camera in the Parlor or Bailey room at the moment.

The motion was seconded. (Celia)

Discussion: What is the necessary timing: does the Parish Committee need to vote on the Worship Associates request for a recommendation immediately? Yes, the Worship Associates meet in early February for a

planning meeting for the year. They need to be ready to launch the website statement, sign up forms for lay leaders, and then recruiting happens in March.

Motion: I move to approve summer services for 2024 to be held online only.

Friendly amendment: MOTION 3: I move to approve acceptance of the recommendation for online only services this summer 2024, coupled with the weekly Wednesday potlucks. (Anne Q) Seconded (Celia) 7 of 9 in favor. 2 abstaining.

Appreciation was expressed by Elizabeth Hunter.

8:05 **Review of Financial report & dashboard (Carolyn, 10 minutes)**

December financials

- Our pledges are rebounding and have now exceeded the seasonalized expectations for year-to-date.
- Expenses are remaining below what was projected in the budget.

Discussion/budget questions:

- Gratitude was expressed for the amazing Treasurer's report.
- On the balance sheet report, it is noted that the FDIC maximum is \$250,000 and one of our accounts is bigger than that. Is the account protected?
 - Yes, per the Treasurer, it is protected as an IntraFi account. It's swept out every night and divided in other banks so it is not held in one institution; the benefit is that First Parish gets a higher interest than what Cambridge Savings Bank offers. Cambridge Savings Bank is changing their policy. Carolyn is looking at the checking account twice a month. First Parish has a money market account at CSB. Shay and Carolyn are working out a review frequency for pledge activity.
 - The town hasn't paid the \$500 for the parking spots it leases from First Parish . (The Town of Arlington's system has been down. Sara Hildago called the town and confirmed they will catch up this month).
- Updated forecast

The reforecast is a separate tab in the indicator template; all of the assumptions by line item are identified in the re-forecast. Highlighted items:

- First Parish is in a favorable position. If things continue as expected, the First Parish will remain favorable at the end of the fiscal year.
- The revenue forecast does not assume an additional fundraiser. nerally speaking, everything remains flat or will approach the trend, which includes lower amount expected from the tenant the AIM school.

- On the expenses side
 - The treasurer used the monthly salaries and benefits for the forecast; she had a meeting with Sara Hidalgo to understand the underrun: Drivers included factors such as First Parish budgeted for positions that have not been hired; the vacancy in the music director position; a childcare assistant has not been hired; Sexton position which was originally budgeted for multiple part-time roles has been combined into one role. Salaries and benefits incurred to date correlate to these factors.
 - Favorable position for the full year. Though looking ahead to next year, the Parish Committee should determine a better way to estimate personnel costs, and so as not to overbudget and provide the Stewardship Committee with reasonable goals.
 - Computer expenses are higher than budgeted and reflect the Parish Committee vote in the fall to improve tech and spend money to maintain the website.
 - A note to the Ministers from the Treasurer: the professional expenses are running below budget.

Questions/comments on the forecast:

- Cambridge Savings Bank went to zero interest on the checking account. A Parish Committee member asked if it would be time to move all of the First Parish funds out of Cambridge Bank and over to Leader?

Response: First Parish has all our systems, including donations through Realm, through Cambridge Savings Bank. It's not an insignificant lift to move around. Leaderbank doesn't offer a credit card. First Parish would still be using Cambridge Savings Bank for a credit card. We might want to consider a change in the future; we can hold more funds at Leader to mitigate this.

- Cost-sharing on the additional costs of family health insurance:

The treasurer shared a one-page summary of the cost-sharing situation comparing the status quo (First Parish covers 80% of individual insurance coverage, and 50% of incremental cost for employee plus child; if staff is an employee plus partner, or two adults and a child/children that 50% is not provided); and some options to get First Parish closer to UUA guidelines.

The Human Resources Committee met with the Parish Committee Executive: the UUA recommended guidance is 80% of individual coverage, plus 50% of the additional costs of ANY policy (partner, family, child). Making this change would increase costs somewhere between \$14,000 - \$26,000 annually, depending on several factors. First Parish's Human Resources Committee's thinking is that this range might be too heavy a lift: there is a middle route. First Parish could pay a fixed amount (instead of a percentage) towards family coverage.

The Treasurer noted the Parish Committee strives to provide competitive compensation, and the committee tries to maintain at least the UUA standard. The Treasurer recommended the Parish

Committee review recommended guidance and find a way to budget for it. It will contribute to the bottom line of the budget next year, but the Treasurer believes it won't be as big a lift as it looks because of how First Parish currently over-budgets for staff.

Questions/Comments:

- There was some discussion and concern around defining, or not defining, partners as a policy. There was discussion around the Parish Committee striving for the highest level of insurance coverage that can be afforded.
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- Rev. Marta noted that the UUA definition of partner does not mandate legal marriage, recommending that.. First Parish not take on defining "family."
- One member noted The Town of Arlington has a policy paying a fixed amount to those employees who are eligible for insurance that do not take it in favor of another insurance option, such as a spouse's employers. . There was a question of whether this model has ever been discussed, with the recognition that First Parish employs less than a dozen people.
- The Parish Committee chair thanked the Treasurer, and the Human Resources committee, for the recommendations. Rev. Stevie provided this link. [Eligibility for the UUA Health Plan | UUA.org](#)
- Multiple Parish Committee members agreed this consideration could be tabled until the next Parish Committee meeting in February.

MOTION 4: (Vote, Discussion). Consent agenda: Minutes, Financials, Ministers' Reports

I move to adopt the consent agenda. (Anne) Seconded. (Jeff) 9 of 9 in favor.

8:20 Volunteerism Working Group report out (15 minutes) - Jeff K. reporting on behalf of the members: Celia, Anne, Joanna, Jeff, (and Kiki Giatis helped out as well).

The Volunteerism Working Group spent a lot of time speaking with leaders of the church. A lot of committees are doing well. The Working Group also confirmed the Leadership Development Committee's observation about the challenges around volunteers for operational issues. The Working Group's report plan involves short term and long-term solutions. The group is looking for a general nod from the Parish Committee as a whole to proceed.

Discussion:

-The Parish Committee chair asked whether there was a recommendation for voting on bylaws changes at the May 2024 Annual Meeting. There is not a plan for this year; First Parish would need to build engagement first.

The other members of the Parish Committee expressed gratitude to the Volunteerism group, especially for the short-term recommendations. It was suggested to add the Youth Group to the mix. Invite the youth to opt-in, to observe, and to have Parish Committee members present to the youth so that the youth understand the inner workings of First Parish.

-Parish Committee members remarked on the 3-year commitment for committee involvement being a barrier, and considerations about doing activities outside of meetings would save time to conduct business.

There are some activities at First Parish when presenting a term to a volunteer is important. For example, on the Parish Committee, the Treasurer and the Clerk for the purpose of retaining knowledge over three years. There is a fiduciary duty of the Parish Committee: knowing the finances and having discussions about them and what needs to be officially handled in a meeting and what doesn't.

- Marta noted the 3 year term is position-dependent: lay ministers have 2 years, up to 3 terms.

- Marta highlighted the recommendation about retaining a consultant. In other congregations, a "membership coordinator" is someone who interviews and surveys the congregation. A lot of work is done in the first year because there is not a backlog. There is not a set number of hours over the course of a year, but it could be part-time. If First Parish wanted to do that route, it may functionally occur next year, beginning of June. It would be a cost that would need to be in the budget.

Other considerations/discussions/comments regarding the Volunteerism group:

- Making sure First Parish volunteers have the skill levels needed, and the right people
- Organizing groups and committees using the Social Justice committee model: people available to get certain jobs done and help the whole group
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- A volunteer manager position is one of the recommendations/sub-themes from the fCharting a course/Visioning work group.
- If Stewardship Committee does not plan to do an entire in-person campaign (last year stewards reached out to about 100 pledging households), could use an existing planned effort like that to imperfectly leverage work that is being planned
- A shout-out to Volunteerism Working Group members Celia, Anne, Al, Joanna, Marta, Kiki G, and Jeff, and best wishes to continue the work this program year.

9:04 pm Charting A Course report out (5 minutes) - John A.

The visioning / Charting A Course Working Group of the Parish Committee gathered lots of data from various gatherings. Members of this working group are parsing through those data. The group is considering the Second Minister survey as a template for helping refine congregational priorities.

TogetherStewardship and the survey can help gather information on skills and individuals' contributions. The Stewardship sermon in March could include some of the information and data from this effort.

The Parish Committee chair thanked John A. and Carolyn. It was noted that as the group looks at themes and the cost, some things would not have a cost, such as RE topics or possibly adult programming. Some items are significant and would require a capital campaign.

9:09 PM Spring Fundraiser (15 minutes)

During the last Parish Committee Executive meeting, there was robust brainstorming around a potential spring fundraiser.

- Month of May timeframe
- An option with something food-related, a series of tastings
- First Parish members and/or area restaurants
- A ticketed event
- Align the event with a social justice cause; needs a champion/organizers/volunteers
- The ideas can continue to be addressed offline. There is Parish Committee support for empowering/identifying people to take this idea and run with it. Finding 2-3 key people: ParCom's job to find those people and to support them.
- It was suggested that a date be found first; the next Executive meeting could choose a date.

9:14 pm Other admin: calendar review and leadership transition

For the February meeting, the format will be online. Al will be the host/reader. One agenda item will be the leadership transition. While the Clerk and the Treasurer are elected by the congregation, the Chair and the Vice-Chair are elected by the Parish Committee. February marks the end of Sara G's two-year term as chairperson as well as Anne Q's two-year term as Vice-Chair. Anne has expressed a willingness to serve as chair.

9:17 Adjourn

I move that we adjourn the meeting. (Joanna)

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

MOTIONS:

1. **MOTION 1:** I move that the Parish Committee endorse and empower the Reckoning and Repair Working Group to place a vote on adopting the affirmation on the May annual meeting agenda. (Celia) Seconded (Carolyn and Joanna) 9 of 9 in favor. None opposed.
2. **Motion 2:** I move to vote to approve the amounts for ministers' housing and maintenance. (Anne) Seconded (Celia). All in favor 9 of 9 in favor. None opposed.
3. **MOTION 3:** I move to approve acceptance of the recommendation for online only services this summer 2024, coupled with the weekly Wednesday potlucks. (Anne Q) Seconded (Celia) 7 of 9 in favor. 2 of 9 abstaining.
4. **MOTION 4:** I move that we adopt the consent agenda. (Anne) Seconded (Jeff).
5. **MOTION 5:** I move that we adjourn the meeting. (Joanna)