

Parish Committee Meeting Minutes  
First Parish Unitarian Universalist of Arlington  
October 15, 2024 7 – 9 pm  
Online via Zoom

**In attendance:** Anne Quaadgras, John Anderson, Carolyn Hodges, Susan Moore, Jeff Keffer, Steve McMullin, Joanna Pushee, Al Tosti

**Ministers:** Rev. Marta Flanagan, Rev. Erica Richmond, Rev. Stevie Carmody

**Guests:** Kay Snowden, Sara Galantowicz, and Lauren Newton, Human Resources Committee

7:02 Call to Order (Anne)

7:03 - 7:06 Reading and Chalice Lighting (Susan) and two minutes of silence

7:06 - There is no rose of recognition on the agenda because the Parish Committee already nominated and decided on Jeff Roberts, parish archivist, for the November rose.

7:07 Review of Financial report & dashboard (Carolyn)

- The tenant, Adventures in Montessori (AIM)
  - Members of Parish Committee Executive, the First Parish Office Manager, and Rev. Stevie met with the tenant, Adventures in Montessori (AIM). There was turnover in the staff (the local AIM director had left) and within First Parish. Discussions are going well and both sides were responsive.
  - The Consumer Price Index (CPI) had not been applied last year or this year. The Office Manager and the First Parish Treasurer, along with the Parish Committee Chair, asked that AIM pay the updated rental cost. AIM was willing to pay from July 2024 onwards: this would be 5% higher, which is in line with the CPI.
  - The amount not captured last year or this year was \$1500. With AIM being on board to pay from July 1, 2024, the amount is about \$800. The First Parish Treasurer will book that receivable and will work with the Office Manager regarding billing.
  - AIM is in favor of meeting with the Office Manager each June to discuss rent, and they are also open to meeting in December to see how things are going each year, including policies such as around parking (AIM parents are not to park in the church spaces, for example).
  - Gratitude was expressed towards Anne Q., John, Rev. Stevie, and Ebiere for all their involvement in the discussions with the tenant.
  - Discussion among the Parish Committee included a question of whether the tenant was caught up with enrollment. The process of rental calculation is now clear regarding enrollment. There are two spreadsheets in use by the office; one one gets updated with the CPI to create base rent; the other is used to calculate the monthly rent given the updated base. The process of reporting enrollment to

First Parish remains unchanged: AIM notifies the office manager what the enrollment is, and then the office manager bills the tenant.

- Other building rent and data management:
  - The Treasurer and Office Manager had a meeting on 10/16 to track tenant expenses and to review the broad umbrella of spreadsheets in general.
  - Data management on Realm: a training will happen for the Office Manager and for the new Office Associate.
  - The Office Manager has ideas from Your Part Time Controller ready.
  - The Town of Arlington did not pay their parking revenue yet. The Office Manager will discuss this with Treasurer. The Town has been late several months running, but First Parish and the Town are getting to an agreement where First Parish does not have to go looking for it. There may have been some turnover within the Town.
- September financials at First Parish:
  - Overall, First Parish is doing favorably with pledges and the plate as well as with one-time gifts.
  - As expected this time of year, expenses are not being paid as quickly as they are coming in, but the expectations are in line with what the Treasurer has seen in the past and the Office Manager is working through this.
  - The Property Committee provided the Treasurer with expenses. The rest is to be paid before Thanksgiving. Expenses include some outside landscaping.
  - First Parish has not had to draw from the amount the Parish Committee authorized to balance the budget. As was mentioned at the September Parish Committee meeting, the 2024 – 2025 budget was increased \$10,764 due to a calculation error in the staff salary detail for the year (impacting salaries and professional expenses). This increase also impacted the approved amount targeted to balance the 2024 – 2025 budget. This amount is now \$63,238 (previously \$52,474).

The retained earning reserve total is \$305,576 representing as follows:

- Contingency reserve for 2024-2025 of \$156,910
- Parish Committee authorized loan for 2024-2025 of \$63,238
- Discretionary Surplus of \$85,428
- A question was asked: What percentage of the First Parish budget is for turning outward? The Treasurer will be looking into this amount.
- First Parish had a second collection in October for hurricane relief. The office manager and the Treasurer are getting the amount tabulated. The amount will be sent to the Unitarian Universalist Association.

Consent agenda: Minutes, Financials, Ministers' Reports including the Lead Minister's report and the parish minister's report, and excluding the Minister of Religious Education's report which will be included in the November meeting of the Parish Committee.

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

**Parental leave coverage** (Human Resources Committee)

7:22 PM - Sara Galantowicz, Kay Snowden, and Lauren Newton, of the First Parish Human Resources Committee

Deep gratitude to the Human Resources Committee was expressed by the Parish Committee. Thank you for all the updates and changes to the employee handbook.

Point of clarification (Rev. Stevie) - With parental leave coverage being new for the First Parish congregation, is there any guidance on doing the process well?

Materials being presented, such as Rev. Erica's drafted leave plan, and other materials have all been reviewed by Rev. Erica. If needed, the Parish Committee has the ability to go into executive session, and to invite in others such as the ministers. Since August 2024, members of the Human Resources Committee, Kay S. and Sara G., and Parish Committee chair Anne Q. have been working on this process of aligning and implementing First Parish's policies with the Paid Family Medical Leave (PFML).

**Process of implementation to ensure alignment with PFML** (Kay)

- Last fall, in 2023, the Parish Committee voted to participate in the state of Massachusetts system, which is optional for churches. In Paid Family and Medical Leave, the gist is that a person with a serious medical condition, or someone who is bonding with a new child, or taking care of a family member, could take up to 26 weeks of combined family and medical leave in a benefit year. The church [First Parish] is not the decision maker around medical leave time. Any employee who needs family medical need applies, with a letter from their doctor, to the state; the state would contact the office manager who verifies the pay. Family leave provided up to 12 weeks in a benefit year; a cap of \$1,150 dollars per week (in a progressive structure). When someone begins a paid family or medical leave, there is a seven-day waiting period before the benefit payments start.
- Rev. Erica's leave plan (Rev. Erica)
  - Rev. Erica shared her screen and shared her leave plan with the Parish Committee and those in attendance.
  - The leave plan would include 15 weeks of leave. (12 medical weeks; 3 bonding weeks)
  - Rev. Erica would preach one time between her return and summer services in 2025.
  - There would be 9 weeks for bonding time and the plan would be to use those weeks in the fall of 2025, taking off 1-2 days/week.

- Rev. Erica will work with Rev. Marta, the Human Resources Committee, and Parish Committee Executive to share the plan for the fall 2025. The outline of the worship calendar would need to be ironed out in June.

7:37 PM - Human Resources Committee proposed a recommendation to pay an additional week of PTO to any employee approved for PFML in order to cover the seven day gap until benefit payments start should an employee be approved for PFML.

- The first week of the leave, per the state, is unpaid. Filling the gap could be done by relying on paid-time off (vacation, sick days, and personal days). First Parish has a conservative sick leave policy and vacation days do not carry over.
- In other contexts and employers, there may be donations of sick days from other employees.
- At First Parish, the Parish Committee may want to consider things like accrual of sick time, donation of sick time, but looking at the 7 days of the first week of an approved PFML is very specific and would be a concrete first step to support staff on leave.
- The Human Resources Committee unanimously recommended that the first week be paid by FP.

#### Questions

- To clarify, the paid one week would apply to any employee that applies for the leave?
  - Yes, any employee who applies, and is approved by the state, would be granted the seven-day coverage (one week of the employee's salary). 26 weeks is the pay period within a year, so it would happen once in a benefit year. It starts on the day the employee goes out.
- Are there non-monetary costs? Does it create any different kind of burden on staff or volunteers?
  - No non-monetary costs were referred to.

**MOTION 2:** I move we approve the Human Resources Committee recommendation to provide one additional week of PTO to any employee approved for Massachusetts Paid Family Medical Leave (once per benefit year). Steve M. Seconded (John A.) 8 of 8 in favor. None opposed.

Gratitude was expressed by the HR Committee: Thank you for taking care of our employees.

Gratitude was expressed by the Parish Committee: Thank you, HR, it has been a busy program year these last few months.

#### **7:42 - Adjunct minister coverage plan & letter of agreement (Rev. Marta)**

- In September, Rev. Marta asked the Parish Committee if ministerial support might be approached as sabbatical coverage has been approached. Rev. Marta conducted that search as blessed by the Parish Committee.

- Rev. Marta shared an email with very happy news: Rev. Tricia Brennan, an adjunct minister who has worked with First Parish before, and is now in semi-retirement has expressed her interest in the leave position.
- Rev. Marta shared the resume of Rev. Tricia Brennan with the Parish Committee.
- A sabbatical coverage agreement, as based on the one the Parish Committee used when Rev. Marc Fredette was covering Rev. Marta during her sabbatical three years ago, was adapted and used.

Rev. Marta welcomed the Parish Committee's questions:

- **Proposed amendments/edits to the letter by a Parish Committee member:**
  - First proposed edit: Under sick and family leave, where the letter says two days are available for use for illness/acute personal: change "parish minister" to "lead minister"
  - Second proposed edit: near the end of the letter, there is an item that may be dismissed or changed regarding if the adjunct person is "convicted" of a felony. The concern is that it would take years or at least months if that were the situation. It was suggested to change to: "is arrested" for a felony.
    - Friendly amendment: "charged with a felony" (Jeff K.)

**MOTION 3:** I move that the Parish Committee approves the adjunct minister contract for January – May 2025 with the edits: (1.) under sick and family leave: two days are available for use for illness/acute personal: change "parish minister," to "lead minister"; (2.) may be dismissed "if an adjunct person is charged with a felony" rather than "convicted" of one. (Jeff K.) Seconded. (Carolyn) 8 of 8 in favor. None opposed.

There was a lot of American Sign Language (ASL) applause for all who did the work. The Parish Committee expressed deep gratitude to Rev. Marta for reaching out to Rev. Tricia.

Members of the Parish Committee and the HR Committee in attendance were asked to share their knowledge and experience of Rev. Tricia Brennan when she was previously with First Parish. Members in attendance said she is "fantastic," knows the members of the congregation, and has a good feel for the First Parish community.

It was mentioned that Rev. Tricia Brennan will not be handling Stewardship. There are alternative plans in the works.

8:05 - 8:10 PM          Break

**8:10 PM - Human Resources Committee priorities and gaps analysis presentation** (Sara Galantowicz, with Kay S. / Lauren N.)

Last program year, after the Annual Meeting in May 2023, the Human Resources Committee did a systems gap analysis. The purpose was to find out how to drive the agenda of the HR Committee for the coming program year. Where are the gaps that need to be addressed from a policy perspective? What did the committee learn?

The framing: There is shared accountability. Multiple actors include staff, ministers, Parish Committee, Committee of Ministry, the Human Resources Committee, and the Unitarian Universalist Association.

The Human Resources Committee looked at four years of exit interview data.

In this share-out, the Human Resources Committee advises the Parish Committee about the focus for the coming year. First Parish is a non-profit that employs close to a dozen staff. How do we make sure our employees are having a good experience?

- Role clarity is something that has already been addressed and a lot of this work happened via the handbook updates. In this process of updating the handbook, it was discovered that there was no process step before the level of "grievance" in the handbook.
- Training: Make sure First Parish provides training to staff as part of new employee orientation.
- Exit interviews: There was no policy around sharing exit interviews; that policy is now clearly defined in the handbook.
- Having routine connection points between First Parish staff and the HR Committee, including an introduction meeting with any new staff was identified and is beginning to be implemented by the HR Committee (Sara G, Kay S., Sara Whitford, Lauren N.)
- First Parish has a well-articulated exit interview policy.
- There was no formal policy for active staff to provide feedback on satisfaction of employment. First Parish can use routine connection points as an opportunity to be open to any feedback. First Parish can think about being the best employer we can.
- One gap in a process issue was that there was not any clear authority for monitoring the handbook and policies. The accountability is a little unclear. If we were a larger organization, First parish would have a larger paid HR. That is an area of additional work. As a subset of this item, the question of who owned the complaint process arose. That has been addressed in the handbook.
- More conversation is merited for the item around the lack of well-defined roles among different committees. The spreadsheet shared with the Parish Committee is a small table that represents hours of discussion.

The Parish Committee expressed deep gratitude to Sara G., Kay S., and the HR Committee.

## **8:22 - Questions and comments from the Parish Committee**

Highlights:

- A question from a Parish Committee member mentioned what both the HR Committee and the Parish Committee might do next. There is not one single path, and next steps may include more dialogue, proposals, and recommendations.
- The Parish Committee is available to vote on any changes to language, additions, or other edits needed or proposed in the employee handbook should changes arise.
- A question was raised on how this process is done in other churches, or what the Unitarian Universalist Association recommends.
- It was mentioned that there has been no mechanism for staff to hear how things are going. The Committee of Ministry works with the ministers; Human Resources works with the First Parish staff. The HR Committee reported that they had not known previously that the lead minister meets weekly with program staff.
- It was mentioned to include other committees like Religious Education and to include the lead minister; it is helpful to understand what happens on a day to day basis.
- The fall has been really collaborative and cooperative, including lots of new people.

**The Human Resources Committee left at 8:42 PM.**

**8:42 Flag proposal update from 2 info sessions** (all who ran table)

- The Defending Democracy working group had proposed the idea of flying the U.S. flag, the progress pride flag, and the Black Lives Matter flag from the First Parish flag pole.
- Members of the Parish Committee collected opinions and input from the congregation during coffee hour after Sunday services in the vestry at the Parish Committee table.
- So far, over a few weeks, there were 20+ people in support of the flag proposal. There were a couple of alternate opinions, such as changing the order of the flags or flying an additional flag.
- No decision will be made until after the scheduled Listening Session which is planned for October 21st at 7pm on Zoom.

**MOTION 4:** I move that the Parish Committee enable Parish Committee Executive to make a decision following the October 21st discussion and a summary of the discussion would be provided to the Parish Committee to support the Executive recognizing feedback to date has been positive. (Carolyn) Seconded (Steve M.) 8 of 8 in favor.

**8:15 Report out from ParCom working groups** (all)

- Communications - John A/ Joanna - wait until the November Parish Committee meeting.
- Volunteer Engagement - Susan/working group reached out to Kiki Giatis, regarding a database, engagement and Stewardship to get to know who our members are. Kiki and Susan will be meeting.

- Charting the Course - Carolyn: John A, thank you for sending out the status of the survey. The working group needs to meet between now and the next Parish Committee meeting to wrap up the survey and be ready to get that out.

#### 8:45 **Executive session: coaching update (Jeff & Joanna & ministers)**

The Parish Committee went into executive session. No notes are taken during executive session.

**MOTION 5:** I move that the Parish Committee go into Executive session, inviting Rev Marta and Rev Erica. (Joanna) Seconded (Anne) 8 of 8 in favor.

**MOTION 6:** I move that we exit from executive session. (Steve) Seconded (John) 8 of 8 in favor. None opposed.

8:52 PM - Scheduling / other business, including the retreat in early February

- Jeff will do the reading for November.
- Al will do the reading for December.

**MOTION 7:** I move that we adjourn. (Jeff K.) Seconded (Anne) 8 of 8 in favor. None opposed.

9:01 Adjourn

#### **Motions**

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Meeting minutes prepared by Joanna Pushee, clerk.