

Parish Committee Minutes  
First Parish Unitarian Universalist of Arlington  
June 18, 2024 7 - 9 pm  
Online via Zoom

**Present:** Anne Quaadgras, John Anderson, Steve McMullen, Jeff Keffer, Susan Moore, Kate Tranquada

**With the ministers:** Rev. Marta Flanagan, Rev. Erica Richmond, Minister of Religious Education Stevie Carmody

**Guests:** Kay Snowden, and Ebonie Smith-Cooper

7:04 **Calling the meeting to order** (Anne)

- Anne appointed John Anderson as note taker.

7:05 **Reading and Chalice Lighting** (Jeff)

Two minutes of silence (let us bring our best selves to this meeting)

Reading from David Brooks "How to Know a Person." The reading begins:

"In every crowd there are diminishers and there are illuminators..."

7:10 **Rose of Recognition proposal** (Anne)

For the Music Director Search Committee, led by Robin Baker and David Klingsberg: The committee has been thoughtful and graceful and deliberated carefully.

After brief comments supporting the nomination, the Parish Committee unanimously agreed that we want to recognize them with a rose of recognition.

7:15 **Review of Financial report & dashboard** (Anne)

In Carolyn's absence, Anne briefly noted the information shared with the Parish Committee in advance of the meeting:

- Previous month financials [& current reforecast]
- Other financial updates

Anne asked if there are questions and reiterated that Carolyn is happy to take questions.

**Vote:** Consent agenda: Minutes, Financials, Ministers' Reports

**MOTION 1:** I move that we accept the consent agenda. (Steve M.) Seconded (Kate T.) 6 of 6 in favor. None opposed.

7:21 **Arlington's 250th Anniversary: Event planning meeting** (Kate T.)

Kate attended a recent planning meeting for events to celebrate and commemorate the 250th anniversary of the start of the American Revolutionary War.

The planning meeting was well attended.

Purpose: The town is seeking to share untold stories of Menotomy, and to commemorate events of 1775 with programs and activities that are as inclusive as possible.

Patriots Day weekend, 2025, includes the 250th anniversary of the start of the American Revolution and also Passover and Easter.

Questions:

- What's happening in Arlington and in other towns?
  - Essentially, the town is asking for input about who wants to do what.
  - There's a form they'd like groups and organizations to fill out to help the town gather information.

Question: How does FPUU want to participate?

Our task: Decide how FPUU will want to participate, and communicate that with the town.

Note: The event budget for town events is very small. Arlington doesn't have a budget for expanding the number of visitors to Arlington on the weekend in question.

Many people and organizations are chipping in with volunteering. Arts Arlington is involved, as are several more committees. The MA State Office of Travel and Tourism also constituted a program and might offer some funding support.

Town is looking for grants, AND, they are looking for organizations in town to contribute.

- At this moment there's no specific deadline for First Parish or other community groups and organizations to sign up.

Ideas:

- Offer use of our bathrooms for visitors
- Offer water
- Consider offering hospitality services for people coming from far away. We might be able to recruit hosts and set up for brief homestays similar to a pop-up Air-B-and-B
  - UU Burlington, VT, did something like this for the eclipse last spring. We could ask them how that went and whether they have recommendations.

Al spoke with the town coordinator who said there will be an event at 2pm, on Sunday, April 20, 2025, in Arlington that will include musket fire. Spectators will need to stay on the opposite side of Mass Ave from FPUU during that part of the events. There will be activities on Saturday and on Monday, too. It is anticipated that the Jason Russell House will be hosting programs. The organizers pointed out that there are two years of activities, not only this one weekend in April, 2025.

Thanks Kate! Thanks for attending and sharing with us.

Action: Plan in August or in the early fall.

## 7:32 **Appointing additional committee members** (Anne, 10 min)

Decide whether to appoint additional committee members listed in motion

- Maryglenn Vincens & Joel Carlton Gysan for the Stewardship Committee
- Marie Meter for the Leadership Development Committee (LDC)
- Mary McCartney for a 7th year on membership (ending 2025)
- Carolyn White for Welcoming Congregation Committee

**MOTION 2:** I move that we appoint the following people to the respective committees:

- Maryglenn Vincens & Joel Carlton Gysan for Stewardship
- Marie Meteer for Leadership Development Committee
- Mary McCartney for a 7th year on Membership (ending 2025)
- Carolyn White for Welcoming Congregation Committee

Jeff made the motion to approve these additional committee members; Steve seconded the motion

Discussion: Do we know which committees still need more people?

Answer: We don't have all of that information, but the Finance Committee would like more people. The Leadership Development Committee has Kiki and Marie. Most committees have at least a couple of people and can recruit and add at the beginning of the church calendar year as needed.

Rev. Erica points out that Lay Ministry is looking for more people. Some promising candidates decided not to pursue it.

**Vote:** Unanimous approval. 6 of 6 in favor. None opposed.

7:38 Anne asked for Parish Committee members to sign up to volunteer for offering a short reading and chalice lighting at future meetings:

August: Kate  
Sept: Steve  
Oct: Susan

Note: Steve will be away for the last two weeks of August.

7:40 **Updated Employee Handbook presentation, discussion, possible vote** (Kay Snowden, HR, 20 min)

Welcome to Kay Snowden of the Human Resources committee. HR is seeking formal approval from the Parish Committee for updates to the Employee Handbook.

The last time the Parish Committee approved the employee handbook was 2016. The HR committee has made a lot of changes and offered a two-page summary of those changes for the Parish Committee to help orient toward the more detailed changes in the manual.

Anne asked for permission to record this segment of the meeting in order to share the discussion with Parish Committee members who are absent. Nobody was opposed, so we began recording at 7:42pm.

Kay presenting:

- HR started a year ago to review and to seek to align the handbook with changes in state and federal regulations
- There are certain benefit recommendations (not requirements) that the HR Committee tried to align into our handbook.

- Many employers in the area have common language and practices that we also sought to align with.

So far HR has:

- Drafted changes
- Distributed the first draft to Parish Committee Executive, the ministers, and received comments back.
- From there HR shared a draft with all staff and then made further changes.
- Substantial changes:
  - Expanded cost sharing for health insurance to include family and children. This is already incorporated into the handbook.
  - Opting into Massachusetts employee leave and benefits. This is beneficial to allow for paid leave for staff. It is a modest cost paid for through a small payroll tax.
- Note:
  - Small additions to personal days, but not much change to paid time off. Not a large change.
- Future budget:
  - Compliance with fair labor standards act, the law that sets federal minimum wage, and which classifies employees as exempt or non-exempt. Generally salaried employees are exempt from earning overtime or being entitled to overtime. However, if their weekly pay is less than a specified thresholds, they are still eligible for overtime pay.
    - We need to treat some employees who are salaried as non-exempt.
    - This should not affect us much because it's unlikely that an employee who works 25 hours per week to exceed 40 hours in a week.
- Separation Pay
  - We've included separation pay because churches do not pay for unemployment insurance. If an employee leaves, there's no severance.
- HR has been doing exit interviews, and HR hasn't been sharing the results. The HR Committee thought it would be appropriate to establish a policy for how to share feedback from exit interviews.
- There's also been no guidance for how to handle conflicts within/among staff to address challenges step-by-step.

Discussion:

- Thanks to Kay for bringing extensive knowledge about HR to this process.
- Thanks for all the extra efforts that have gone into enhancing our policies. We've seen, during the past year, that the HR manual and policies are in need of adjustments.
- There was a request for extra time, over the summer, to go through the manual and updates in more detail, and to offer any comments. This request was made in light of:
  - 3 Parish Committee members being absent from the current meeting.
  - The importance of the document both for staff and for the institution
  - The large number of changes
  - At least one Parish Committee member learning about this topic only a couple days ago and having had insufficient time to review the information

- The request for more time was seconded by a new Parish Committee member who had not been aware of this until the last few days.
- We noted that the document does a couple of things.
  - It seeks to protect employees and to help them know their rights and resources.
  - It also helps to protect the organization

Notes from Kay about changes that are already in place or in process:

- We have already begun to pay into the state system, so that's already underway.
- We could treat the changes as 'in effect' subject to further review.
- There will be additional minor updates based on changes such as updates to thresholds for federal and state determination of exempt/non-exempt status.
- Suggestion: Develop a cycle or routine in which we review the HR Manual every three years, led by HR with input from Parcom. That would enable Parcom to understand and appreciate the manual, too.
- Note: The HR manual states that ministers have letters of agreement, and those agreements take precedent over the HR manual when the two disagree.
  - Recommendation that we review such agreements and seek to make amendments to bring those into agreement and alignment with the HR manual.

Marta notes that the Committee on Ministry is involved in negotiating ministerial agreements. Stevie doesn't think that the Committee on Ministry (COM) was involved with his agreement.

Suggestion: Consider the various committees involved including Human Resources, Committee on Ministry, Religious Education, Parish Committee, and how we work together across these different committees. Recommendation that we step back to make sure we're all 'rowing in the same direction.'

The end goal is to create clarity for when situations come up. Particularly with regard to paid medical leave, we need to make sure our different documents are aligned.

A few reasons not to vote to approve this document tonight:

1. Most of the Parish Committee has not spent much time reviewing the document. Only Parish Committee Exec has taken time to review it carefully. It needs more than a weekend.
2. At least one of us has a lot of little comments that can be shared for clarification.
3. Three of nine Parish Committee members are not present.

Consensus: The Parish Committee had general agreement to postpone any vote to formally adopt and approve updates to the HR manual and to use the summer to review it carefully and to compile comments from the Parish Committee.

The next Parish Committee meeting is Aug. 27th. We agreed to aim to finalize the updated manual at that meeting.

Gratitude was expressed towards Kay Snowden. Thanks to the HR Committee for all of the work on this slate of changes and updates.

8:05 Break

8:10 **Ebonie Smith-Cooper Aspirant status sponsorship request**

Ebonie is seeking to be considered for ministerial fellowship. The first stage is an application that informs the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) that a candidate has an interest. The UUA replies with a long list of items you must complete in order to achieve “Aspirant” status - the middle phase. That includes a variety of things including background checks and also support from a UU community. The Aspirant must show they are an active participant in a UU community. The Aspirant needs a letter to certify that the community supports the Aspirant in pursuing ministry.

Divinity school is a separate process from the UUA process.

What the Parish Committee is going to say, yes, we know Ebonie, that we know she is knowledgeable about congregational life, and that she is a suitable candidate for UU Ministry - that we see potential for Ebonie as a UU Minister. The UUA wants to know that we see in Ebonie having potential for UU Ministry.

**MOTION 3:** I move that we approve Ebonie Smith-Cooper’s request for First Parish to sponsor her for Aspirant status for UU ministry. (Kate T.) Seconded (Steve M.) 6 of 6 in favor. None opposed. Kate made the motion to formally endorse Ebonie for Aspirant status with support from FPUU. Steve M. seconded.

As Parish Committee chair, Anne Q. will create an official document and sign it to signal the Parish Committee’s support for Ebonie’s Aspirant status.

8:30 **State of the Parish** (Marta, 20 min)

Currently, ministers are wrapping up a program year and looking ahead to planning the next program year.

There are many dates and activities already on the calendar for next year. Some are related to the US Presidential election.

Marta shared a set of events from in-gathering to the election.

Currently, First Parish is entering the summer season of lay-led worship online only via Zoom, plus in person Wednesday evening potlucks. Lectio Divina will continue over the summer, lay-led, three times per week.

Summer does have some staffing in the First Parish office.

The Parish Committee has (in our materials to prepare for this meeting) a document outlining events during the first 20 weeks of the next program year. Important dates for FPUU are in bold; national items are in italics.

**Observations:**

1. Worship and RE anchor First Parish. Most of the FP staff and financial resources are devoted toward worship and Religious Education.
  - Supporting one another through changes in our lives
  - Engagement with justice
  - Engagement with grief
  - Engagement with theological questions
  - ... with music and beauty.Living our faith, credo services, and poetry service reflect parts of that.
2. Our engagement with democracy and justice will be playing a big role in our spiritual beings over the next 20 weeks
  - The second presidential debate will be two days after our Ingathering service.
  - 8 weeks after election day, Congress will certify who will be the next President.
  - Inauguration Day will fall on Martin Luther King Day.We're likely to be deeply shaped by highs/lows, anxieties around all of these issues.
3. Three events over these 20 weeks are entrees for First Parish with our local community:
  - Town Day
    - Pie Palace and Man-made Chili
  - Harvest Moon Fair
    - Competing with Christmas Eve for the most neighbors who walk into our building
  - Christmas Eve

How are we engaging our neighbors who engage with us? Are we modeling our values?

How will we engage new members and new friends?

- Volunteer Fair (September)
- "Un-Ferry Beach" event (September)

How are we engaging people who are newish to us?

4. Leadership activities are numerous over the next 20 weeks
  - 8 trainings and retreats (mostly on a Saturday)
  - Leadership Development Committee afternoon program for church leaders
  - Financial round table.

Note: Adult education programs and justice-related programming are not included in the calendar of programs Marta shared so far. So, there's more.

Question: How can we, as the Parish Committee, help you - Ministers - to be sustained and sustainable through the coming months? What can we do to support you in these activities?

**Answers/Ideas:**

- Marta shared a calendar of programs in advance in the past, and doing that led to some shifts/changes in program plans.

- Rev. Erica - reflecting back what's most needed in our congregation is important because it can help the Ministers to put their own energy where it's most important/valuable. I'm hoping to offer Wednesday Evening Chapel in the fall, not only starting in January.
  - That's a sustaining spiritual practice for Rev. Erica
  - Lifting voices of folks who find there is so much available that it can be overwhelming, so:
    - Things that are low lift and high impact are good.
- Minister of Religious Education Stevie - with educator hat on, think of each deep breath you take in worship. Breathing is one continuous stream. What can we do now that will help us set up for sustaining ourselves and the community?
- Remembering, "What do I wish I had been practicing in the months leading up to ... (a moment in the past)?"
  - We do a certain amount of projecting our anxieties onto children. Please be curious about that.
  - Watch yourself when your anxiety goes up and consider what we're projecting onto our children.
  - Pay attention to what children need in this time.

Appreciation for having three great ministers to help our community. Appreciation for the advance planning and preparation.

Make sure we're practicing now, our spiritual practices, so we've got the spiritual muscles developed for when things get tough.

8:41 Any other business

8:45 The Parish Committee agreed to adjourn the meeting. 6 of 6 in favor. None opposed.

#### MOTIONS:

**MOTION 1:** I move that we accept the consent agenda. (Steve M.) Seconded (Kate T.) 6 of 6 in favor. None opposed.

**MOTION 2:** I move that we appoint the following people to the respective committees:

- Maryglenn Vincens & Joel Carlton Gysan for Stewardship
- Marie Meteer for Leadership Development Committee
- Mary McCartney for a 7th year on Membership (ending 2025)
- Carolyn White for Welcoming Congregation Committee

Motion 2 was made. (Jeff) Seconded (Steve M.) 6 of 6 in favor. None opposed.

**MOTION 3:** I move that we approve Ebonie Smith-Cooper's request for First Parish to sponsor her for Aspirant status for UU ministry. (Kate T.) Seconded (Steve M.) 6 of 6 in favor. None opposed.

**MOTION 4:** I move to adjourn the meeting. - 6 of 6 in favor. None opposed.

Prepared by John Anderson.