

# Parish Committee Minutes

First Parish Unitarian Universalist of Arlington

August 27, 2024 7 - 9 pm

Online via Zoom

**Parish Committee members:** Anne Quaadgras, John Anderson, Carolyn Hodges, Joanna Pushee, Susan Moore, Kate Tranquada, Al Tosti, and Jeff Keffer

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

**Guest(s):** Kay Snowden (HR Committee)

7:03 Call to Order (Anne Q.)

The Parish Committee congratulated Rev. Erica who got married in July. She and her husband are expecting a baby in early 2025.

7:05 Reading and Chalice Lighting (Kate T.) - poem by Denise Levertov, followed by two minutes of silence.

7:10 Welcome back and check-in (Anne Q.)

The Parish Committee members and ministers named recent experiences that brought home why First Parish is important.

To name a few experiences: potlucks and deep conversation, phone calls, our advent season, Covenant Groups, connection and a nurturing community, new jobs, connections not being dependent on place, care through the changes in our lives, the importance of an open and staffed building that is welcoming, the quality of recognizing one another, the children!!, how First Parish helps support children to be themselves and make the world a better place; losses and the prayer shawl ministry, even outside of First Parish.

7:24 Volunteer Conversations (Jeff K.)

Engagement and volunteerism have been themes that came out of the fall 2023 Parish Committee retreat, along with Visioning for the future. One event idea the working group for Engagement and Volunteerism discussed was having a connections fair in the fall. With the September 2024 calendar being full, opening with Ingathering on September 8th, welcoming people into the meeting house for unFerry Beach (which will be on site on September 28th this year), and

Town Day in Arlington on September 21st, it would be best to come back to this committee or engagement fair at a later date. After meeting over the summer, Jeff K, Anne Q., Joanna P., and Leadership Development Committee chair Kiki Giatis, continue to think about more opportunities for connection and engagement.

The Parish Committee expressed positive responses to the idea of a fair or event for volunteerism and engagement. There was consensus that there is huge potential for an event.

The First Parish website has a fantastic page about connecting as well and is a great resource.

7:31 Employee Handbook summer updates (Anne Q. / Kay S., 10 min.)

The Parish Committee recognized that the Human Resources Committee had a busy summer with the employee handbook updates. Major updates included benefits that are fair and competitive.

The changes since June 2024 were shared with and submitted to the Parish Committee by mid-July 2024. The final version reviewed by the Parish Committee was the August 6, 2024 version; four small edits were submitted to Kay Snowden at the end of August including simplification of the language around veteran status and clarification around the process for employees, other than the lead minister, to be reviewed.

On behalf of the Human Resources Committee, Kay requested if there were any additional questions or comments.

The Treasurer commented that the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) provided an update less than two months ago regarding exempt status, namely that the UUA increased the threshold. The Treasurer and the Office Manager will work together and look at tracking the time of employees. [See clerk's note below.]

[Clerk's note: "To be considered exempt under the FLSA, an employee must meet a salary threshold as well as certain duties tests. This salary threshold is increasing from \$684/week to \$844/week on July 1, 2024, with an increase to \$1,128/week scheduled for January 1, 2025." (<https://www.uua.org/leaderlab/worker-classification>)]

Having no further comments or questions, the Parish Committee voted on adopting the new Employee Handbook.

MOTION 1:

I move that we approve the updated Employee Handbook, including the four changes that Kay went over today with the three changes from AI, plus the one for

the evaluation process for employees other than the Lead minister. (Anne Q.) Seconded (Jeff). 8 of 8 In favor. None opposed.

Deep gratitude was expressed to Kay Snowden and HR Committee, and the Parish Committee acknowledged that the HR Committee is volunteer-run.

7:45 Adding a First Parish member to a one-year term on the Human Resources Committee (Anne, 5 min)

Currently, the Human Resources Committee includes Kay Snowden, Sara Galantowicz, and Lauren Newton. The Human Resources Committee is looking to add one more person for a one-year term.

**MOTION 2:** I move that the Parish Committee appoint and add Sara Whitford to the Human Resources Committee. (John A.) Seconded (Jeff K.) 8 of 8 in favor. None opposed.

7:47 Human Resources comments on parental leave (Kay, 5 min) - PFML

The Parish Committee requested insight from Kay Snowden of the Human Resources Committee on what might be needed to be discussed in the future in order to prepare for the Parish Minister's planned parental leave in 2025.

The Parish Committee came to a consensus that Parish Committee Executive would meet at a later date, and that an executive session could be held as part of the Parish Committee retreat, scheduled for September 14, 2024.

7:59 - 8:06 Break

8:06 Rose of Recognition proposal (Anne)

The Parish Committee nominated the Human Resources Committee for the Rose of Recognition. The Human Resources Committee has shown its endurance, patience, perseverance, and its ability to take feedback from multiple sources.

The Parish Committee celebrates that First Parish has improved benefits such as health insurance and paid family and medical leave.

8:09 Review of Financial report & dashboard (Carolyn, 20 minutes)

- 2023-2024 financials close: The Treasurer reported that the fiscal year is closing and an approximate 65,000 dollar surplus range is available. With \$60,000 being used to repay the retained earnings as the Parish Committee voted last program year to make the budget balanced; \$4,900 would go back into retained earnings. It was noted that the July and

August financials will be discussed at the September Parish Committee meeting.

- A question regarding whether the Taste of First Parish fundraiser line item has been closed or in process. The Treasurer confirmed that that line item is now closed. It was noted that First Parish received a thank you letter from World Central Kitchen: just under \$6,000 was donated to WCK.
- A question about how many years are left on the second minister fund was raised. First Parish has two years left. First Parish has some extra for program year 2025 - 2026.
- First Parish has done wonderfully in pledges. First Parish demonstrates love for our community inward, outward, and side by side. The Parish Committee celebrates this good news around the pledges and the plate.
- Giving First note: December 24th, Easter, and Ingathering are the big dates. On December 24th, one hundred percent of the plate is typically given to Renewal House, this is separate from the Giving First monthly designation.
- The tenant, Arlington Children's House (Adventures in Montessori), is doing quite well with numbers to be improving. Enrollment had been down. The tenant is covering its commitments.
- Regarding Professional Expenses: the line item for "search expense for staff" is also included there. The budget overage is not indicative of ministers or staff overspending: rather First Parish's use of services to place advertisements for new positions.
- The Treasurer and the Office Manager are working on office and general expenses such as computers and maintenance of computers and tech. The Treasurer will be putting a separate line item in to better track these expenses in program year 2024 - 2025.
- There were unexpected expenses around pest control in 2023-2024, and building repairs so the Property budget exceeded the anticipated needs. Funding from retained earnings was available to cover and remedy this variance. The Property Committee oversees its budget very closely.
- A question about the pest control, alarm, plumbing repairs, and minor building repairs was posed to the Treasurer. If members look at the general scorecard and the account details tab, there is more detailed information there.
- New information to share with the Parish Committee and First Parish congregation as a whole:

A generous gift of about \$60,000 was given to First Parish in 2024 by a parishoner. The Parish Committee deeply thanks this parishoner and highlights how this gift will enable First Parish to "dream big" - it is a one-time gift, and it goes into the operating budget of First Parish.

The clerk provided an article in *The Spire* to thank the anonymous parishioner and to bring attention of the gift to the congregation.

The Parish Committee and the ministers acknowledge that it has been an amazing year for First Parish: most religious or spiritual communities are not in this position of vibrancy, growth, and strength.

The Parish Committee expressed gratitude to the Treasurer for shepherding the financials with clarity and care.

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

MOTION 3: I move that we adopt the consent agenda. (Anne Q.) Seconded (John A.) 8 of 8 in favor. None opposed.

**8:31 State of the Parish: what to expect this year; discuss options & financial impacts (ministers, 25 min)**

### **Part I: State of the Parish**

The Lead Minister, Rev. Marta Flanagan, expressed total excitement and jubilation to have people return *in carne* in just twelve days' time to the meeting house. The First Parish staff is working hard to prepare.

The program year 2024-2025 marks Minister of Religious Education Stevie Carmody's second year with First Parish, Dr Daniel Parsley's first year as a full music director (it will be his first fall with First Parish), and Office Manager Ebiere Omoregie's fifth month with First Parish.

First Parish welcomes new Office Associate Allison Sillers who starts the week before Ingathering.

First Parish welcomes and welcomes back the office staff to a cycle of Ingathering, the Harvest Moon Fair, Stewardship, holidays such as Easter and Christmas.

The annual staff day is August 28th with Rev. Marta Flanagan, Rev. Erica Richmond, Rev. Stevie Carmody, Ebiere Omoregie, and Daniel Parsley.

8:35 PM - The Parish Minister shares a preview of the worship plan for the fall (Rev. Erica)

Rev. Erica shared a document and previewed the worship plan including who is preaching when, guest preachers (all of those Sundays are mapped out already), and themes for the next three months.

The worship arc is balancing the prophetic, pastoral, and community needs. It was noted that a lot of folks are anxious about the election: there will be additional

volunteer hours within and outside of the community and/or a need for staying grounded.

Ingathering is on the 8th of September with Marta preaching. There will be the annual water communion with a twist: what you found, learned, or discovered at the place the water came from. On September 15th, Rev. Erica will preach about different roles and positions we all occupy such as disruptor, healer, and storyteller. On the 22nd, Marta will preach about truth and untruth. On Sept. 29th, Rev. Stevie will preach about second chances. In October, First Parish will have the lay-led speakers for Living Our Faith. In November, Marta is preaching on Election Sunday and Rev. Erica is preaching after the election. There will be Music Sunday in November.

The summer services, which were held all online via Zoom, were well attended.

The lead minister mentioned the lack of air conditioning in the meeting house as one of the drivers of holding summer services online, and how First Parish might begin to think about attendance for worship in the sanctuary in the future.

## **Part 2: Options and Financial Considerations for Coverage**

The lead minister requested direction from the Parish Committee on financial information and process information regarding finding coverage for the Parish Minister's anticipated planned leave in early 2025. A recommendation to approach the time the same way First Parish approaches sabbatical coverage was made.

Clarification was requested regarding the sabbatical fund, and it was determined that the sabbatical fund could remain for sabbatical purposes. First Parish has substantial funds for a proposed parental leave coverage in the retained earnings surplus.

The Parish Committee re-stated that the lead minister has done a terrific job of finding people to fill in during sabbaticals and is confident that this time around would be the same for covering a parental leave.

For the process, the lead minister would be able to talk one-on-one and approach individuals about availability. The lead minister would know what is needed in terms of skills, what someone is good at, and how well the individual would work in relationship with First Parish. In terms of what someone is good at: the individual would be covering the big areas such as preaching, rites of passage, Stewardship season, Lay Ministry (working with the lay ministers during that period of time: approximately February through April), and being the point minister for the Social Justice Committee.

The Treasurer mentioned that in the sabbatical reserve, First Parish has \$58,000 (far more than what is spent on any one sabbatical); the Treasurer will review this line item and continue to have it on her radar.

The discussion among the ministers and the Parish Committee turned to the Stewardship component. Some brainstorming included the following highlights:

- Consider breaking the Stewardship piece out and hiring someone as a function to help the Stewardship Committee, perhaps getting someone on board early in November or December part-time.
- Embark on leaning into a capital campaign; be careful about what is manageable during the time the Parish Minister is on leave.
- There was a consultant brought on years ago at First Parish - someone who was retired - and could possibly be brought in again, or someone whose expertise would be similar. We as First Parish could learn a few things from someone brought in.
- Volunteers will pop up, supporting the Parish Minister, including celebration and pitching in; there was a suggestion to go back and look at the last few years of the visiting stewards and folks on the Stewardship Committee to review.

To sum up, the Lead Minister will be considering who she is talking to, what their abilities are, and to find someone who can do a training for Stewardship; someone who has the ability to do adjunct minister duties. The person would not cover all five full Sundays: guest preachers could be brought in (likely resulting in the guest preacher budget being exceeded).

It was mentioned that it is currently not the Parish Committee's policy to give a volunteer a stipend to do some task.

The Parish Committee gives the Lead Minister its blessing to begin the process of finding coverage for early 2025 and, if needed, the Parish Committee could be open to creating a task force to help with the process. The Parish Committee gave its blessing to the Lead Minister to have approximately \$30,000 at her disposal from parish operating funds to find coverage for the parental leave.

**9:07 September Parcom Retreat logistics & other scheduling** (Anne, 5 min)

The Parish Committee annual retreat will be on September 14th, with an agenda forthcoming. Kate T. volunteered to bring fruit. Al volunteered to bring another snack. There will be coffee. Lunch will be provided.

**9:09 Adjournment**

**MOTION 4:** I move we adjourn. (Joanna) Seconded (Anne) 8 of 8 in favor. None opposed.

Being on Zoom, Kate T closed out the meeting with a bevy of heart emojis.

### **MOTIONS:**

**MOTION 1:** I move that we approve the updated Employee Handbook, including the four changes that Kay went over today with the three changes from AI, plus the one for the evaluation process for employees other than the Lead Minister. (Anne Q.) Seconded (Jeff). 8 of 8 In favor. None opposed.

**MOTION 2:** I move that the Parish Committee appoint and add Sara Whitford to the Human Resources Committee. (John A.) Seconded (Jeff K.) 8 of 8 in favor. None opposed.

**MOTION 3:** I move that we adopt the consent agenda. (Anne Q.) Seconded (John A.) 8 of 8 in favor. None opposed.

**MOTION 4:** I move we adjourn. (Joanna) Seconded (Anne) 8 of 8 in favor. None opposed.

Notes prepared by Joanna Pushee, volunteer parish clerk.