

Parish Committee Minutes

First Parish Unitarian Universalist of Arlington

12/14/2021

Attending: Marie Meteer, Sara Galantowicz, Carolyn Hodges, Anne Quaadgras, Jeff Keffer, Al Tosti, Tom Estabrook, Rev. Marta Flanagan, Rev. Erica Richmond, Eric Segal (Finance), Liz McBurney (Finance), Kiki Giatis (Stewardship)

Call to Order

Reading and Chalice Lighting.

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

Financial Report & dashboard (Carolyn) November 2021:

- Pledges are catching up to the expected level.
- Because expenses remained low this month, we finished the month with about \$100,000 in excess
- Plate continues to be about 25% lower than budgeted. Only about a half of Sunday morning worship participants are attending in person.
- In general, the finances are stable.

(Vote 1, Discussion). Consent agenda: Minutes, Financials, lead Minister's Report, Parish minister's report, RE report. Motion made by Al and seconded by Anne. The vote passed unanimously.

State of the Parish (the Ministers):

- Marta emphasized how healthy our congregation is. The example she used was that the recent 7-0-2 Parish Committee vote on allowing congregational singing indicated an ability to disagree without conflict. Further, the four comments sent to the Parish Committee disagreeing with that decision have been respectful.
- To date, worship attendance in person does not seem to be affected by the decision to allow singing.
- Marta's sabbatical starts January 1 and lasts until May 15th.
- Parish Committee members discussed the need for a five-year plan and a desire for more open programming
- Committee members acknowledged the need to work to get back to where we were pre-pandemic, especially with the Religious Education programs. They expressed hope we can reimagine our activities.
- Given case counts in Massachusetts continue to increase, Carolyn asked that we look again at the impact of singing, as well as other COVID policies (in our January meeting).
- Sabbatical Hopes: Parish Committee members express their appreciation for Marta's leadership in these hard times and their hopes that her sabbatical gives her energy and strength.

Presentation of the 2022-23 Budget (Finance Committee, Eric Segal, and Liz McBurney)

- The Finance Committee presented the draft budget, and Parish Committee members reviewed individual line items. The first budget draft is close to balanced, and included staff raises.

Discussion of the additional items to prioritize for inclusion:

- After reviewing the draft budget, the Parish Committee developed a list of possible additional priorities to include in the Stewardship Campaign. These include:
 - A building audit to inform becoming a green sanctuary
 - An increase in program/office support staff hours to reach 2 FTEs
 - An increase in the number of sexton hours (for the building cleaning)
 - Focus on a greener campus (including new trees)
 - Tech support staffing to be able to continue hybrids services
 - Increase/expand Religious Education programing
 - Increase/expand Adult programing

Vote on prioritization of budget items (not a formal vote)

- We then voted on the priorities, with each Parish Committee member having 5 votes to put on their ranked choice of priorities. The results were:
 - Increased program support I staff 39 votes
 - Increased Religious Education Programing 19 votes
 - Increase building / sexton staff 18 votes
 - Tech staff for hybrid services 17 votes
 - Increased adult programing 14 votes
 - Green campus 11 votes
 - Green sanctuary 2 votes
- These priorities will guide both the Stewardship Campaign and adjusting the draft budget in the spring. Follow-ups with staff and specific committees for additional details will proceed.

Motion was made at 9:15PM to adjourn. Motion made by Anne and seconded by Tom. Motion passed unanimously.

Attachments: November Minutes, Financial Documents, Ministers' reports, DRE report

MOTIONS

1. I move that we adopt the consent agenda.

“Mama, come look at our tree!”

Yesterday the children in our Religious Education program made bird feeders to decorate the Christmas tree that had been hoisted up earlier in the week in the courtyard. If you take a look today you'll see bunches of them clustered on the lower branches. When the parents filtered out from the worship service to find their children they were pulled by mittened hands to examine the limbs adorned by pinecones and toilet paper rolls dotted with seeds.

I've been reading a lot of articles recently about the death of Sunday School and the worries of low attendance, especially with the littlest children. I've gone to many meetings with my colleagues and heard numerous tales of the loss of family participation, the lack of newcomers, volunteer burnout, pledging woes, and staff reductions.

I am choosing to focus on our tree this month as an example of what holds First Parish together, where our strengths lie, and what will carry us into the future.

A plea went out for someone to help buy and set up a Christmas tree. Quickly Andrew Fischer said yes. A few emails later a team of folks were ready to help him set it up and decorate it with lights. When it fell over during high winds on Saturday night someone set it up again before

the congregation arrived. And some other kind person embellished it with a pretty cloth and poinsettias.

During class time on Sunday morning some of the children made their bird feeders outside, under its branches, while others listened to quiet holiday music indoors. Some read books about animal homes, hibernation, and ways to help birds during the bleak months ahead. At the end of classroom time the feeders were shown off to their parents, along with stories about the sticky Crisco and how to help feathered friends.

Our older children, studying “Lessons of Loss” have been talking about loss during COVID, struggling with mental health issues and stress, and remembering loved ones, especially during the holiday season. They open up to each other and their teachers, and are unafraid to reveal their fragility. We've learned they talk more freely outside, so each week they sit at the picnic tables, or walk our

church grounds, and talk. Yesterday they circled the tree and talked about childhood memories and the loss of innocence.

The attendance numbers in our program this fall are smaller than in the “before time”, yes. But what happens when they are together is still amazing. Unlike so many of our neighboring congregations we have had FIVE new

families visit us this fall. And we have solid numbers in our Prek and Kindergarten classes, as well as our older kids in grades six and seven.

The Music and RE Committee together have organized a carol sing along, around that Christmas tree in the courtyard, for this Thursday afternoon at 5. We hope families will take that opportunity to meet up with old friends of all ages. A new parent just emailed me this morning to see if they can bring a friend. We will be there to greet them, sing with Anne Goodwin, share candy canes, and offer some holiday spirit.

Next week Reverend Erica and I will offer a Time for All Ages in the Sanctuary. The children will shake jingle bells and help to decorate a poinsettia tree to embellish the Sanctuary for Christmas Eve. I suspect many people will be happy to see children there once again, as well as reading from the pulpit on Christmas Eve.

Our evening programs are still going strong. Reverend Erica joined me at a recent parent OWL visuals viewing session, and helped to answer some questions about the program, as well update them about her upcoming Star class about sexuality for adults. The Coming of Age mentors (Carolyn Hodges, Jeff Keffer and Pamela Baldwin) are reviewing a tentative calendar for our eighth

graders, which will kick off, in person, in March. For the next batch of OWL kids I’ve recruited teachers, one of whom is new (Melanie Hopwood), and am working on building up our OWL teaching team, since many have retired.

Let me say again how very fortunate we are to have Rose Sawyer Marsh as our Youth Group Coordinator. Many of my colleagues are struggling to find and hire anyone to do

this work. Lots of them can't get teens to participate in their programs. We have between 30 and 35 attending weekly! We have an 8 person youth advisory team that meets every month to collectively plan their varied programming. Rose has trained them to be peer advisors and chaplains for each other. A few helped Peggy Gardiner with a recent Food Pantry Drive. They are bonding, having fun together with art projects, drumming with Matt Meyer, and are looking forward to a holiday gift swap.

In January we will hike again and create opportunities for those families who are still not comfortable being indoors.

We have a well known UU storyteller joining us to kick off the winter term, and plans for an interactive and fun MLK weekend One Room program. We will have pajama days and snow fort building along with Hebrew Bible stories,

Neighboring Faiths virtual field trips and Web of Life sessions that take them outdoors in all weather. Rose will begin planning for the youth group worship service, as well as service projects near (or maybe far) that meet our safety requirements. At least two adults will be trained to be OWL facilitators for current and future classes. Six teens have offered to teach in our winter term and are partnered with adult veterans. It's wonderful to have youth volunteers in our classrooms.

We are living in an unpredictable time, yes.

We have had to pivot, regroup, rethink, and do things differently.

But, I am choosing to focus on the ways we can serve those who take the time and energy to be with us, in whichever ways they feel safe, to help them to feel connected, in this our shared faith home. I am counting all the ways we continue to be a unique place for our children to be together, to ask their questions, make friends, and to grow in love.

Wishing you all a very restful holiday season. Thank you for all YOU do to support our children and youth.

Respectfully submitted by: Tina Schultz, Director of RE

Lead Minister Report
November 12- December 11, 2021
Rev. Marta Morris Flanagan
First Parish in Arlington, Massachusetts

This was the month that hybrid worship began. What a technical accomplishment! Many thanks to the Tech Team and the Worship Associates for pulling this off. While Rev. Erica and I have been in the sanctuary leading worship, we have received only positive reports about the quality of the online experience. Only one of the last 5 hybrid services (Embrace the Darkness) experienced serious technical challenges. Though the sample size is too small to be predictive, I note that attendance at the incarnate services started strong but has declined and attendance online has been consistent.

This was also the month of transition for our covenant groups. We reopen Covenant Groups every year in January. But this year's transition also involved celebrating Marilyn Downs' work these last four years as Head of the Convenors Group and welcoming Kate Lenox into the role. Kate has already done an exceptional job of lining up ten covenant groups for 2022. They will include 89 people, nearly a third of whom (27) will be new members of groups. Thank you, Kate, for helping to deepen our ties to one another through the Covenant Group program!

This is my last minister's report before I go on sabbatical and so I devote the bulk of it to the upcoming sabbatical.

Sabbatical Hopes for You

My four and half month sabbatical begins January 1. I return to the pulpit on May 15, the Sunday before the Annual Meeting on May 22. You will be in the good hands of Rev. Erica who will serve as Acting Lead Minister in my absence. She will have the good assistance of Rev. Marc Fredette, our half time Adjunct Sabbatical minister. Together Rev. Erica and Marc will be available to you as you navigate the pandemic and the annual stewardship drive in the coming months. In particular, Marc will be giving time and attention to creating more opportunities for community and connection at First Parish.

My hope is that the sabbatical and the presence of a new minister will bring added perspectives on who we are and who we want to be as a congregation.

Please ask both of them lots of questions about what they know is happening in other congregations and what they see happening here at First Parish. Use their perspectives to enhance and shape the choices you will be making as leaders here at First Parish. We are all depending on you to help lead us into a post pandemic future.

My Sabbatical Plans

This is what I know and have staked my life's work on:

Every one of us needs help remembering what it is deeply true and worthy.

(Oh how easy it to be distracted by fears, doubts and lesser cares!) Every one of us needs help to deepen our faithfulness and sharpen our understanding of what we believe and value. And we need such help through all the different stages and circumstances of life, in the challenging times and the comfortable times. Religious communities, and ministers, in particular, exist to help do just that.

I may be a minister myself. But I, too, need help in remembering what is deeply true and worthy, in deepening my faithfulness, and sharpening my understanding.

Sabbaticals exist to help ministers get that help so we can come back and keep helping others. Ministers typically do that through study and travel, through the exploration of interests and skills, and through rest and reflection.

COVID has provided some challenges in designing a sabbatical plan. I applied to the Minister in Vicinity program at Harvard Divinity School and selected courses to take. But with the Omicron variant, Harvard University is reconsidering running their non-degree programs next semester. So unless I hear otherwise from Harvard, I am designing a reading program of my own around spirituality and theology.

An additional goal for my sabbatical is physical health. A herniated disc these last five months as well as COVIDs ending my practice of going to the gym has affected my strength and wellbeing. Regular exercise and better diet will be part of the sabbatical.

For simple delight, I have also signed up for a cooking class at the Cambridge Culinary Institute as well as a "contemplative embroidery" class.

On a personal note, Charlie and I hope to be able to have a wedding ceremony in February. As you know, we had planned a wedding for June 2020 with all First Parish invited. The pandemic postponed that wedding. Harvard did not accept bookings at Memorial Church until this past October. For now, Harvard Memorial Church is requiring signed attestation of vaccination by all attendees, but we are aware that with the rising case numbers Harvard may exclude anyone who is not a student or staff at Harvard. If that should occur, we will either postpone the wedding or make it a much smaller affair than we had planned.

So there you have it! My hopes for my sabbatical are:

1. engagement with ideas, most especially through a daily reading program
2. physical health, through exercise and diet
3. some delight and creativity especially with crafts and cooking

I look forward to returning to our community with added energy and perspective!

May you each know wellness in body and spirit in the months ahead,

Marta

What follows is the usual and more detailed accounting of my ministerial activities this month.

Worship

	Number in	Number of	the sanctuary	individuals	Total
				online	
Nov 14 Richmond	“Hope is a Both/And” 149	111	(43%)	260	Rev. Erica
Nov 21	“Thanksgiving and Mourning” Rev. Marta Flanagan	126	108	(46%)	234
Nov 28	Credo Service MaryGlenn Vincens Jerry Silberman Cindy Tavilla	54	116	(68%)	170
Dec 5	“What is a Miracle?” Rev. Erica Richmond	75	115	(60%)	190
Friday, Dec 10	Embrace the Darkness	65	62	(49%)	127

Sunday Average: 188

Last month's Sunday average: 173

Last Year's average (online only): 195

Notes:

- Incarnate numbers are counted by the ushers.
- To estimate online attendance, we have used the following formula:
Number of screens on for at least 30 minutes x 1.25 = Number of individuals
- All numbers above are individuals (not screens).

Attended Worship Associate monthly meeting: 12/8
Embrace the Darkness Planning Meetings: 11/17, 11/30, 12/ 8

Pastoral Care Provided by Lead Minister

Pastoral appointments and visits:

Online: 1

Office: 9

Home: 3

(themes: spirituality, employment, living with illness)

Attended Rob Meier's memorial with Rev. Erica officiating, 11/21

Staff and Lay Leadership Support Provided by Lead Minister

Appointments with lay leaders regarding projects and committee work: 4

Committee meetings attended:

(in addition to Worship meetings):

ParCom Exec 11/17, 12/1

ParCom 11/16, 12/7

Committee on Ministry 11/17

Weekly individual meetings with Parish Minister Rev. Erica and DRE Tina Schultz

Biweekly weekly meetings with Music Director Jonathan Brennand

Weekly Program Staff Meetings (Ministers, DRE, Office Manager, Music Director)

Adult Programming Activities of Lead minister

Lead Lectio Divina: twice a week (attendance 14-25)

Wednesdays at 9 am, Thursdays at 8 am

Led with Tina Silberman Introductory Session of Covenant Groups 11/30

Attend meeting of Covenant Group Convenors 12/1

Professional Development and Continuing Education of Lead Minister

Attended meeting of Greenfield Ministers Study Group 11/29

Parish Minister Report
November 16- December 14
Rev. Erica F Richmond
First Parish in Arlington Massachusetts

Here we are in the Christmas season. While Par Com continues to make hard decisions about COIVD protocols, I am gladdened that we simultaneously are diving into conversations about finances, endowments, budgets, and now Stewardship. Our budgets are moral documents and I am struck by this congregation's opportunity for generosity. Thank you for continuing the important work of this community.

I have also spent time preparing for Marta's sabbatical. I am so glad she is able to take one and I wish for her restoration and revitalization during her time away. I also hope she is able to cultivate joy, be that in her wedding or in the capacity to sink into a good book. I join you all in wishing her an enriching winter. I am thrilled to be able to work with Marc Fredette and I know he will be a welcomed addition the staff team.

Looking forward to a generative winter. :)
Best,
Rev. Erica

Worship:

We have now had six (including Embrace the Darkness) hybrid worship services. A continued hip hip hooray for the tech team.

It was delightful to preach on gritty hope on November 14th and to preach on miracles and Elfland on December 5th.

I preach again on December 19th- we are planning on having the RE children start with us in the sanctuary and I am thrilled to work with Tina to support a time of intergenerational Christmas celebration.

We were able to confirm all the needed guest preachers for the Sunday's during Sabbatical.

I will begin working more closely with the Worship Associates in January.

Pastoral Care Provided by Minister

Individual pastoral care sessions: 3

Individual meetings with committee leaders: 6

Themes included ongoing grief, mental health, and family relationships.

I officiated Rob Meier's memorial service on November 21st at 2 pm. I was hearted by our community's drawing together. We also interned Rob's ashes in our congregation's memorial garden. Thank you to the Totsi's for managing those logistics.

Lay Ministry:

Our lay ministers continue to provide such great care to our congregation.
I attended the December 1st meeting. Our Adjunct Sabbatical minister, Rev. Marc, will be working with this group during Marta's sabbatical.
The Giving First recipient this month is Chaplains on the Way and their executive director is coming to present on their work on 12/19 in the parlor.
Staff and Lay Leadership Support Provided by Minister
The programmatic full-time staff team continues to meet biweekly.
ParCom Exec: 11/17 and 12/1
Committee on Ministry: 12/15
Indigenous Justice Working Group: missed
Membership Committee: 12/12
Lay Ministry: 12/1
Leadership Development Committee: 12/13
Par Com: 12/7 and 12/14
Racial Justice: 11/30
Social Justice: missed this month
Stewardship: 12/12

Adult Programming: Education, Spiritual Deepening, Community Building
Tina Schultz and I hosted a gathering for parents of OWL participants on December 8th. It was a great opportunity for me to get to know more RE families and to talk about spirituality, sexuality, and our faith.
Stewardship is kicking into gear, their proposal for this year's theme is "Investing in Caring Committee." Stewardship Sunday is February 13th.
I will be participating in the Carols and Candy cane gathering on 12/16.
I am offering two sessions for adult on sexuality in January.
Social Justice / Turning Outward
- Pie Palace was a success! It was held on 11/20 and raised \$1400 for our social justice committee
- The Social Justice committee and Racial Justice committee voted to help fund the UU Urban Ministry's winter speaker series.
- At Anne Matheis's invitation, she serves on the town's MLK planning committee, I recorded a benediction for the virtual presentation to be aired in January 2022
Professional Development and Continuing Education
Monthly session with a Spiritual Director
Monthly consultation with my ministry mentor

Nov-21										
		Current Month Actual	Current Month Budget	Variance	%var	YTD actual	YTD Budget	Variance (amt)	Variance (%)	Notes/ Drivers
Income										
Pledge		104,228	37,036	67,192	181.4%	400,992	341,345	59,647	17.5%	Full year-pledges aligning as expected, running above plan
Plate		4,969	3,333	1,636	49.1%	12,365	16,666	(4,302)	-25.8%	plate income below plan (on-line only Sept- mid-Nov)
Fundraiser			7,125	(7,125)	-100.0%	(41)	7,625	(7,666)	-100.5%	Harvest Moon Fair deferred due to COVID
Tenant*		5,050	4,416	634	14.4%	23,044	22,081	963	4.4%	Mariposa-main tenant
Other Building		75	2,125	(2,050)	-96.5%	5,625	10,625	(5,000)	-47.1%	other building use increasing but will remain below budget
Contributions		8,965	8,667	298	3.4%	45,826	43,334	2,492	5.7%	Second Minister Fund, PPP loan and one-time gifts
Other Income		13,000	10,000	3,000	30.0%	13,312	23,000	(9,688)	-42.1%	Trustee funding of Capital expenditures occurred in Nov (\$13K), Wellingtono

										n funding will occur in Dec (\$10K).
Total (sum)	136,287	72,702	63,585	87.5%	501,122	464,676	36,446	7.8%		
All Income	144,356	73,602	70,754	96.1%	511,657	469,176	42,481	9.1%	Key drivers improved pledges off set by deferred Harvest Moon Fair lower building use, and delayed timing of Wellington funding	
% explained	94.4%	98.8%			97.9%	99.0%				
Expense										
Salary*	40,407	41,769	1,362	3.3%	62,020	60,166	(1,854)	-3.1%	Increases effective 7/1, Sexton - earlier start date August 2021	
Benefits (all)*	10,058	12,701	2,643	20.8%	54,838	63,503	8,665	13.6%		
Utilities	1,701	4,339	2,637	60.8%	4,683	9,544	4,861	50.9%		
Property-maint	25,160	2,833	(22,326)	788.0%	35,073	40,167	5,093	12.7%	Trustee/ Operating funding of Capital expenditures occurred in Nov	
Office & General exp	6,060	6,592	532	8.1%	33,886	52,960	19,075	36.0%	Tech expenses	

										(COVID) in process
	Committees	3,031	4,010	979	24.4 %	9,654	20,199	10,545	52.2%	committee expenditures currently below budget
	Outreach	2,259	1,737	(522)	30.1 %	27,616	30,539	2,923	9.6%	
	Total (sum)	88,675	73,981	(14,694)	19.9 %	227,769	277,077	49,308	17.8%	
	All Expense	89,554	74,648	(14,906)	20.0 %	366,013	429,089	63,076	14.7%	Key driver-favorable property, general exp & committees expense
	% explained	99.0%	99.1%			62.2%	64.6%			
	net position			55,848		145,644	40,087	105,557		
			ck	55,848				105,557		
November 2021 Comments:										

If you are interested in seeing the monthly Profit & Loss statement, please email treasurer@firstparish.info to get a copy. We are now postin the monthly template here.

Budget Priorities	1	2	3	4	5	Weighted total
Increase Office Staffing	5	3		1		39
Programming children	1	2	1	1	1	19
Increase Building Staffing	1	1	2	1	1	18
Tech staffing	1		1	4	1	17
Programming adult		2	1	1	1	14
Green campus			3		2	11
Green Sanctuary					2	2