

Parish Committee Special Meeting minutes
First Parish Unitarian Universalist of Arlington
August 31, 2021

Attending:

Parish Committee members: Marie Meteer, Anne Quaadgras, Celia Wcislo, Jeff Keffer, Carolyn Hodges, Al Tosti, Sara Galantowicz, Steve McMullin, Tom Estabrook

Staff: Tina Schultz, Jonathan Brennan, Marta Flanagan, Rev, Erica Richmond

Members: Marilyn Jackson, Tish Miller, Jessica Farman, Kiki Giatis, Lois Fine, Lou Fiscarelli, Bonnie Zimmer, Maryglenn Vincens, and Ellen Robie.

Welcome and introductions

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

Overview and current status – Marie

- Overview on our past decisions and CDC, state guidance, infection rates.
- First Parish has installed HEPA filters in the restroom, touchless faucets, and improved office ventilation. In addition, many windows in the sanctuary and vestry can now be opened and repairs and upgrades to the sanctuary ventilation system should be finished in 3 weeks.
- All staff are vaccinated
- Masks are required to be in the building for all
- September 12th Ingathering is on hold
- The Parish Committee would like to gather broader input from congregation about when and how we return to services in the sanctuary

Opportunity for visitors to speak (keep to 2 min per person)

- We heard from Tish Miller, Jessica Farman, Kiki Giatis, Lois Fine, Bonnie Zimmer, Ellen Robie, and Maryglenn Vincens

Information gathering plan

- How to gather information from the congregation
 - Our previous Communications survey told us that a survey of the full congregation was the preferred way to get input from members about a return to worship.
 - A sub-group of Sara, Marie, Jeff, and Celia will work on the survey and draft questions. Attendees recommended gathering demographic data on respondents to make sure we receive broad community representation.
 - Possible Zoom townhall to share the survey results.
 - Create a plan for regular communications from the Parish Committee on return to in-person services status and deliberations.

- RE children have special considerations. A week ago the parents were surveyed and 75% of those responding preferred that the children be allowed in the sanctuary when we reopen, assuming everyone is masked.

Return “no earlier than” date

- Discussion of how far forward to push the reopening date to allow for additional data gathering and review.
- Vote #1- To keep Sunday services online through November 7th and in-building services no sooner than November 14. Motion made by Al, and seconded Jeff. Motion passed 7 to 1.

Volunteer vaccination requirements

- Vote #2 – Motion that those participating in First Parish as religious education teachers and youth advisors, choir members and music performers, and lay ministers (if they conduct in-person visits) need to be fully vaccinated. Parish Committee Executive members and staff will determine how to ascertain vaccination status. Motion made by Celia, seconded by Jeff. Motion passed unanimously.

Motion to adjourn was made at 9:06 by Jeff, seconded by Sara. Motion passed unanimously.

MOTIONS

1. I move that First Parish Worship Services continue online until/no sooner than November 14th.
2. I move that those participating in First Parish as religious education teachers and youth advisors, choir members and music performers, and lay ministers (if they conduct in-person visits) need to be fully vaccinated. Parish Committee Executive members and staff will determine how to ascertain vaccination status.

As many of you may know, we have gotten a big response to our decision to return for ingathering in person, with masks but without restrictions on vaccinations. I have tried to gather as many as I could together and organize them roughly by sentiment so you can get a sense of who is responding and what their message is (though please also at least skim through them. My categories don't cover all their points.)

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ERM1nEcjXrC78eDWVY1czSHneN5p3szOytHkWN0Ef0/edit#>

Clearly people want to give us input. One of the things we'll be talking about is how to let them do that and how to both give the ministers and worship associates time to plan and also make our decisions based on community-wide input (the Connection Board is a self-selected portion of the community). I think we need to give everyone a chance to comment. One possibility is a survey, but there are others. Since we have not posted this meeting, so we won't take a final vote. The goal is to all be on the same page with respect to the options and understand our individual positions, and also make sure the community knows we are going to listen to them before making a final decision.

To help us sort through what the possible paths are, I've laid out what I think is the space of possibilities. We can add to it if I've missed anything, but I'm trying to be pretty broad. But first, there are some implicit principles we've been acting under that I think are worth thinking about:

- Not to come back until all can come back. This was generally a guiding principle when considering spacing that would require us to limit the number of people who could attend, but it can be applied here to the vaccination status, which would exclude children and possibly those with some medical conditions.
- Not to get too far ahead of or behind the curve, which has generally meant that we weren't as aggressive in loosening standards as the local government and state, but in this case it could apply to not leading in restrictions, so currently vaccination is not required to enter municipal buildings, restaurants or even the science museum, which just required staff and volunteers to be vaccinated.
- Remembering we are a spiritual community, not a "transactional" one (as characterized by Sara G), in that we're not selling a service or experience like a movie theatre or arts center.

As for the possibilities, there are broadly 3, with variations on each

- In person, as planned, without restrictions
 - Variations:
 - pass out n95 masks
 - require distancing (we now know there will be fewer people there)

- In person, but only for vaccinated people
 - Variations:
 - Simply announce this as the policy, but don't check
 - Ask people to sign a "covenant of security", which includes being vaccinated or also perhaps a negative test within 72 hours.
 - Require people to show their vaccination cards and possibly test results
 - This raises lots of issues, from little ones, such as who does the checking and what about people who didn't bring their card, to bigger ones, like whether inspecting the card and allowing the person to come makes us liable if in fact they had a forged card
 - Issues:
 - What about the children?

- Postpone in-gathering (a month? til Thanksgiving?) and continue on zoom
 - Variations
 - still have an outdoor gathering to bring together all those who feel safe coming together with others.
 - Ask those that aren't vaccinated or have risk factors to wear masks
 - Require masks for everyone
 - Continue to have outdoor opportunities to bring people together

Evidence that being vaccinated isn't the silver bullet we had hoped for continues to mount. All the Galantowiczses, fully vaccinated, tested positive after finding out a friend, also fully vaccinated, was sick and tested positive. They didn't show symptoms, but had they not had a friend who got checked because of symptoms, they would have never known. How many of us in the vaccinated group, if tested, would show positive?

Here's some additional data points from Marta:

Recent news events

ParCom made its decision on Tuesday night, August 17. Since then...

--Arlington Board of Health announced that masks are required in all indoor settings (not just municipal buildings) (Wed August 18)

--The Governor mandated vaccines for state employees (unless they have a medical or religious exemption) (Thursday August 19)

-- 15 area theaters (including ART and the Huntington) are reported in the Boston Globe as requiring proof of vaccination at indoor shows (Thursday, August 19)

-- Boston Globe reports on Forecasts predicts COVID death rates to rise in MA (Boston Globe Sunday August 22)

Vaccination Rates in Arlington as of August 19

72% of entire population is fully vaccinated.

84% of those 12 and older are fully vaccinated

Updated UUA Recommendations

On Friday, the UUA updated their recommended Covid Practices in light of the Delta

Variant: <https://www.uua.org/pressroom/press-releases/guidance-delta-variant>

Note: The UUA recommendations are made with the entire country in mind.

Postpone Ingathering until we can all gather

Postpone ingathering, continue on zoom on the 12th, but have a gathering outside that afternoon, and then we have a chance to collect information and make future decisions

- Ventilation work is not complete yet
- Children can't join us if we restrict to vaccinated people

Model for this: John Marsh memorial online, then in person courtyard gathering
Already have the Wittemore lawn reserved.

There is an outdoor RE program
Screen could be outdoors

Waiting to make a decision until we get more input from the community

Emphasize that The situation is changing quickly, numbers going up

Also, would like to hear from the community,

Therefore we are pushing out the decision about returning to the service

Picnic will go on as planned

Deciding when the appropriate date is for ingathering.

We vote that we need more data.

Parcom has decided that September 12 is too soon to be meet in doors in person. We Are going forward with that assumption

From Marta:

in theory parcom exec could make a decision to postpone incarnate worship after having consulted with parcom members

you could postpone till a survey is conducted and input heard

Exec, in consultation with the parish committee, are advising the staff

Marie, contact julius

Based on the data and conversations with the parish committee.

1> need to know

2 vague connection

VOTE then to the congregation.