

8.0 POLICY ON CONGREGATIONAL GROUPS

8.1 Introduction

This First Parish policy is designed to encourage and support the formation of groups at First Parish in Concord. Committees, task forces, councils and other groups are an important foundation of First Parish in supporting our mission of growing spiritually, building community and making a positive difference in the world. These groups enable the members and friends of the congregation to be engaged in a diverse and deep range of activities and services that support the mission of First Parish. They create opportunities for people to build friendships and shared experiences. They enable individuals in the church to leverage talents and make a meaningful difference on the world. It is important for First Parish to support the development of these congregational groups.

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance to members, friends and staff of the congregation on the creation, development, functioning and dissolution of these groups. This policy, like all other policies of the church, may be amended as appropriate by the Standing Committee.

In keeping with the policy-based governance model in place at First Parish, the Senior Minister is referred to in this policy as the Head of Staff. This title reflects the Senior Minister's leadership and administrative responsibilities to the church. Within the First Parish governance model the Standing Committee, representing the congregation, is responsible for development of governance policies that guide the actions of the Head of Staff, and for oversight of the Head of Staff regarding those policies. The Standing Committee delegates responsibility for the day-to-day policy implementation, programs, services and operations of the church to the Head of Staff.

This Policy on Congregational Groups refers to three different types of groups: Governance, Programs and Operations, and Affinity (these are described below). Certain elements of this policy apply to all groups and certain elements apply to these different types of groups. All First Parish groups will have a written charter, which is a written statement of their mission, function, structure, membership, and responsibilities as a First Parish group. Each group will have a chartering authority. This chartering authority is the body that recognizes the group as part of First Parish and authorizes the use of FP resources (e.g., facilities use, staff resources, access to website, mail list, etc.) to support the group's functions. The chartering authority for Governance groups is the Standing Committee; the chartering authority for Programs and Operations groups and Affinity groups is the Head of Staff. Because it is so closely related to the programs and operations of First Parish, implementation of this policy is the responsibility of the Head of Staff, with the support of the Standing Committee.

8.2 Scope of the Policy

All groups within First Parish will need to comply with the following policies. The only exceptions are those groups that are chartered and defined by the By-Laws of First Parish; these are the Standing Committee, the Nominating Committee, and the Trustees of Parish Donations.

8.3 Definitions of Congregational Groups

All groups are important to the life of First Parish and in serving the congregation and broader community, but there are some important differences. There are three different types of groups within First Parish. They are:

8.3.1 Governance groups

These groups are subgroups of the Standing Committee and may include members who are not members of the Standing Committee. These groups provide input, advice, research, consultation and recommendations to the Standing Committee on matters related to the governance of First Parish. These may be permanent subgroups focused on a specific area of governance or temporary subgroups (i.e., task forces) created to address specific issues or objectives.

8.3.2 Programs and Operations groups

These groups collaborate with First Parish staff to provide guidance and support for ongoing functions and major congregational priorities, such as Religious Education, Social Action, Pastoral Care, etc. Because of this role in the life of the church, these groups receive guidance and oversight. They focus on a major area of the church's functions and coordinate their activities with the staff and, when interests overlap, with other groups. They may also create subgroups that will support their mission and these subgroups will be overseen by the sponsoring organization. Affinity groups may become a Programs and Operations group with approval of the Head of Staff, who will inform Standing Committee of this change.

8.3.3. Affinity groups

These groups are formed by members of the congregation who share a common interest or a shared identity. They support the mission of the church by engaging members and friends of First Parish and building community. They offer a small group atmosphere where the members can connect with others who share their interests and participate in the larger congregation. They build community, create meaningful connections, and support each other through working and learning together.

A description of the specific characteristics and policies for each type of group is shown in the table below.

8.4 Formation and Recognition of Groups within First Parish

First Parish provides a number of resources to assist groups in their formation, promotion, and management of their activities. In order for a group to have access to the privileges and the support of First Parish, the group will need to be chartered by the Standing Committee or Head of Staff (or his/her designee). Depending on the mission of the group and the framework established by the chartering authority, groups may form subgroups or task forces to support their activities. Subgroups will operate under the auspices of the sponsoring group and do not need to be individually chartered. Further, it is understood

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that when a group is first forming, it will need some time to organize itself and to be fully compliant with elements of this policy. With approval of the chartering authority, groups may form and take advantage of First Parish resources for a reasonable period of time prior to issuance of a charter.

8.5 Policies related to all congregational groups.

The following policies apply to all recognized groups regardless of their function. Policies that relate to specific types of groups are described in the table below.

- 8.5.1 All groups will have mission that is consistent with the mission of First Parish.
- 8.5.2 All groups and subgroups will adhere to all First Parish policies. Groups should know which policies pertain to their function and activities. Further, all groups will support the principles and priorities of the church, and the principles of Unitarian Universalism. The leader(s) is/are responsible for ensuring that the group acts in accordance with these requirements. Groups that handle money will operate consistent with First Parish's financial policies.
- 8.5.3 No group may speak for or represent the views of First Parish in Concord, its congregation, staff, or activities, externally or internally, explicitly or implicitly, without the written approval of the Standing Committee or Head of Staff. This is to protect the reputation and interests of the broader congregation. Groups may speak for their own interests with the understanding that this does not obligate First Parish to the same position. Groups may use the name of First Parish in Concord in any external written or oral communications, advertising, or promotional materials with approval of their chartering authority. Major events that require use of the facilities of First Parish will require permission from the group's chartering authority.
- 8.5.4 Members and friends of First Parish are encouraged to actively participate in groups. Groups are encouraged to have as broad participation as possible. Depending on the group's mission and the chartering authority's requirements, members may be selected based on expertise, diverse perspectives, or be limited to certain interested participants (e.g., Men's Group, Women's Group, etc.). The reasons for any limitations will be clearly outlined in the group's chartering statement.
- 8.5.5 Groups will develop and maintain effective leadership and membership. The chartering authority will ensure there is adequate leadership, appropriate succession plans, and sufficient membership for each group. For subgroups, the sponsoring group will have this responsibility.

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- 8.5.6 First Parish staff members are responsible to the Head of Staff, and part of their role may be to support the groups within their area of responsibility. First Parish groups are expected to work collaboratively with all staff members. Should conflicts arise, involved parties should seek to resolve issues first. If the parties are unable to come to satisfactory resolution, the chartering authority should be engaged for discussion and resolution.
- 8.5.7 Groups should have a clear process for making decisions. In general an open, deliberative and consensus based, decision-making process is preferred. Other processes are appropriate for groups depending on the nature of their work, including voting, leader decisions with input from the group, etc. The process for making decisions should support the group's mission and work plan. Conflicts within and among groups will be resolved by the groups' chartering authority.
- 8.5.8 If a group does not act in accordance with First Parish policies, its status will be reviewed by its chartering authority and issues will be resolved in the best interests of First Parish.
- 8.5.9 Groups may be dissolved by their chartering authority. Because of the impact of Programs and Operations groups on the functions of First Parish, the Head of Staff will consult with, and obtain the approval of, the Standing Committee prior to their dissolution.
- 8.5.10 The management of congregational groups:
- 8.5.10.a Each year the Head of Staff and Chair of the Standing Committee will convene a planning session with all the group leaders, the Nominating Committee, and others as appropriate. The purpose of this meeting is to review the annual goals for First Parish, identify any related activities or priorities of the church or any of its groups, and discuss any priorities related to membership, education, event or activity planning and collaboration needed among the groups.
- 8.5.10.b All groups will submit an annual report to their chartering authority that describes the major accomplishments of the year. Certain groups, because of their charter, may be exempted from submitting these reports by their chartering authority. The annual report does need not be a long document, but should provide a summary of activities and services of the group over the past year. Subgroups will provide this information to their sponsoring group as appropriate. The Head of Staff will establish the schedule for report submission.

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8.5.10.c The Head of Staff will maintain all records including formation, leadership, annual reports and dissolution of groups. This information will be made accessible to the congregation as appropriate.

8.6 Independent Groups are important contributors to First Parish.

First Parish members often participate in non-First Parish groups in such numbers and in so many positions of leadership that these independent groups may seem to be part of First Parish. The identification is particularly close when groups were formed by First Parish or they have a historical connection with First Parish. Also, some groups may form within First Parish, grow and develop, and become freestanding, independent organizations. All these groups are welcome to apply for access to First Parish's resources (e.g., use of the facility, access to communication channels, website, or staff support), subject to the approval of the Head of Staff or his/her designee. Such groups must adhere to all relevant First Parish policies.

Further, First Parish members often come together in short-term association for a purpose that relates to Parish life. If these members seek to become a recognized group within First Parish, they are encouraged to apply for this recognition with the Head of Staff or his/her designee. Such associations do not fall under these policies. Members individually or acting collectively in these associations should not represent themselves as First Parish groups in the sense of this policy, or as speaking for First Parish without first becoming chartered by First Parish.

8.7 Policies related to specific types of congregational groups.

The following table shows how these policies apply to different types of groups. This information is to clarify the unique aspects of each group and present how the general policies relate to their function.

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	Governance Groups	Programs and Operations Groups	Affinity Groups
1. Definition and purpose			
The primary function of the group.	Governance Groups are groups of the Standing Committee (SC). These groups provide input, advice, decisions, and recommendations to the SC on matters related to designing and deploying the governance policies and practices of First Parish.	Programs and Operations Groups provide guidance and support for programs, services and operations that represent major congregational priorities and functions of the church. These groups will be advised that they may make funding requests and provide input into the budget planning process.	Affinity Groups offer members a small group atmosphere where they can connect with people who share their interests, share their identity and participate in the life of the church. Affinity groups build community and support their members through their activities and experiences.
2. Source of the charter			
This is the chartering authority of the group, and provides oversight and support as needed to the group.	The Standing Committee will approve and charter Governance Groups. The Standing Committee will provide oversight to these groups.	The Head of Staff will approve, charter and oversee the Programs and Operations Groups.	The Head of Staff or his/her designee will approve and charter the Affinity Groups, and will provide oversight.
3. Duration			
The anticipated life span of the group – permanent (i.e., ongoing) or temporary (i.e., task forces)	The life span of Governance Groups varies, in terms of their mission, but because they are governance-oriented, they tend to be “permanent” sub-groups of the Standing Committee. Temporary groups, such as Task Forces, might be used to focus on analysis and recommendations related to the policies, major decisions or plans for the church.	These groups are permanent unless dissolved by the Head of Staff, Standing Committee or Congregation. Temporary groups, such as Task Forces, might be used to focus on analysis and recommendations related to plans for the church or to plan an activity or event for the church.	Affinity groups will be on-going, as long as they have five active members, and meet other requirements of this policy.

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4. Membership			
The source and requirements for membership of the groups.	The Standing Committee determines the membership and requirements for membership of these groups.	Membership in Programs and Operations Groups is open to all First Parish members and friends. Additional requirements may be established by the Head of Staff as the chartering authority.	Membership in Affinity Groups is open to all First Parish members and friends. Affinity groups will be self-generated from within the congregation. There will be a <u>minimum of five members</u> .
5. Leadership			
How leadership is selected and any particular duties or requirements of the group's leader.	The Standing Committee will designate chairperson(s) and any particular reporting or communication requirements for groups.	Leaders of Programs and Operations groups are selected by the group in consultation with the Head of Staff or his/her designee. All leaders must be members of First Parish. Groups that have financial responsibilities will have a Treasurer.	Leaders of Affinity Groups must be members of First Parish and will be selected by the group.
6. Relationship with staff			
Level of FP staff involved with the group or other sources of support.	The Standing Committee will advise on appropriate First Parish staff involvement. These groups will operate in a manner consistent with the Standing Committee - Head of Staff Linkage Policy.	Programs and Operations Groups work collaboratively with their designated member of the First Parish staff and with other First Parish staff on an as needed basis. In the event of disagreement with staff, groups will endeavor to resolve the disagreement with the individual staff member and then the Head of Staff. If agreement is not possible, the group may bring the issue to the attention of the Standing Committee.	No staff involvement is required for Affinity Groups except for monitoring by the Head of Staff or his/her designee, or as may be requested by the group.

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Continued	Governance Groups	Programs and Operations Groups	Affinity Groups
7. Communication & reporting requirements			
<p>The requirements for communications with the chartering group, congregation or other groups within the church.</p>	<p>The Standing Committee (SC) will determine the appropriate communications and reporting requirements for governance groups. Typically, the SC will direct that meeting minutes be kept and provided to the SC. The SC minutes should be made publicly available except where confidentiality is a concern. The SC will provide support and direction on the use of other communication vehicles, including the newsletter, mailings and other announcements.</p>	<p>Programs and Operations Groups will maintain minutes or meeting notes (specifically for a record of topics discussed and decisions made) of all meetings. These will be made available when requested, except where confidentiality is a concern. The group will submit an annual report to the Head of Staff and be included in the congregation's Annual Report. These groups may form subgroups and will have oversight responsibilities for these groups. These subgroups do not need to provide minutes or reports unless required by their chartering authority or sponsoring group.</p>	<p>A written report will be submitted by Affinity Groups annually to the Head of Staff or his/her designee. Depending on the nature of the group activities, this will be a brief review of the group's activities and accomplishments. It may be included in the congregation's Annual Report.</p>
8. Examples			
<p>The following are examples of current committees, task forces, etc. that relate to each type of group. This is not intended to be a complete list; group designations will be the responsibility of the Head of Staff.</p>	<p>Evaluation Committee Task Force on Committee Policy</p>	<p>Religious Education Council Social Action Council Pastoral Care Council</p>	<p>Jewish Awareness Affinity Group Needleworkers Group Book Reading Group</p>