

<b>Regular Attendees</b>		<b>Present</b>
Fifi Ball	Director of Operations	Y
Jeff Brainerd	Standing Committee member	Y
Rev. Howard Dana	Senior Minister (on sabbatical)	
Dave Elwood	Chair	Y
Michelle Fortier	Treasurer	Y
Laurel Gray	Ministerial Intern	Y
Kristin Haddad	Standing Committee member	
John Lowe	Standing Committee member	
Peter Nobile	Clerk	Y
Zach Roe	Social Action Coordinator	
Toby Smith Ropeik	Standing Committee member	Y
Kate Svreck	Standing Committee member	Y
Valerie Vallancourt	Standing Committee member	
Lora Venesy	Standing Committee member	Y
Marion Visel	Minister for Pastoral Care, Lead Minister in Howard's Absence	Y
Tom Wilson	Standing Committee member	Y
<b>Guests</b>		
Fred Van Deusen		
Don Miller	Racial Justice Action Group (RJAG)	

Marion lit our chalice and opened our meeting with *Fire* by Judy Brown, and we held a moment of silence together.

**I. Regular Business**

Standing Committee (SC) minutes from November were approved with a unanimous vote.

**Director of Operation's report**

Fifi highlighted two items in the “changes” page; first, that the non-photo directories cost more than budgeted which is an unusual expenditure for that budget line; second, that Laurel has qualified for MassHealth coverage, so our personnel budget has been reduced by around \$5,700. The committee thanked Laurel!

The group discussed SC policy regarding targeted gifts. A motion was made to retroactively approve the \$11,110 targeted gift for a new irrigation system, and the motion passed unanimously. Michelle will work with Fifi on specifics regarding any other and future targeted gifts.

Dave described a letter of concern, addressed to Fifi Ball, from First Parish's abutters regarding the bank property on Walden Street, the owners of which are seeking to rezone that property via warrant article at the 2019 Town Meeting for uses other than as a bank. Several First Parish members are following these machinations closely; Doug Baker is attending a Planning Board meeting this evening,

and the committee will continue to stay informed.

**Lead Minister's report**

Marion described her efforts to support upcoming guest ministers, including Gary Smith in early January and Susan Frederic Gray on January 20<sup>th</sup>, who will also be conducting a Forum. Parishioners have been encouraged by seeing more staff appearing at the pulpit area during services. The transition to Howard's sabbatical has gone relatively smoothly. Marion's schedule tends to be on an 11-day on/3-day off cycle. Three new members signed the book this past week.

The committee congratulated Laurel in passing a major milestone in her journey toward full ministerial status – congratulations, well done, and a bright future ahead!

Proposed ministerial housing allowances for the coming year are as follows:

- Rev. Amy Freedman: \$52,056
- Rev. Marion Visel: \$28,800

A motion was made to approve these allowances and the motion passed unanimously. Rev. Dana's housing allowance will be reviewed when he returns from sabbatical.

**Treasurer's report**

Michelle discussed revisions to First Parish financial policies; a motion was made to accept these revisions (having do with references to the 7 ½% allowance), and the motion passed unanimously.

Michelle also discussed the financial policies forum this past Sunday, which while lightly attended was a good discussion. The upcoming pledge campaign theme is Reach High, Reach Wide.

Our audit is now complete, and the auditor (Scheid & Co) had no major concerns. A series of recommendations for improvement have been made and are being digested and discussed, and Michelle will share these with the SC in January.

Michelle noted that Marty Wallace has been suggested as a possible new member of the Finance Committee, and Michelle will set up coffee with Marty to discuss.

**II. Standing Committee initiatives/New business**

**Black Lives Matter banner**

Per our agreement with the Town of Concord's Historic Districts Commission, we are revisiting whether to keep the Black Lives Matter (BLM) banner up. Don Miller spoke eloquently about the continuing impact and positive reception of the banner, and the work going on within First Parish around racial justice. The Racial Justice group very much hopes that the banner will continue to fly on the front of our church. Fred reported that recent speaker Amanda Kemp noted the disconnect between the banner and what is going on inside the building, that First Parish did not feel internally welcoming to people of color. It was noted that the UUA is encouraging more, not less, work on racial justice issues; that other congregations are keeping their BLM banners up; and that keeping the banner up is consistent with our overall mission.

A motion was made to continue displaying the BLM banner for another 6 months; the motion passed unanimously.

### **Diversity support discussion**

Jeff reported a conversation with Sara Ballard of the Diversity Committee around more open displays of support for the LGBTQ community. The location and configuration of such a display, which could include a banner or flag on the exterior of the church, was discussed. Lora noted the need for developing a more concrete policy for making decisions around similar issues, given our recent experience with the Question No. 3 lawn signs; Michelle noted that the Wellesley church has developed a policy on Public Statements that would be worth reviewing. The group discussed how to ensure that any such display or symbolism is more than token. John encouraged the Diversity Committee and others to generate ideas and conversation within First Parish, and noted that the Social Action Council will continue to work on this issue in the new year.

### **Ministerial Support committee**

Jeff reported that this committee, comprised of Dave, Jeff and Peter, met to discuss how best to support Howard. The purpose of the committee is to work with Howard to continually improve his relationship with the Standing Committee, to provide a more intimate trust-based forum for informally discussing issues that may need clarification, and to help him tackle minor administrative tasks. The committee will undertake tasks including a review of Howard's contract and clarifying details around accrual of comp time.

### **Liaison and subcommittee reports**

Toby reported that she was approached by a congregant with some criticism about the front office regarding volunteers, collection boxes, and how phone calls are handled. Fifi noted that she has discussed these criticisms with said congregant, and that this person now likely feels more listened to, and that in any case several measures have been taken including keeping printed copies of the weekly newsletter in the front office.

Lora noted hearing many, many positive comments on Laurel's Sunday 12/9 sermon.

Dave reported 110 children at the Craft Workshop, another very successful event.

### **The Future of First Parish**

Dave discussed upcoming work in planning for the future of First Parish, including a recruiting event in January with the goal of creating the following four overlapping task forces (themes coming out of our fall SC retreat are in *italics*):

- Changing who we are – *fostering a culture of kindness, welcoming and interconnection*
- Growth and diversity – *becoming a more diverse and growing congregation*
- Connection – *to other communities and groups*
- Building our spiritual selves – *healing our brokenness by living our benediction, grounded in UU beliefs*

For the event, the SC will act as a steering committee, with one SC member (at least) per task force,

with all committees reporting to the congregation in June on any progress or plans. Part of the SC's work will be to align this effort with other efforts within First Parish, including upcoming SAC initiatives, RE goals, RJAG work and so on.

The group discussed planning for a Sunday mid-day event (say 11:30 to 2:30) in January, possibly the 13<sup>th</sup>, but that given all that is going on the event might slip into February. Lora noted the need for "pre-recruiting" leaders for each task force group, and Fred asked about time commitments for leaders and task force members, availability of resources, or approvals for action. Tom emphasized that choosing a date in January with few conflicts will be difficult. Marion noted that there should be a way for staff to interface with these task forces without creating additional burdens on the staff. Dave and Tom and others will continue to flesh out preparations for this event.

A motion was made at 9:00 PM to adjourn the main meeting, and the group entered in to Executive Session, which was then adjourned at 9:25PM.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Peter Nobile  
Clerk