

Oct 1 - First Parish - 7.5% Discussion - Notes

10 parishioners
plus Kristin Haddad, Kate Svrcek, Patty Popov, Toby Smith Ropeik, Michelle Fortier from Standing Committee

Kristin Introduction

- Reviews current policy
- 7.5% is only a portion of what First Parish does for social action (ex: \$147K given in 2015), figure also doesn't include goods collected and donated
- SA Coordinator (Zach) salary is part of 7.5%, rest is given in grants
- Zach benefits come out of general budget, not 7.5%. His benefits will increase next year.
- SAC Board has a reserve fund (largely from gifts and savings in salary between Bethany and Zach) that will cover Evan Seitz salary for a pilot period
- Currently Sr. Minister has little control over 7.5%, causing governance issues
- Summarizes research results from looking at SA program at other churches, where none are doing grants except First Parish (often they use Share the Plate)
- Three most likely outcomes of this year's 7.5 discussions and survey:
 1. Incorporate what we currently do into written policy
 2. Move Zach salary into general budget, and keep 7.5% going out into the world
 3. Eliminate 7.5% and fund social action using different mechanisms.

Open Discussion

Kristin clarified three most likely outcomes

Originally 7.5% was 5%. Then in 1996 it was raised to 7.5%.

Clarification - SAC Board created SA associate position originally with fewer hours and on a temp basis, until it could be incorporated into general budget. That incorporation lasted only a few years. SAC Board itself felt there was value in position and so kept funding it from 7.5%, even as hours for position increased.

I'm happy with how we spend out money. The 7.5% originated at time when finances were less transparent. Now we have more open policy, we should as a congregation have ongoing open discussions about how we spend SA money.

Move to lower 7.5% to 5% was introduced at annual meeting in 2009 and was defeated.

We've already been talking about 7.5% for more than a year. There may be fatigue over the issue.

This is the first time the issue has been addressed by Standing Committee. Howard is responsible for operations, SC handles policy.

SAC could decide to let Zach go on its own.

Right now the 7.5% sits outside our normal governance model. It makes more sense to have a consistent model.

Practice in hiring staff for SA has been evolving because Howard had final say on hiring Zach. Not true with Bethany, who did not officially report to Howard.

The 7.5% allocation detracts from our larger mission.

We're not being honest with ourselves. It's our money that funds this position and we wind up with less of a say over this pot of money than any other. I don't feel good about this.

There have been other attempts over the years to address this issue. In the past, some grants were arranged by SAC members for organizations they were involved in.

It's powerful to have a budgeted amount designated to social action. Moving staff under regular budget makes governance sense. But then what happens to 7.5% for SA?

My experience with Share the Plate is extensive and it helps to involve people. But then we lose the power of having a portion of our regular budget designated for SA.

Many congregations do *Share* the Plate. Hurricane Harvey and Maria plates were *Give* the Plate.

Those with experience with Share the Plate say it does not impact (lower) pledging.

We can try things, like Share the Plate, and always change if we find an issue with a funding mechanism we are trying.

Some members give to First Parish thinking it's like a membership at the Concord Museum - Giving very small amounts in pledges.

Philosophically, every salary should be part of regular budget. And I don't think 7.5% serves us well for social action. We need more congregant involvement in SA, rather than just money. We need to have a more dynamic conversation about that. 7.5% is totally arbitrary. I'd like it to go away. Instead we should have a regular conversations about SA.

I appreciated it, in years past, when SAC asked the congregation what issues members wanted to give SA money to. Maybe SA should remain a budget item of say, \$50K.

I have heard parishioners complain that the church gives SAC grants in an

arbitrary fashion, and we don't build on the grants we award.

I have never liked the idea of 7.5%, because it feels like a tax. In tough budget times, it forces choices that tie the hands of the church.

7.5% sets both a lower and upper boundary. It's symbolically important but also constrains us. Important for congregation to articulate what it wants.

Only a small group at our church discuss spending that 7.5%, rather than larger number. I think more people want to have a say.

We should acknowledge the genius of people who created the 7.5%. In stepping away from it, we need to think about a bylaw for how long any decision should last. A sunset bylaw, so to speak.

As things are, Zach doesn't have his own budget to work with.

At another meeting Zach mentioned that about 10% of our annual budget goes to music, another 10% to RE. Including salaries. But only 7.5% goes to SA.

I hope our pillars (SA, RE, music) are not actually that isolated. We should allocate based on need.

There should be a budget item to give Zach money to use.

There is an administrative burden on Fifi currently because of calculating the 7.5%. It would be easier if it was handled the same as other budget items.

How do we symbolically confirm our commitment to SA if we take away the 7.5%? Maybe we need something to replace it?

Why can't SAC come up with a budget suggestion, a flat annual figure, with some idea of where it will go. Just like any other department.

It's hard always to know in advance what will be needed for SA. A little chicken and egg.

It was clear that we were hiring a minister interested in SA. It would be good to give these funds and capability to him to administer. This is something that will help keep him here.

I would rather talk about the larger SA program.

What aspect of 7.5% is so important to you, that you would not want to lose?

- We wouldn't lose, we would be doing something different.
- Through engagement in local non-profits, brings FP out into the local area.
- I value that our church is known for social action. It should be part of our annual budget.
- The 7.5% has been a lie because of Zach's salary, so it's less important than others may think.
- Our grants go for slow change, which gives us a good mix along with more immediate or crisis/disaster type giving
- The way SA is done here is missing lots of opportunities. A model that takes us out in the community would be more valuable.

Having Zach's salary come from 7.5% wrecks our whole commitment to designate a portion of our budget for SA.

What we do is more important than the checks we write.

First dessert with Zach is Wednesday at Kristin's house. 7:30 pm.