

First Parish Plymouth

Guide to Committees

The purpose of Committees

- Vehicles to accomplish the mission of the congregation
- Share the work and engage the members of the congregation
- Turn spiritual ministry into actions for the common good
- Develop congregational leadership

Annual Record

- Agenda and minutes of Parish Committee meetings for each month
- Committee reports for each monthly Parish Committee meeting
- Annual Meeting warrant and report
- Membership applications
- Important correspondence and thank you`s fro each month

Tasks of the Parish Committee

General Responsibilities

- Guide strategic planning for congregation's mission and goals with minister
- Develop administrative policy
- Conduct business and legal affairs of the congregation
- Serve as trustee of the property of the congregation
- Seek regular input from congregation and staff for major decisions

Responsibilities of Parish Committee Chair / President

- Make emergency decisions representing the best interests of the congregation
- Call and run monthly Parish Committee meetings; submit agenda to clerk
- Read and respond to/distribute personal mail addressed to the Parish Committee
- Advise Church Administrator of items needing attention, including correspondence that needs to be sent from the church office
- Schedule meetings that result from the Parish Committee decisions with Church Administrator
- Review membership applications, communicate to Minister and Membership Chair
- Communicate with UUA Administration, Dept. of Ministry, Finances, and Ballou-Channing District Executives as needed
- Review estate/legal requests from members of the congregation
- Participate in the Ballou-Channing District congregation Presidents' meetings
- Check mailbox in Parish House regularly

Responsibilities of Vice-Chair (vice president)

- Work with Finance Committee on canvas
- Coach as a sounding board for committee chairs regarding ideas and events prior to any meeting in which those ideas or events would be proposed
- Read and respond to official mail from US and MA; government; communicate with Chair regarding such correspondence
- Organize and hold quarterly (or four times per church year) pot luck dinners or lunches to enable person-to-person input to agendas of committee meetings, sharing of results and decisions of committees, and general discussion of matters of concern to the congregation.

Responsibilities of the Clerk

- Prepare monthly meeting agenda and communicate it to Church Administrator for duplication prior to meeting
- Keep notes of monthly meetings
- Prepare copy of meeting minutes for Church Administrator to be posted and available for members of the congregation and to file in annual record binder
- Prepare summary of meeting minutes for Church Administrator to include in church newsletter
- Communicate to Church Administrator after each monthly meeting any item needing attention or events that need to be scheduled
- Write warrant for annual and congregational meetings, and submit to Church Administrator for duplication and mailing at least one month before meeting
- Check mailbox in Parish House regularly

Responsibilities of Treasurer

- Receive, review, and pay regular utility bills
- Receive, review, and pay regular insurance bills
- Communicate with Parish Committee Insurance and Legal Advisor as needed
- Pay minister and church staff on schedule requested
- Submit forms and pay appropriate IRS and FICA amounts as requested by staff
- Check mailbox in Parish House regularly
- Submit copies of reports to church office monthly for record binder

Responsibilities of Insurance and Legal Advisor

- Secure and review property and liability insurance for congregational facilities
- Other tasks tbd

Tasks of Selected Major Committees

Social Action Committee

- General purposes:
 - Inform and educate congregation in areas of social concern
 - Identify ways to rectify social injustices (local, national, global)
 - Sponsor and support groups organized to deal with community social problems
- Serve as liaison between Parish Committee, congregation, district, and local Interfaith Coalitions for Peace and Justice
- Provide opportunities for the congregation to participate in social projects, including collecting money, donating food and clothing, supporting senior citizen and youth programs, helping at local food kitchens
- Conduct educational programs and worship services to raise the congregations consciousness about social issues
- Enable the congregation to witness about social issues, including writing letters to and visiting elected officials, writing letters to the editor of local newspapers, participating in demonstrations, testifying at public hearings
- Encourage the congregation to organize to change systems of oppression and injustice
- Develop public statements in the name of the committee or the congregation
- Publicize activities so the congregation and the wider community know what is happening and how they can become involved
- Utilize the wide range of talents in the congregation to implement change, e.g. problem solving, organizing, research; hands-on work such as typing, serving food, or staying at an overnight shelter
- Train people in organizational and social-change skills
- Ensure that the congregation buildings are used to facilitate social change: have special programs housed in the congregation; open the congregation for meetings of community groups; allow controversial groups a place to meet
- Work to make sure the congregation's financial resources are used for moral ends: ethical investing of endowment funds; fundraising for community projects; purchasing supplies from organizations involved in social change; purchasing environmentally safe products; using the congregational buildings to support bail bonds
- Develop links with and use the resources of denominational social change groups: the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, Cambridge Forum, Unitarian Universalist United Nations Office, the Unitarian Universalist Peace Network, etc...
- Create alliances with community organizations; e.g., the NAACP, NOW, Rainbow Coalition, and churches and synagogues (ecumenical and interfaith groups)
- Check mailbox in Parish House regularly
- Submit copies of reports to church office monthly for record binder

Worship and Music Committee

- Review and advise the minister on worship services (Sunday and others) to ensure they provide a level of inspiration, intellectual challenge, spiritual nourishment, community belonging, intergenerational connections, and continuity with Unitarian Universalist faith needed by congregation.
- Review and advise the minister on worship services to ensure they give visitors a positive first impression of what Unitarian Universalism and the congregation are like.
- Attend to details so worship communications meaningfully to all
- Help encourage greater participation in worship by the congregation
- Coordinate the schedule of worship services with those providing music or other modes of presentation
- Develop a program for lay-led services and guest speakers, including guidelines so lay people and speakers who may not be Unitarian Universalists are comfortable conducting the worship service
- Maintain a library of worship resources readily available to members who are conducting services, including anthologies and other resources of inspirational reading
- Make use of the diversity of skills and interests of all ages in the congregation in worship, including music, decorations, dramatic readings of children stories, a family chalice lighting ceremony, etc...
- Evaluate and make recommendations about the music program
- Assist the Membership Committee on developing procedures to welcome visitors
- Provide input to childcare and religious education school programming, the aesthetics of the meeting place, the coffee hour, spoken announcements, and equipment such as the public address system
- Assist in planning special worship services, including Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, Memorial Day, Children's Sunday, etc...
- Check mailbox in Parish house regularly
- Submit copies of reports to church office monthly for record binder

Finance and Investment Committee

- Review and manage the congregation's endowment and investments
- Report quarterly to the Parish Committee on investments
- Serve as a resource to assist in the management of fundraising, budgeting, pledge recordkeeping, bookkeeping
- Monitor congregation's income, expenses, and pledge payments, and make regular reports to the Parish Committee and the congregation
- Arrange for an annual audit or review of the financial records by an independent accountant or financial agency
- Check mailbox in Parish House regularly
- Submit copies of reports to church office monthly for record binder

Membership Committee

- General responsibilities:
 - Contacting potential new members
 - Welcoming newcomers, and helping to integrate new members into life of the congregation
 - Working closely with publicity and the Church Administrator
- Be well versed in the principles of Unitarian Universalism, the nature of the local congregation, its programs and emphasis, and be able to formulate reasons for people to join congregation
- Actively welcome newcomers and help them get acquainted
- Survey the community to discover areas (geographic, economic, social and political) in which potential new members might be found
- Search out potential new members
- Develop means of approaching non-church affiliated persons who might find a focus and association in Unitarian Universalist religion
- Plan programs of orientation for those new to Unitarian Universalism
- Plan with minister and the Parish Committee and Worship and Music Committee for suitable recognition of new members
- Examine the membership roll, assisting in keeping it current and to maintain contact with those whose participation may be waning
- Develop a “Welcome Visitors” area, pew cards brochures, and other items related to visitors
- Make sure the minister is introduced to visitors after the worship service
- Follow up with visitors by a personal note, a telephone call, or a special invitation to a congregational event; make sure visitors names are added to the mailing list if they wish to receive the congregations newsletter
- Maintain the membership book
- Check the mailbox in the Parish house regularly
- Submit copies of reports to church office monthly for record binder

Religious Education Committee

- General responsibilities:
 - Set goals, objectives, and philosophy for the programs it establishes
 - Expand religious education program to children, young adults, new members
- Identify the interests and needs of all members: children, youth and adults
- Become familiar with religious education materials available from the Unitarian Universalist Association and elsewhere
- Asses the interests and skills available among members within the congregation that can be used in program development, leadership, and promotion
- Design a program for the year that is well balanced and adapted to the needs and interests of various segments of the congregation and uses available resources
- Involve the constituents of various programs (children, parents, youth, young adults, singles, older adults, etc...) in recommending program ideas and plans
- Arrange for necessary equipment and supplies
- Coordinating scheduling with other congregational events and programs
- Evaluate the program to include feedback from participants and leaders
- Plan programs with the congregation's leadership so that religious education programming can be an expression of the congregation's vision and mission
- Check mailbox in Parish House regularly
- Submit copies of reports monthly to church office for record binder

Denominational Affairs

- Provide a liaison between the congregation and the Unitarian Universalist Association and the District
- Meet to discuss issues of denominational concern
- Promotes education on Unitarian Universalist General Assembly resolutions in collaboration with other committees
- Fosters an understanding of and commitment to what it means to be a responsible member of the Association of Unitarian Universalist congregations
- Prepares a pool of people in the congregation to be delegates at General Assembly and district meetings
- Check mailbox in Parish House regularly
- Submit copies of reports to church office monthly for record binder

Checklist for Effective Meetings

- Develop an agenda for the meeting and share it in advance with the participants.
- Ask that reports be prepared in advance in writing. If the business of the meeting becomes too extensive, written reports can help reduce the time needed for meetings.
- Schedule important items early in the meeting. Participants are usually fresh when you address these issues
- Begin with centering exercise, song, reading, or silent meditation
- Consider the effect of seating arrangements, chairs in blocks, in a circle, or around a table. Be mindful of participants proximity, so that people are neither sitting too close nor too far apart for comfortable interaction
- Use methods that will allow committee members to participate. Occasionally, allow committee members to discuss in subgroups. Invite reticent members to participate and perhaps more importantly, invite reticent members to take responsibility for being sure that they receive a fair hearing.
- Committee members need to be conscious of the important roles they play in the group. Study the different roles people can play, analyze the roles each plays, and consciously choose roles that are helpful to the committee's on going evaluation of it's process with evaluation sheets, process reports, subgroup discussions, etc... Such evaluation is best done often, briefly, and well.
- The committee needs to be mindful of the needs of individual members. Participants need to get acquainted with each other as persons. Allow some time at each meeting for the development of feelings of interpersonal support within the group. If negative feelings develop, discuss them as openly as you can, trying to resolve them.
- Consider your committee's needs for greater flexibility or greater structure. Is your committee hindered by too strict adherence to formal procedures or would greater attention to formalized procedures make it healthier and more productive?
- When a decision needs to be made, ask whose responsibility it is. Is this question best decided by the chair, the executive committee, by another committee or subcommittee, or the whole group?
- If the whole group, is it sufficiently weighty to require consensus? Will voting do? Is a formal vote needed to achieve validity, even if consensus has been reached?
- A committee's success is largely a reflection of the proportion of participants who take responsibility for its success. What proportion of the group identifies with the committee and its goals? While it is neurotic to assume that if the committee fails, it's your fault, it is equally ineffective to assume that the committee's ineffectiveness is the result of other participants' behavior. Rather than searching for someone to blame, energy is better spent asking "How is your interaction effective?" and "How can I add energy to what is effective and withdraw it from what is ineffective?"