



Shared Ministry Review

Worship and Spiritual Life

Religious Education



Does First Parish have the right finances, staff, services and support to fulfill its mission?
Are the right personnel, policies, structures, committees, charges, performances in place?
Are there trends in evidence over the past five years?
Do our policies, programs etc., compare favorably to several peer institutions?
Do these support the mission of FPL?

Attention to: Finance, Organizational Structure/Governance, Worship and Spiritual Life.

<https://www.smr.fplincn.org/>



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Worship and Spiritual Life

- Brief Report of Inquiry on Worship and Spiritual Life
- Particular attention to Religious Education



Methodology

- Reviewing current worship and spiritual life offerings and religious ed. curriculum
- Comparing the above to those at four area churches
- Interviewed previous and current RE directors
- Interviewed Deacons, Religious Education, Choir, Outreach, congregational groups
 - Appreciative Inquiry Format: What do you value most about FPL? Where should FPL be in 2-3 years? What might we do/do more of to get there?
- Reviewed previous work: Discernment in 2014, Vision 2020 in 2017



What do you value the most about the Spiritual Life of First Parish?

Predominant Themes: Major components of worship

- Church community, especially affinity groups: e.g., Choir, Outreach, Care, Small Groups
- Music and the Physical Space
- Intellectually rigorous and spiritually challenging sermons without judgement
- Non-dogmatic and non-liturgical approach to worship
- Multigenerational congregation
- Religious education for youth and adults
- Outreach, mission trips and earnest engagement with the greater world
- Being inclusive, diverse, honest, and emotionally open and safe
- Small groups, memorial services, meditation groups
- Care and compassionate work, community service



Community

This is a strong and deeply connected community with generally shared values of caring for others, valuing spiritual depth and authentic, original, and independent thought in sermons and in the service. Most people feel community in Sunday service and smaller groups. This is a community where people feel safe to share personal struggles and where people find that when they are in need, the community is there to support them.

Perhaps because it is a close community with a long history, it can feel off putting to outsiders and newcomers who feel it is hard to become a part of this group.



Music

People love the music in the service (the choir, the virtuosity of the organist). One parishioner said that he valued the music “for the emotional, spiritual, and sensory connection” that it provided for him.



Worship

The church values its independence and the tradition of not belonging to any one denomination. People draw spiritual strength from a background of many different religious traditions and want to learn from other traditions and religious practices.

There are those who are quite moved by the pastor's sermons and those who miss the sermons of the previous pastor. Some of the latter absent themselves from Sunday service.



Religious Education

- History of RE is uneven with good and many challenging aspects
- Recent Events
 - Financial and Personnel Cuts
 - Enrollment and Curriculum Challenges
 - New Director
- Rebirth over summer and fall
 - New Leadership, Structure, Results
- Vision



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First Parish Vision 2020

Religious Education	Entry Points / Membership	Worship / Spiritual Enrichment	Engagement & Activism
Objectives: <i>What will result from Religious Education?</i> More families with kids will be active members of the church Kids will understand and appreciate the spiritual values of FPL Youth will have begun their personal search for truth and meaning There will be stronger sense of community at FPL, of which the kids are integral members			
Content: <i>What will be the topical priorities?</i> The spiritual themes articulated in our Covenant and Call to Ministry: "love of truth" "worship of God" "affirm each person's dignity" "in the spirit of Jesus" "service of all" "cherish the living earth"		Delivery: <i>How will we teach?</i> Engaging teachers Broad involvement Adaptable and innovative in time, place, format	
<i>What is most valued/desired by parents and kids?</i> Friends participate Meaningful Engaging and fun Doesn't conflict with other activities Childcare		<i>What strengths and historical successes can we build on?</i> OWL Neighboring Faiths Strong and varied capabilities in the congregation	<i>What can FPL offer that other organizations don't?</i> Morality Service World view on religion Inter-generational relationships Reflection & meaning Nature & environment
Leadership Commitment of time from congregation	<i>What are critical enablers and capabilities?</i> Communication and marketing Teacher recruitment and selection Content and training to develop teachers		Institutional momentum Willingness to experiment and innovate

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Where would you like to see First Parish in three years?

Predominant Themes

- A church that is more inclusive of differing perspectives and rises above politics in the sanctuary
- Sermons that are intellectually rigorous, spiritually challenging, non-judgmental, personally relevant and that cover a wider range of topics
- Fiscal stability and growth in membership, especially families with children
- An expanded, multigenerational religious education program; staff, programming, flexibility in scheduling, marketing, volunteer teachers, more pastoral involvement
- A clear process for communication among groups and committees
- Welcome new people into Small Groups



What do we need or need to do to get there?

Predominant Themes

Worship

- Increase connection between the ministers and the community.
- Invite parishioners and speakers from outside of the community to give sermons.
- Less traditional music - perhaps teen musicians and more soloists from the congregation.
- Increase intergenerational services to every 4-6 weeks
- Robust programs in religious education, family development other engaging topics



What do we need or need to do to get there?

Predominant Themes

Religious Education

The religious education program is very important to the future of the church and has been moving in a new and very positive direction in the last few months under new leadership from within the congregation. The program needs to grow for the church to grow. There should be programs for Adults.

The needs of parents and kids should be met with flexibility in order to encourage participation and to attract new families.



What might this mean? How do we get there?

- Continue to increase financial resources for the RE program.
- RE needs more volunteers to enable the program to expand and to attract new families. A small group currently does the majority of the work.

“Getting 50 volunteers a year would make a huge difference. We have made progress and need to keep up the momentum!”
- Make the opportunity to volunteer in RE achievable and doable to encourage people to become involved e.g. pairing an experienced teacher with a new one.



What might this mean? How do we get there? (continued)

- Have children present with adults during the service
- Different activities for kids at other times of the day/week besides Sunday morning
- A program for teens with a personal connection with an engaging leader.
- Fun events(!), family and community events, etc. (Yes, there was a list :-)
- More service activities and activism for teens
- Children picked up from coffee hour to enable parents to participate in the coffee



Questions

