

How Decisions are Made at First Parish in Lexington

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Created by

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Statement of Purpose

The Parish Board hopes this document will:

- improve transparency by helping church members and friends understand how the church operates;
- clarify for the minister, staff, and committees their authority, roles, and responsibilities;
- stimulate discussions among the minister, staff, lay leadership, and congregants on whether the policies herein are the most appropriate for First Parish; and,
- identify policy gaps for future Parish Boards to fill – gaps are identified in **yellow** in this document.

1. Staffing

1a	Who decides who is hired to fill a permanent staff position?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current Ministerial Agreement states “The Board and Minister will jointly decide on hiring, discharging, and changing compensation of church staff.” In addition, Bylaws state that the Personnel Committee shall make recommendations to the Parish Board. This applies to full-time staff only. • Following consultation with the Parish Minister, staff have authority to hire temporary or part-time staff that they will be supervising and that are included in the current operating budget.
1b	Who decides who is hired to fill a part -time or temporary staff position?	
1c	Who decides the job description for staff?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The staff person’s supervisor, with input from the Personnel Committee
1d	Who decides whether to fire a staff member?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current Ministerial Agreement states “The Board and Minister will jointly decide on hiring, discharging, and changing compensation of church staff.” In addition, Bylaws state that the Personnel Committee shall make recommendations to the Parish Board. This applies to full-time staff only. • Following consultation with the Parish Minister, staff have authority to fire temporary or part-time staff that they are supervising.
1e	Who decides whether to change the number of hours a staff member works?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff supervisors can change the number of hours as long as the change can be covered within the existing operational budget. Changes not covered by the existing budget require Parish Board approval, following a recommendation from the Finance Committee.
1f	Who decides when to create a new staff position?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervisors have the authority to create new staff positions if the new position can be covered within the existing budget. Positions not covered by the existing budget require Parish Board approval, following a recommendation from the Personnel and Finance Committees.

1g	Who decides whether a staff person should participate in an event that does not occur during their regular work hours?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The staff person’s supervisor.
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2. Financial

2a	Who decides how much the church is allowed to spend in a year?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Finance Committee solicits all other Committees for a preliminary budget based on their projected plans. Finance Committee then develops an overall preliminary operating budget, with input from the Treasurer. Parish Board reviews preliminary budget and works with Finance Committee to develop draft budget. Parish Board presents draft budget to the congregation, and revises based on congregational input, as appropriate. Congregation votes on final operating budget at the Spring Semi-Annual meeting. The church has a parallel process for budgeting for capital expenditures (see Capital Expenditures Policy, adopted by the Board, November 12, 2013).
2b	Who decides whether staff get raises?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Personnel Committee recommends raises and the Finance Committee includes proposed raises in the preliminary budget. Process then continues as above. Ministerial Agreement states that the Parish Minister and Board decide on changes to compensation.
2c	Who decides whether we can spend more than planned in the operating budget?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Parish Board can approve unbudgeted operating expenditures that amount to less than 5% of the approved budget (Bylaws, Article V, Section 7) A vote of the congregation is required to spend more than 5% of the approved operating budget.
2d	Who decides what happens to an unrestricted gift made to the church?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Past practice has been: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> unrestricted gifts less than \$5,000 go into the Operating Fund (funds the Treasurer is allowed to spend on budgeted expenses) unrestricted gifts greater than \$5,000 go to the Trustees. All Legacy Circle member bequests go to the Endowment Recommend that the Parish Board develop a designated gifts policy, a donor agreement sheet, and a statement of church priorities to better align church and donor priorities.

2e	Who decides whether we can spend money on something that's not in the budget?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committees and staff can spend funds allocated in their operating budgets. Approval of the Parish Board is required to overspend a budget. • For capital expenditures, any unbudgeted item requires Finance Committee approval; any unbudgeted item for \$5,000 or more also requires Board approval; if an unbudgeted Capital Expenditure item requires immediate action (e.g., for safety reasons or building integrity purposes), the Treasurer's approval must be obtained.
2f	Who decides whether we can spend money in the endowment?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The trustees control the funds in the endowment (Article VI, Section 2 of the Bylaws: "The Trustees shall have full power and authority in the management of such funds to sell and transfer any securities held by them, to invest and reinvest said funds, and to determine what constitutes principal and what income, not inconsistent with the terms of the trust instruments under which such trust funds are held or with the directions of the Parish as to such other funds as shall have been placed with the Trustees.") • Consistent with Article VI, Section 2 of the Bylaws referencing "with the directions of the Parish", the Trustees will – following a majority vote from the congregation – transfer funds specified by the congregational vote to the church's operating fund.
2g	Who decides what we do with a year-end surplus?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Finance Committee makes a recommendation to the Parish Board, who then decides.
2h	Who decides who will receive grants from the Good Samaritan Fund?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Social Action Ministry and the Parish Minister.
2i	Who decides who will receive funds raised from second collections?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Social Action Ministry.

2j	Who decides whether funds in a restricted account can be spent?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Varies by fund: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Endowment: The congregation (see 2f, above) ○ Howe Lecture Fund: Parish Board, in consultation with the Howe family (minister, staff, or congregants submit proposals to the Board to use funds) ○ Good Samaritan Fund: Social Action Ministry and Parish Minister ○ Floyd Taylor Fund: Parish Board ○ Ministers Discretionary Fund: Parish Minister ○ Various group-specific funds (e.g., Memorial Garden Fund, Adult Programs fund, Ferry Beach fund, Coming of Age): the named group ○ Deferred Maintenance Fund: Building and Grounds. Capital expenditures (and any maintenance expenditures greater than \$5,000) paid for with Deferred Maintenance must follow the Capital Expenditures Policy. ○ Various Music Funds: Music Committee ○ There are restricted funds where authority is unclear (e.g., Library Fund, Loring Garden Fund) • For capital expenditures, any unbudgeted item requires Finance Committee approval; any unbudgeted item for \$5,000 or more also requires Board approval; if an unbudgeted Capital Expenditure item requires immediate action (e.g., for safety reasons or building integrity purposes), the Treasurer’s approval must be obtained.
2k	Who decides whether we apply for grants from outside agencies or foundations?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No current policy. Recommend that all external grant proposals require Board approval.
2l	Who decides if a group may hold a fund raiser for the church or for their own budget?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No current policy; decided on a case-by-case basis. In October 2015, the Board approved this motion: “A Special Music Fund will be established to support the music program at First Parish through donations at concerts. These funds will be used for musical purposes outside of the annual church music budget.”
2m	Can church members be paid for working at the church?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certain positions at the church are paid positions; others are volunteer positions. Paid positions can be filled by either members or non-members (Board decision in 2015/2016).

3. Committees

3a	Who decides who will serve on a committee?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Parish Board, with input from the Committee on Leadership and Service, appoints members of the following Committees (Bylaws, Article VII): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Personnel Committee ○ Committee on Leadership and Service ○ Ministerial Support Committee ○ Shared Ministry Evaluation Committee ○ Lifespan Religious Education Committee ○ Safe Congregation Response Team • Other committees recruit their own members.
3b	Who decides how much a committee can spend without approval from the Board?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committee are able to spend funds that are designated for them in the approved church budget.
3c	Who decides who will serve on the Parish Board?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Committee on Leadership and Service presents a slate of candidates at Semi-Annual Meetings, for a congregational vote.
3d	Who decides what the committee charge will say?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committees draft a Charter for the committee, for Parish Board review and approval.
3e	Who decides who is the chair of the committee and how long they will serve?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specified in the Committee’s Charter
3f	Who decides what the committee budget will be?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is part of the annual budget process.

4. Building Use

4a	Who decides whether an outside group can rent space inside the church?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In accordance with the First Parish Rental Policy & Agreement, as created by the 2016/2017 Task Force on Space & Income, the Parish Administrator decides on the rental and usage of First Parish rooms and property. • The Music Director, in consultation with the Parish Administrators for scheduling purposes, can authorize any musical performance and negotiate fees with renters or choose to waive fees as needed.
4b	Who decides whether an outside group can use the extra lot on Harrington St.?	
4c	Who decides whether an outside group can use our parking lot?	
4d	Who decides whether a parishioner can use space at the church?	

4e	Who decides whether a parishioner can host an event at the church?	
4f	Who decides whether certain foods are prohibited in the building?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No current policy. In the past the Parish Board has decided this on a case-by-case basis. • As of 2016, First Parish is a nut-free church.
4g	Who decides what art work appears on the walls in the Parish Hall?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Art Committee
4h	Who decides whether outside groups are allowed to serve alcohol in the church?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Per the Safe Congregation Plan, outside groups who rent or otherwise use church property for special functions must obtain the express written permission of the Church Administrator to serve beer and wine.

5. Events

5a	Who decides whether First Parish will participate in an outside event sponsored by another organization?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No current policy, but event should align with the church’s mission. In the past, decisions made by the lead event organizer.
5b	Who decides who will be a delegate at General Assembly?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Parish Board solicits requests to be a delegate, and votes on who will be delegates.
5c	Who decides whether alcohol will be served at a church-sponsored event?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 5 of the Safe Congregation Plan specifies when alcohol can be served at church sponsored events: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Alcohol may be served if: The First Parish committee or ministry that is sponsoring the event explicitly states that alcohol will be served, and one or more designated persons who will serve the alcohol (“servers”) are at the event. ○ Alcohol is not permitted at: First Parish committee meetings or at other times when church business is being conducted; Youth Group or other events that are designed for children/youth; on First Parish property, except at First Parish-sponsored events at which alcohol is served.
5d	Who decides whether we will charge admission to church-sponsored events?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No current policy (including how raised funds may be used), but recommend that the Parish Board develop one. In the past, this has been up to the event organizer.
5e	Who decides whether vendors can sell goods at church-sponsored events?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No current policy. In the past, the Parish Board has decided this on a case by case basis.

5f	Who decides whether youth groups can go on service trips to other towns or states?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overnight, out-of-town service trips require Parish Board approval.
5g	Who decides which church-sponsored event will take place where there are competing demands on building use?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No current policy. Generally, the two event leads and the Parish Administrator resolve any conflict.

6. Worship / Music / Lifespan Religious Education

6a	Who decides what the worship format will be?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The current Ministerial Agreement states that “The Minister will be responsible for all worship services, including seasonal celebrations and rites of passage, such as weddings, child dedications, and funerals and memorial services except those for which the Worship Associates assume responsibility.”
6b	Who decides what religious education curriculum will be used?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Director of Lifespan Religious Education, in consultation with the Lifespan Religious Education Committee.
6c	Who decides whether we will make major changes to worship services and religious education?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No current policy. The current Ministerial Agreement suggests that this will be a joint Parish Minister / Parish Board decision (“The Congregation looks to its Minister for spiritual leadership and initiative, for assistance in setting and articulating its vision, and for professional and inspired performance and oversight of the Congregation’s programs in collaboration with the Parish Board and the Congregation’s committees.”)
6d	Who decides who will serve as a guest preacher and what the compensation will be?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Parish Minister, per 6a (above).
6e	Who decides whether we will offer an alternative (non-Sunday morning) worship service?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No current policy (see 6c)
6f	Who decides whether we will collaborate with another church in an activity?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No current policy. Generally, the lead staff member or parishioner, in consultation with the Parish Minister, makes the decision.

7. Vendors / contractors

7a	Who decides we can enter into an agreement with a vendor or contractor?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No current policy, including who has signature authority. Currently, committees usually have final say on signature authority, and then Parish Administrator handles administrative functions (scheduling, sending bills to accounting, etc)
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8. Public face

8a	Who decides what gets posted on the church website?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No current policy. In practice, the Parish Administrator, Parish Minister, and staff have editorial and posting rights, in collaboration with the Parish website developers. No clear policy on monitoring posted comments.
8b	Who decides what gets posted on the church Facebook page?	
8c	Who decides whether we display a banner or flag on the outside of the building?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No current policy. In the past, staff made some decisions; other decisions were made via a congregational vote.
8d	Should the church promote works by church members?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Church members can petition the Art Committee to have their art displayed in the Parish Hall. Otherwise, no current policy.