

THE FIRST PARISH CHURCH IN WESTON  
Report of the Ministerial Configuration Committee  
September 2011

**Introduction:**

The Ministerial Configuration Committee (MCC) is pleased to recommend to the Standing Committee a proposed staffing arrangement that we believe best addresses the ministerial needs of First Parish Church Weston (FPCW). In addition to specific recommendations, this report provides a summary of the findings and analysis, which led to our conclusions.

The MCC was asked to consider whether FPCW should continue to be a two-minister church, and if not, what alternate configuration would best serve the needs of the church community. There are two parts to our recommendation. The first part is a proposal for addressing the ministerial needs of the church. It includes a job description and rationale for a new full time position, which we have called Director of Family Ministries (DFM). This part responds explicitly to the Standing Committee's charge to the MCC.

The second part is a recommendation to empower and add visibility to the role of the DFM. We suggest first that the DFM participate in meetings of the Standing Committee on the same basis as the Senior Minister. Then secondly and significantly, we also recommend that the Standing Committee add a new Executive Operating Committee function to the senior oversight of FPCW. These recommendations respond to the implicit charge to the MCC that the configuration recommended be one that might endure over time, and that would maximize the chance of success. We strongly and unanimously agree that these two parts of our recommendation are inextricably linked and are both essential to the strengthening and effective functioning of our church community.

**Background:**

The practice of a two-minister church at FPCW began when Judy Hoehler joined Harry and they became equal co-ministers. In their unique situation as a married pair of ordained ministers, they together managed all ministerial needs of the church in both the Sanctuary and the Church School. Their successful tenure was based partly on the fact that their singular situation allowed for a seamless vision and joint oversight of the entire church community. Both the Sanctuary and the Church School knew that they had the attention and ministerial presence of "The Hoehlers".

When the Hoehlers retired, Tom Wintle was named as Senior Minister. By then FPCW was accustomed to the two-minister arrangement and in effect continued the Hoehler arrangement without thoughtful examination. During the past sixteen years several associate ministers have been hired to work with Tom. They have had different Terms of Call, different personalities and different job descriptions, and while each has added to the FPCW community, none of the arrangements has been truly successful.

There are likely many reasons for this history, but our focus was on understanding the problems for FPCW that arose as a result. Most significant was the impact on the Church School and related activities for youth and families. None of the ministers took complete responsibility for all of these programs. As a result of the frequent changes and inconsistent leadership over the past sixteen years the Church School and youth programs have suffered from ministerial inattention, lack of

consistency, and volunteer burn out. The Church School has seemed to many a separate and unequal part of the First Parish Community.

This weakness has impacted the overall health of FPCW. The strength of a church school is often the deciding factor for new families when they choose to join a church community and is thus the primary source for new members and new stewardship. Despite the many strengths of the Church School program, the slow but steady decline in membership and stewardship at FPCW can be linked, at least partly, to the lack of strong ministerial guidance in the Church School.

### **Recommendation Part I:**

We have concluded that FPCW does not need two ministers. For one thing, the present size of our congregation does not justify a second minister. UU churches with memberships like ours typically have one minister. We also believe it is preferable to have one Senior Minister who sets the tone and guides a consistent theology for the entire church so there is no confusion or conflict between the messages delivered in the Sanctuary and those taught in the Church School. There is, however, a spectrum of responsibilities that the Senior Minister alone cannot meet.

To this end, and given the problems identified above, we are recommending that FPCW engage a full time person in a position which we are calling the Director of Family Ministries (DFM) to complement the Senior Minister. (The job description is included as Attachment I.)

While the operation of the Church School is an essential part of this position, the role is much more inclusive. We have intentionally used the word “family” to signal that the responsibilities of this person will not be limited to serving children of church school age, but will include parents, high school youth, and potentially young adults. We have described this as a full time position because we believe strongly that the range of job responsibilities warrants it and because we believe it will attract a richer pool of applicants.

This person should not be a “minister in training” or an individual with aspirations to run their own church. Rather, we recommend seeking someone whose career preparation and passion are for children and families. We believe it is essential that the DFM focus on this specific set of responsibilities, and not be a “second” within the entire church. Furthermore, we would not require that the DFM be an ordained minister, although ordained ministers will be welcome to apply. It is our expectation that the pool of candidates outside of ordained ministers will be larger and more attuned to the role we envision.

We feel strongly that our main goal should be to find the best candidate, one who is interested in a career focused on Church School members and families. The UUA, and most denominations, have a much larger pool of trained lay educators than trained ministers who are committed to an Associate Minister role focused on Church School. Also, we hope a person whose professional interest is in children and families will have a longer tenure at FPCW than the typical second minister and thus provide stability to our community.

Our priority in selecting a new DFM should be on finding the right personality fit rather than relying on credentials. We are including an “Interview Guide” as Attachment II, which describes in some detail the kinds of questions we hope the Search Committee will probe with candidates for the DFM position.

We expect too that the DFM will be a visible presence in the Sanctuary and well known throughout the entire FPCW community. Family Sundays, AllGEN programs,

and parent education programs are all formal ways in which the DFM can participate in the larger church community. Special gatherings and events provide opportunity for all ministerial staff to socialize informally with members of the congregation.

Similarly, with just one minister, we expect the Senior Minister to be the ministerial presence in the Church School and with youth and young adults, visible to parents, children and youth and engaged at the policy and oversight level. We see a clear need to integrate the Sanctuary and the Church School – to replicate to the extent possible the feeling that flowed naturally from the Hoehler co-ministry – that this is one church community with a seamless vision and equal importance in all parts.

While we hope and expect that this proposal will have broad and enthusiastic acceptance, we acknowledge that some members of the congregation may find deficiencies in the recommended configuration. One is that this recommendation will probably result in FPCW having only one ordained minister on staff and therefore no regular alternative to Tom in the Sanctuary. A small budget for guest speakers, along with the use of lay speakers and other options, could help provide variety and different viewpoints in the pulpit at a relatively modest cost.

Pastoral care is another special concern because it is impossible for one person to relate well to every member of the Congregation. Pastoral Callers fill part of the need that Tom cannot satisfy, and are an invaluable resource for FPCW, but as lay friends and neighbors they lack training and cannot substitute for a professional in many instances. Also, some people are uncomfortable sharing confidential information with peers. Our job description does specify that the DFM will assist the Senior Minister with identifying needs for pastoral care among church school families and assisting with this care as appropriate, which we hope will address this need to some extent.

Other members of the congregation will be concerned with the expense of a full time DFM, given that the budget now runs a deficit and income is declining. We have discussed this with the Treasurer and FinCom and feel that in the short term there are ways to manage the extra expense (which will be less if we do not hire an ordained minister as the DFM). In the longer term financial concerns will be addressed in two ways. We will expect the DFM to review all expenses related to the Church School and youth and family programs and recommend economies for consideration by the Standing Committee. And, we hope that the revitalization of the Church School and family ministry will lead to new memberships and stewardship. While there is risk associated with spending in advance of income, we feel that this is the best course to take if we want FPCW to be a successful and vibrant faith community,

### **Recommendation Part II:**

During our many interviews, we learned that communication, decision-making, and role definition among members of the senior staff, and between senior staff and committee chairs, were not always clear and effective. There have been issues of transparency, sometimes a failure to share important information, and confusion surrounding who has the authority to make what decisions. Communication - both horizontal and vertical - has often been lacking. In this environment, decisions can be made without comprehensive input from concerned parties, and sometimes important stake holders are left out of the conversation altogether. This leads at best to confusion and frustration, and at worst to poor decisions. It also leads to significant issues falling between the cracks, going unresolved, or being totally ignored.

We have learned also that there are times when staff members have been given responsibility but not authority. We have learned that staff members often do not feel empowered to do the job for which they are responsible. This is not a workable situation. It is in the overall interest of FPCW to give the new DFM the responsibility and authority they need to have the best possible chance to succeed.

The change from a two-minister church to a church with a Senior Minister and a Director of Family Ministries inevitably will require new thinking about who is responsible for what and how that responsibility is to be carried out. While the Senior Minister will have overall responsibility for the success of FPCW, including the Church School, the DFM must be empowered to make decisions regarding the programs under their direction. Given the experience others have had, it is best to anticipate there could be some confusion about roles and specific areas of responsibility especially in the initial phase of this new configuration.

We are recommending two changes to the management structure and process that provide a forum for addressing these concerns. First, we believe that the DFM should report to and participate in meetings of the Standing Committee on the same basis as the Senior Minister. This would help connect the DFM to the broader church community and lay leadership and ensure that their voice will be heard directly.

To be clear, we are recommending that there be a dual or matrix reporting relationship for the DFM, who would report both to the Senior Minister and to the Standing Committee.

In addition, we are recommending that the Standing Committee consider creating a new “Executive Operating Committee” which would include a small group of senior lay leaders – perhaps the Chair of the Standing Committee and the Treasurer – along with the Senior Minister and the DFM. This Committee would not make policy decisions but would serve as a place where any differences of opinion on direction or program execution could be addressed and where any concerns about roles, responsibility and authority may be resolved. Because it would be a small group, it should be possible to address issues openly with assurance of confidentiality.

As we said at the outset of this report, it is our strong and unanimous belief that the addition of a full time Director of Family Ministries to complement the Senior Minister position is the best configuration for First Parish. We also believe strongly that the management changes we have proposed, including the establishment of an Executive Operating Committee are essential if a DFM is to succeed in this new role.

We each have enjoyed being part of this Ministerial Configuration Committee and thank you for the chance it has given us to work together and contribute to our Church. For the record, Attachment III summarizes how our Committee went about our investigation and analysis. All of us welcome the opportunity to discuss any aspect of our report, investigations, analysis, and recommendations with you.

Respectfully submitted by the Ministerial Configuration Committee.

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