

Next issue deadline
Sunday, January 31

The Spire

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THE FIRST SUNDAY RECORD

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First Parish Unitarian Universalist of Arlington, 630 Massachusetts Avenue, Arlington, MA 02476 • Gathered 1733

Aligning our Grounds with Our Values

Winter is a time of dormancy for many living beings, but we know that life remains in the soil, roots, and bare branches and will emerge come spring. So, too, winter is a good time for us to reflect, learn, discuss, and make plans.

Would you like to join a study group that will explore how we might better use and care for the land and living beings that surround the meetinghouse? You do not need to know about gardening to join this conversation — you just need a desire to learn and to help us figure out how to best manage our land in consonance with our values.

In early December a generous donor gave First Parish money to purchase trees for our grounds. The Property Committee has been thinking about replacing the crabapple trees that used to grow on the Massachusetts Avenue side of our building, so this donation could not have come at a better time. This spring four black tupelo trees will be planted. Despite their name, black tupelos are not black. They are mid-size native trees with stunning fall foliage and small white flowers that bees love. (They are also known as black gums, sour gums and, on Martha's Vineyard, beetlebungs.)

We want our grounds to reflect our commitment to climate justice and our Unitarian Universalist Seventh Principle of "Respect for the independent web of all existence of which we are a part." We have had solar panels on the Sanctuary roof for several years. We also have several small pollinator gardens that support bird, bees, and other insect populations. The Town of Arlington has developed a Net Zero Action Plan with the goal of achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. One element of this plan is planting more trees to provide shade, absorb carbon,

and help sequester carbon in the ground. Can First Parish support the town in this effort?

We also want to use our grounds to support and nurture our community. Green space is important for sustaining people's spirits and mental health. Children in our religious education programs plant bulbs and flowers in our gardens, get their hands in the earth, and learn about how life grows. Especially during the pandemic, many groups have met in our courtyard. During the summer, members share responsibility for watering the gardens on our grounds. How else might we use our grounds to create spaces for community, meditation, beauty, and honoring those who lived on this land long before us?

We have some challenges to consider. The strip of land in the parking lot between First Parish and the Robbins Library (which belongs to First

Parish) has been overgrown with black swallowwort (which is toxic for monarch butterflies) for a couple of decades. Several of our members try to keep the vines in check, but it's a constant struggle. How should we handle invasive species without herbicides? Might there be a better way to use that challenging strip of land? Also, much of our property has yews that were planted in the 1970s. A few people have worked hard to keep them trimmed, but many of the yews are overgrown, and none of them support bird or insect populations. Is there a better way to provide winter beauty for our grounds?

It's time to step back, take a larger view, and together develop a plan that reflects our values, our community, and our concern for the web of life during this time of climate change. If you are interested in joining these conversations, please contact gardens@firstparish.info.

— Peggy Gardiner



Treasury Lessons

Six months into a new job, you know that feeling – much accomplished *and* much to learn! I, Carolyn Hodges, and Shay Crawford are your new Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer. Our roles are to ensure proper control, monitoring, and reporting for the church's income and expenses.

Our predecessors maintained financial stability and provided solid orientation and support. Along with ongoing guidance from Office Manager Sara Hidalgo and Bookkeeper Liz McKersie, we started on good footing. In November, Shay and I hosted a financial “summit” to gather those supporting financial activity in our community; this included representatives from the Parish Committee, the Trustees, the Auditor, and the Finance, Stewardship, and Property Committees, as well as our ministers. We learned our first valuable lesson: We have a great team and the church finances remain in good shape!



Our Stewardship colleagues recently notified First Parish members of the status of their financial pledges and gifts. Many of us give through Realm with debit and credit cards, and almost half of us cover the fees associated with on-line giving. *Thank you!*

We also learned that “automatic” does not mean “auto-magic.” A review of donor Realm activity provided our next lesson: Donation transactions require updated information for the amount, valid card numbers, expiration date, and security code. For some, transactions were not fully processed as this information changed. Thank you for keeping watch and updating Realm.

Instructions for Realm are available on our church website (www.firstparish.info/give/pledge-pay-options). If you have experienced a delay in processing and need assistance to resolve it, please contact us at reasurer@firstparish.info.

Shay and I closely monitor First Parish finances and are pleased that the church continues to live within its

means. Our financial colleagues continue to demonstrate responsible stewardship of precious resources. Our most important lesson is reminding ourselves of the generous and caring community supporting First Parish. We are so very grateful for your patience and willingness to help. Your support will ensure that First Parish remains vibrant.

– Carolyn Hodges, Treasurer

Supporting Indigenous Rights

The Indigenous Justice Working Group was convened by Ellen Leigh in March 2021. Our original goal was to respond to the UUA's Action of Immediate Witness (AIW) by drafting a land acknowledgment for our congregation to consider adopting. The AIW calls for congregations to “research, identify, and acknowledge the Indigenous peoples historically and/or currently connected with the land occupied by congregations, and find ways to act in solidarity with or even partner with those Indigenous peoples.” (The complete AIW is on the UUA's website.)

Our group quickly realized that a land acknowledgment was only one thing we wanted to do. Among our goals is supporting the Massachusetts Indigenous Legislative Agenda. Five bills in the 2021–22 session reflect some key concerns of the Indigenous people in the Commonwealth:

- Honor Indigenous Peoples Day
- Protect Native American heritage
- Remove racist mascots
- Celebrate and teach Native American culture and history
- Educate Native youth

There's an important opportunity this month to support this agenda: On January 11, from 7 to 8 pm, UU Mass Action will offer a virtual action hour and teach-in facilitated by Mahtowin Munro, leader of the United American Indians of New England. We are excited to learn more about what can we do to promote these bills, and we hope that many others at First Parish will join us at this Zoom event. RSVP at tinyurl.com/uuma-rsvp. Another option is to find “United American Indians of New England” on Facebook and respond to the invitation there.

Two interesting events are happening in January, hosted by the Tomaquag Museum in Rhode Island:

- “Away from Home: American Indian Boarding School Stories,” an exhibit at the University of Rhode Island in Kingston through January 7. Visit www.tomaquagmuseum.org/awayfromhome.
- A virtual screening of the award-winning documentary *Dawnland*, followed by a Q&A, on Wednesday, January 5, from 6 to 8 pm. To register, visit www.tomaquagmuseum.org/events.

Our group is in the process of creating a resources list for our new webpage, and brainstorming ways to alert the congregation about upcoming events.

The Indigenous Justice Working Group meets the fourth Wednesday of each month at 8 pm via Zoom. To learn more or help plan events, please contact us at ijwg@firstparish.info or talk to any member of the group. We hope to see many of you at the action hour on January 11.

– Jennifer Davis-Kay for the
Indigenous Justice Working Group:
Tom Estabrook, Carolyn Hodges,
Annie Homza, Elizabeth Hunter, Ellen Leigh,
Dianne Schaefer, Dawn Geronimo Terkla

Discussing *From Here to Equality*

At the powerful Juneteenth celebration this summer, sponsored by the Racial Justice Coordinating Committee, our guest speaker was Schiffon Wong, vice president and chair of the Reparations Committee of the Mystic Valley Chapter of the NAACP. She made a powerful case for reparations and recommended a recently published book by Duke Professor William A. Darity Jr. and folklorist A. Kirsten Mullen, *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century*.

I’ll lead a group discussion of the book on three Tuesday evenings, via Zoom, from 7 to 8:30 pm:

- January 24, Introduction, Parts 1 and 2 (chapters 1 to 4)
- January 31, Parts 3 and 4 (chapters 5 to 9)
- February 7, Parts 5 and 6 (chapters 10 to 13)

Watch for the registration link on the First Parish Connection Board, or go to racialjustice@firstparish.info.

“Something that is often missing from ‘reparations talk,’” according to legal scholar Alfred Brophy, “is a specific plan for repairing past tragedies.” On our last

night together, we’ll explore steps we might take at First Parish to answer Brophy’s challenge.

We have several copies of *From Here to Equality* in our church library, and copies are available at Robbins Library in Arlington and other libraries in the Minuteman Library Network. If you’re purchasing the book, please consider supporting a black-owned bookseller. I ordered mine on-line from Frugal Bookstore in Roxbury.

For background, you might want to start with “The Case for Reparations” by Ta-Nehisi Coates, the cover story in the June 2014 issue of *The Atlantic* magazine, available at Robbins Library.

I look forward to reading, discussing, and planning action together!

– David Whitford

Alliance Programs

The Alliance is responding to current conditions by moving its programs on-line. Sadly, we will not gather for our traditional Chowder Supper in January. And, as storytellers benefit from a live audience, we have postponed the storytelling program planned for January 7 and in its place will hold an Evening of Literary Sharing. We will hear members of our congregation share short stories, poems, or passages of their own or by others. To get the Zoom link, or to find out about future programs, please visit our page on the church website at

firstparish.info/ways-to-get-involved/womens-alliance/

There are links to recipes for all kinds of chowder on our page, as well, if you want to enjoy some during the January 7 show.

– Sharen Leonard





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The Spire

Diane Shriver, Editor

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Submissions due by Sunday, January 31
Items may be edited for space and clarity.

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If you do not have e-mail, contact the office.

The Spire generally deals with the big picture.
Time-sensitive details belong in the Weekly E-mail
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by Wednesday at noon.

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