

# The Spire

MARCH 6, 2022

THE FIRST SUNDAY RECORD

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## Becoming a Member

I first attended worship at First Parish in the spring of 2003. It was not love at first sight, but I liked enough of what I saw to hang around. One of my personal watchwords is, “You get out of it what you put into it,” so I tried to do my part: I took the New UU class, helped clean up after the Harvest Moon Fair, and taught RE. But it was a full two years before I felt fully sure enough that I’d found my spiritual home to sign the membership book.

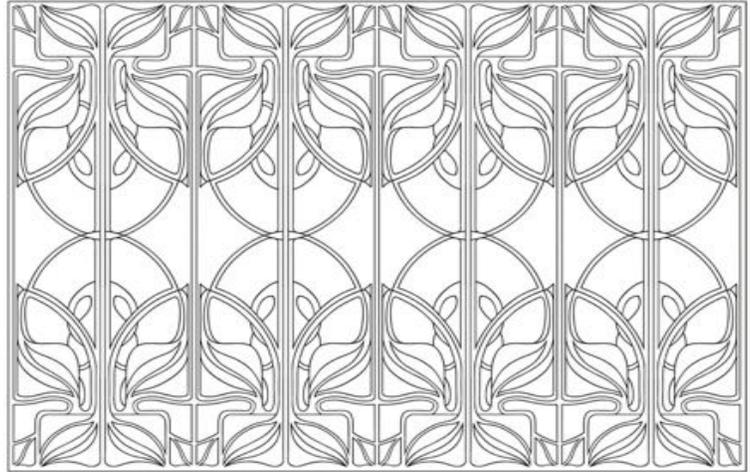
And with that single act, immediately I felt a shift.

First Parish member Andrea Winslow describes this moment as moving from “active attendee” to “part owner” of First Parish, and that was exactly it for me. I felt more deeply invested. I had a stake in this building and this community, and I was determined to see my investment pay off.

My feelings about being an official member of a congregation were shaped by one of my favorite children’s books: *Heaven to Betsy* by Maud Hart Lovelace. In this story, 15-year-old Betsy realizes that she no longer wants to attend the Baptist church with her family; after singing with the choir at the Episcopal church, she is convinced that she is actually an Episcopalian, and she asks her parents (but really her father) for permission to switch churches. After a startled moment, her father says:

“The important thing isn’t what church you want to join but whether you want to join a church at all. If you’re going to be an Episcopalian, I hope you’ll be a good Episcopalian. I hope you’ll go to church as regularly as your mother and I do. We miss a Sunday now and then, when it’s fine picnicking weather. We know that God made the out-of-doors, too. But year in, year out, we go to church pretty regularly.

“And we support the church. You have to think of that. Churches need an income just as a family does, and it is more than money, too. A church needs members who take an active part in the church work.



Mother and I don’t do as much as some, and some folks overdo it, in my opinion, but we try to carry our load. My point is that if you’re going to join a church, you want to be prepared to support it, both with money and time.”

Though these words were written in 1945, they remain excellent guidelines for membership. A congregation requires “time, talent, and treasure” from its members. Our church website states, “Membership is about participating in the life of this community, sharing in worship, supporting its work, and charting the course of its work through the right to vote at congregational meetings.”

I asked the Membership Committee what they saw as the benefits of membership, and they promptly rattled off half a dozen:

- officially being part of things
- being able to vote
- having skin in the game
- having a voice
- feeling more deeply connected
- being solidly on the ministers’ radar

During the New Member Recognition Ceremony (just one of our congregation’s many gorgeous rituals), current members address new ones by saying, “We welcome you with joy into the life of First Parish.”

Certainly there are ways to contribute to the life of First Parish without becoming a member. However, for me there is something especially meaningful about being in community with others who have officially committed to support the life of our spiritual home and to engage in a lifelong search for the good and the true. From the moment I signed the book, I felt welcomed with joy. And as the newest member of the Membership Committee, I wish the same for you.

— Jennifer Davis-Kay, First Parish member since May 2005, who joyfully co-chairs the Membership Committee with Susan Moore

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## Giving First

Our tradition of donating half of our non-pledge Sunday offering to a worthy cause continues. The March recipient is the Center for Teen Empowerment, which employs youth ages 14 to 20 to create and implement initiatives that positively influence their peers and create real, meaningful changes in their communities. The group works in Boston and Somerville, and also in Rochester, New York.

Teen Empowerment hires core groups of youth leaders to work in their own neighborhoods, helping them develop the skills they need to identify pressing issues amid racism, poverty, and violence in rapidly changing cities. They tap into their own and their communities' strengths to create positive change.



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## Alliance Program on March 11

The program for the Alliance's March gathering focuses our attention on a long existing societal inequity that affects women, especially those who are Brown or Black or living in poverty. For many, access to information about menstruation, reproductive health, and sanitary supplies is limited. The topic is surrounded by misinformation, stigma, and taboo.

Our speaker, Bria Gadsden, director and co-founder of Love Your Menses, will share ways we can work toward menstrual equity through community conversations, menstrual health education, youth programming, resource connection, and mentorship.

The program will begin with a half-hour Netflix film, *Period. End of Sentence* (2018), which won 13 awards including the 2019 Oscar for Best Documentary

Short. It documents women in rural India, where the stigma of menstruation persists, as they strive toward financial independence by manufacturing low-cost sanitary pads. After the film our speaker will present her talk, entitled Promoting Menstrual Equity Through Community, Conversations, and Collaboration. Then there will be time for questions and discussion.

Gadsden recommends reading local author Anita Diamant's *Period. End of Sentence*, inspired by the documentary, a collection of essays that explore the cultural roots of menstrual injustice, which erodes self-esteem, limits opportunities, and even threatens lives. The book also celebrates a new generation of activists and innovators who are working to end period poverty and stigma.

To get the Zoom link for the gathering, please visit [alliance@firstparish.info](mailto:alliance@firstparish.info).

— Sharen Leonard

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## Spirit Talks

Spirit Talks have a new schedule:

- Mondays and Fridays from 4 to 5 pm
- Tuesday evenings from 7:30 to 8:30 pm

Join a facilitated one-hour conversation that fosters reflection and connection with other members of our First Parish community. Attendance is drop-in — you are not required to commit to attending. Just come whenever it fits your schedule.

E-mail [spirittalk@firstparish.info](mailto:spirittalk@firstparish.info) to join the e-mail list and receive the link to participate. If you try it out and decide it isn't for you, you can ask to be taken off the list at any time.

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## Deeper Connections

If you are new, or feeling new, the Membership Committee invites you to check out our Deepening Connections Sampler: 25 opportunities to meet new people, make a difference, build community, deepen your faith, and learn more about First Parish.

To encourage participation, there will be a drawing on April 3 for three fabulous prizes: \$20, \$15, or \$10 in Harvest Moon Fair Bucks! Pick up your Sampler at the Welcome Table after church, or download it at <https://firstparish.info/newcomers/>

## Walk the Labyrinth

On Sunday, March 20, we will gather at 3 pm to walk a labyrinth at the Bethany House of Prayer, a beautiful chapel tucked away in Arlington Heights surrounded by gardens filled with stone artwork. We will be outdoors, so be sure to dress for the weather.

Labyrinth walking is an ancient practice used by many faiths for spiritual centering, contemplation, and

prayer. When you enter the serpentine path of a labyrinth, you walk slowly while quieting your mind and focusing on whatever you choose, be it the wheel of the year, a spiritual question, or prayer.

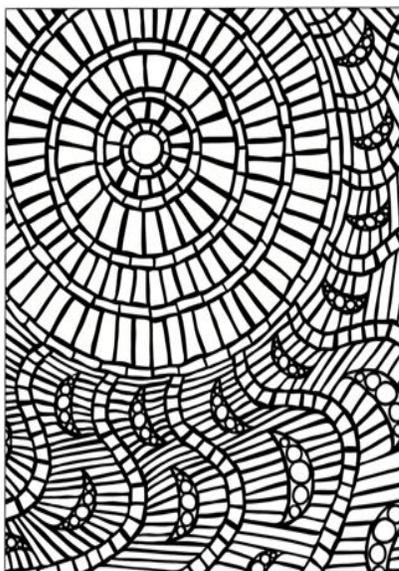
The address is 181 Appleton Street. All are welcome; note that vaccination is expected for all participants.

Please sign up in advance at [star@firstparish.info](mailto:star@firstparish.info).

## ParSnips

In February 2020 I was elected chair of the Parish Committee (ParCom), your governing board. The board changes leadership in the winter, when things are quiet, and keeps terms to two years, giving more people the opportunity to lead. So after two years as vice chair working with chair Steve McMullin, I happily took on the role, not realizing that we would be in a pandemic before our next meeting.

I learned an enormous amount from Steve about managing the variety of things that come before ParCom, from the budget process to supporting the many groups in our community. But he did not leave notes about what to do during a pandemic. The bylaws weren't helpful, either. We were going to have to wing it, and we did, with lots of help from all of you.



As I reflect on my term as chair, on the surface it seems as if it's been dominated by unending uncertainty and difficult decisions. But looking deeper, I realize that having this leadership role during this time was an incredible gift. I saw first-hand how so many people jumped in to make the enormous transition to on-line church feel seamless. And I watched support networks and on-line and outdoor activities pop up. While the world was distancing and isolating, this community was coming together.

The 2020 Stewardship Drive was interrupted when we closed the meetinghouse. With so much uncertainty, pledges were down, and pledges form the largest part

of the church's income. Our income from rentals was also uncertain. To create a balanced budget to present to the congregation in May 2020, the Parish Committee was cautious and lowered the total.

However, as that year progressed, you all gave way more than was pledged. You can see some of the benefits in the work the Property Committee has done in the meetinghouse while it's been empty, from improved ventilation to a fresh coat of paint.

Our financials, like our community, have remained strong. Adding a second minister required income increases each year. We are meeting that commitment despite the pandemic, and receiving all the benefits of Rev. Erica, who has brought more to our community than we ever imagined!

Your pledges during this year's Stewardship Campaign will let ParCom create a balanced budget for next year. Your commitment means we can keep the "home fires burning" (pay staff, maintain our building) and also do more in our community and for causes we care about. I feel as if the money I donate to First Parish is multiplied by the community.

During my term I have felt so supported and so appreciated, and I've learned so much about leading with compassion and spirituality (a bit different from my leadership roles over the years in high tech). I thank all of you for the privilege of leading ParCom.

At our last meeting, Sara Galantowicz, who has been vice chair for the past two years, was voted in as chair, and Anne Quaadgras became our new vice chair. They lead an incredibly dedicated team on the committee, including Carolyn Hodges (treasurer), Celia Wcislo (clerk), Tom Estabrook, Jeff Keffer, Steve McMullin, and Al Tosti. I will remain on ParCom until May 2023, supporting our new leadership and doing my best to serve our community.

— Marie Meteer



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## The Spire

Diane Shriver, Editor

Next issue: Sunday, April 3  
Submissions due by Sunday, March 27  
*Items may be edited for space and clarity.*

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*The Spire* generally deals with the big picture.  
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by Wednesday at noon.

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