

Next issue deadline
Sunday, November 28

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

Worship Options

During the 19 months of this global pandemic, every decision has been “for now,” because as conditions change we must change with them. We always follow the health protocols of the state, the town, and the practices of similar spaces in the area.

In early October more than 200 people completed a Parish Committee survey, an astonishing rate of participation. It showed that 99 percent of us who are eligible are vaccinated, and that we have a strong desire to return to incarnate worship.

In keeping with those preferences and current health practices, the Parish Committee voted on October 12 to begin hybrid worship on November 14, when we will have the option to worship incarnate or live online. For those in the Sanctuary:

- All those eligible to be vaccinated must be.
- Everyone must be masked except those speaking from the pulpit.
- There will be no congregational singing, and no food or beverages.

To prepare for our return, the Property Committee has overseen an engineering analysis of our ventilation system and repairs to improve airflow. We also have purchased equipment so we can live-stream services, thanks to help from Julius Pereli, Jo Guthrie, and Arlington Community Media.

The staff and Worship Associates are approaching the first four Sundays of hybrid worship as a trial period, a time to experiment and see what works. Signs will announce our requirements for vaccination and masks. Instead of a Time For All Ages in the Sanctuary, when children arrive they will be invited to gather in the courtyard and then go to their rooms. In place of our usual greetings, those attending online will enjoy five-minute-breakout rooms, and those in the Sanctuary will meet in twos and threes. We will

modify our process of placing stones for joys and concerns, and there will be no spoken ones. Joys and concerns may be written on cards in the Sanctuary or in the chat box online. The choir will sing masked, from a safe distance.



Again, the four weeks beginning November 14 will be an experiment on how to gather for worship responsibly and well. We will learn from our experiences and adapt. Churches that are already holding incarnate services include Harvard Memorial Church, Calgary Methodist in Arlington, Arlington Street Church in Boston, First Parish Concord, Follen Church in Lexington, First Parish Lexington, and churches in Dedham, Melrose, Watertown, Wayland, Sherborn, Sharon, and Worcester.

There are innumerable details to attend to as we prepare. There are also lots of feelings to hold. I have heard – and myself felt – excitement, trepidation, and grief. We have come to enjoy aspects of online worship: break-out groups and more. We miss aspects of worship together: live music, singing, and more. We are fearful of the risks of gathering in person. We yearn to see one another in person.

We each have our own medical story, as well as a need to connect with others. I invite everyone to listen deeply to one another, to hear the fear, grief, uncertainty, and excitement. To listen with love. And I invite everyone to remember that all decisions are being made by people with good intent, with a commitment to the health and well-being of this precious religious community.

I invite you to express gratitude to the Parish Committee, the Property Committee, the Worship Associates, the tech teams, the Religious Education Committee, the Music Committee, the STAR adult enrichment committee, the staff, and others who are working oh, so hard to create meaningful connection for all of us under extraordinary circumstances.

– Rev. Marta Flanagan

Exploring Our Sexuality

One of the flagship parts of our religious education program is the Our Whole Lives (OWL) curriculum for our middle-schoolers. OWL is a lifespan program that includes versions for younger kids, young adults, and older people. In two Zoom sessions, Rev. Erica will lead a in a broad-stroke version of this renowned curriculum, for adults.

We will gather virtually on Thursday, November 4, and two weeks later, on Thursday, November 18, from 7 to 8:30 pm. Please be available for both meetings.

Registration is required; you can do so on our church website, at

<https://firstparish.info/events/sexual-ethics-11-18/>

A Challenge to Learn and Unlearn

November is National Native American Heritage Month, and as we strive to listen to Indigenous voices we invite the congregation to take part in a challenge. Members of the Indigenous Justice Working Group of our Social Justice Committee have been learning, and unlearning, what we know about Indigenous history and culture by experimenting with the 21-Day Racial Equity Indigenous Challenge.

This challenge is aimed at understanding the truth about what happened to Indigenous people and how they were robbed of their land, their culture, and their lives. They were also robbed of their history, which stretches back more than 20,000 years, by being omitted and being subject to many myths. Mindful of the invisibility experienced in Native communities, the challenge offers diverse perspectives from descendants of the 574 nations on whose land we live.

Each day, for 21 days, we are challenged to pick at least one of the provided resources or activities. There are a tremendous variety to choose from, some as brief as two minutes, others longer. The best approach is to vary among reading, listening, noticing, connecting, and engaging. You can use a the program's tracking tool or a journal to reflect on what you have learned. Musical suggestions keep the inspiration going!



Group member Elizabeth Hunter tried to do a lot of different things – she watched, listened, and read – and found the challenge to be a useful framework. “It’s not an enormous commitment, but can be done in 10 or 15 minutes a day,” she says. “The 21 days don’t have to be consecutive, and the structure accommodates a lighter lift or a deeper dive.” Elizabeth made drawings while listening to podcasts.

Annie Homza describes the challenge as very intense. She committed to an hour or more a day. She started with UU resources and then took a course through the Smithsonian Museum of the American Indian. Annie found it “so interesting to look at artifacts that many of us have seen as part of Western education and reconsider them from an Indigenous perspective.”

Tom Estabrook watched the movie *Wild Indian* by an Indigenous filmmaker and found it a “very troubling film that nonetheless made important statements.”

Carolyn Hodges, our newest member, enjoyed *Unreserved*, a radio program on the Challenge menu, and also highly recommends *The Quill Sisters*, a podcast about women porcupine-quill artists who converse about weaving Indigenous culture into Western thought.

I took the challenge by doing activities on 21 consecutive days, using the menu as a guideline but taking advantage of other Indigenous offerings. With so much to choose from, I had time on a busy day for a brief video (*Everything You Know About Thanksgiving is WRONG*) or an article (*Four Ways to Honor Without Appropriating Culture*). On a less hectic day I delved more deeply into longer material, such as *Dawnland*, a documentary about Maine's Truth & Reconciliation Commission. The challenge offers many more resources that I look forward to accessing in the future. I am grateful to have immersed myself in this intensive learning experience.

Please consider taking this opportunity for us to move as a congregation toward Indigenous Justice. Feel free to contact us with questions or ideas, at ijwg@firstparish.info.

– Ellen Leigh

The Indigenous Justice Working Group:
Jennifer Davis Kay, Elizabeth Hunter,
Annie Homza, Tom Estabrook, Dawn Terkla,
Dianne Schaefer, Carolyn Hodges,
and spiritual guidance from Rev. Erica Richmond

Marta on Sabbatical

The word *sabbatical* comes from the word *sabbath* — in the Bible, a time for letting fields lie fallow in preparation for future plantings, as well as a day for reflection and spiritual rejuvenation.

Rev. Marta Flanagan began her ministry at First Parish in August 2009 as the sole ordained minister, and she is now in her thirteenth year with us. With the arrival of Rev. Erica Richmond in the fall of 2020, Marta became Lead Minister and Rev. Erica became our Parish Minister.

As is customary for Unitarian Universalist ministers, Marta and Rev. Erica each accrue a month of sabbatical for every year of service. Marta has taken two short sabbaticals while at First Parish and will take another from January 1 to May 15, 2022. For four-and-a-half months Rev. Erica will serve as Acting Lead Minister, and a part-time minister will assist her.

Rev. Erica will work closely with the Parish Committee and continue to provide pastoral ministry to the congregation. To balance her new portfolio, she will preach once a month rather than twice, and offer fewer adult programs than usual. She will continue to be available to committee leaders but will attend fewer meetings. She will hold individual pastoral appointments. Rev. Erica cherishes this congregation



and is looking forward to more incarnate interactions in the coming months.

During this time Rev. Marc Fredette will be our Adjunct Sabbatical Minister. Rev. Marc retired in July from 11 years of ministry at the UU congregation in Waltham and continues to live in the area. Marc is a graduate of Harvard Divinity School and was a lay leader at the UU congregation in Portsmouth, N.H., while pursuing a tech career. He will work half time, preaching once a month and participating in worship on the other Sundays, supporting the Lay Ministry team, and offering adult-education programming during the winter and spring. He will also be available for pastoral counseling. Marc is thrilled to be joining Rev. Erica, the staff team, and the congregation.

Marta plans to take courses at Harvard Divinity School as a “Minister in the Vicinity,” as well as return to an exercise regime at the gym once her neck heals from a pinched nerve, an injury she incurred last summer. She will begin and end the sabbatical with silent retreats. Depending on Covid travel restrictions, she may travel to the American Southwest or to Germany to further explore remembrance and repair, and how cultures and individuals deal with wrong-doing in their past. During her last sabbatical Marta explored this question while traveling in South Africa and in the American South. She is eager to return to us on Sunday, May 15, when she will be back in the pulpit.

Reflections

On Thanksgiving

I’m thinking about the candles that used to adorn my childhood Thanksgiving table — a Pilgrim boy and girl, he in the black hat with the inexplicable buckle, she in a white cap and apron. In an online resale site I see a full, vintage set of these candles, which includes a turkey, a Native American man with a single feather in his hair and his arms crossed over his bare chest, and a Native American woman whose headband and shell necklace match those of her partner.

Were these also on the table of my childhood, and I have simply forgotten them? Did someone in my whiter-than-white family suddenly feel ashamed at the

characterization of the Native Americans and throw them away, uncomfortable at what were essentially mascots for our meal? I don’t know the answer, but I know the Pilgrims remained — on the table and in my imagination — part of my origin story for America, my link to a shared cultural story of Thanksgiving.

For a long time I viewed Thanksgiving as the purest of the holidays, the one most focused on what it was really about — gathering with loved ones to share a meal, and pausing to reflect on our many blessings. I didn’t know that, during the Civil War, President Lincoln began the tradition of setting aside a day for thanksgiving, praise, and prayer. But singing “We Gather Together” in a school assembly or fall concert

was an annual event from elementary school through high school, and I believed what the words told me – that God was on my side, chastening and hastening his will to make known – that from the beginning, the fight we were winning.

To believe in the purity of Thanksgiving and in the goodness of American forebears whom God blessed with bounty, I have had to overlook a whole lot of commercialism – from the endcap displays of pumpkin-pie spice and gravy seasoning to the Macy’s parade, football games, and car dealerships. (In my defense, Black Friday was not a thing when I was a kid.) I have also had to fail to learn a lot of historical truths.

In *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*, sociologist James Loewen warns, “More than any other celebration, more even than such overtly patriotic holidays as Independence Day and Memorial Day, Thanksgiving celebrates our ethnocentrism.” Loewen tells us what my history books did not. The Pilgrims (who were not called Pilgrims until the 1800s) robbed Native American graves, stole caches of corn, and spread disease.

It is true that Wampanoag people, led by Massasoit, lent their aid to the English people who landed on the *Mayflower*. But here is the often-forgotten context: In 1617, three years before the *Mayflower* sailed, a pandemic – mostly likely brought by English and French fishing expeditions – swept through the people living on the coast of what we call New England, killing 90 to 96 percent of them over the next three years. Massasoit wanted allies against enemy tribes, as his tribe had lost so many.

It is true that Squanto, a Wampanoag man from the village of Patuxet, could speak English, and was



Repair and Reparations, Part 2

Join in a Reverberations session on Sunday, November 21 at 2 pm, led by Ellen Leigh of the Indigenous Justice Working Group and members of the Racial Justice Coordinating Committee. The Zoom link will be in the Events calendar on our church website, www.firstparish.info.

praised by Governor William Bradford as an aid sent by God. The missing context? Squanto learned English after he was stolen from his village and brought to England. He was sold into slavery in Spain but escaped and made his way back home aboard an English ship. He found his village destroyed by disease. He was alone, and like Massasoit and his people, vulnerable. Allying himself with the newcomers was strategic.

Although there was some kind of meal of thanksgiving after the harvest of 1621, it was possible only because the English settlers had farmed land that had already been cleared by generations of Indigenous people. The English crops succeeded because they used techniques taught to them by the few Wampanoags who remained after years of plague. Yet when we look at 20th-century art depicting that first Thanksgiving (see *The First Thanksgiving 1621* by Jean Leon Gerome Ferris, or *The First Thanksgiving at Plymouth* by Jennie Augusta Brownscombe) we see the generosity of white Christian Europeans sharing their food with poor, uncivilized pagans.

Loewen writes, “This notion that ‘we’ advanced peoples provided for the Natives, exactly the converse of the truth, is not benign. It reemerges time and again in our history to complicate race relations.” It is the same unexamined storytelling, Loewen argues, that allowed plantation owners to think of themselves as benevolent caretakers of the people they enslaved, the same mythology behind Manifest Destiny and the White Man’s Burden.

So what do I do with this mythology, now that I see it for what it is? I don’t know. Loewen offers us this kernel of hope: “The antidote to feel-good history is not feel-bad history but honest and inclusive history.”

What does honest and inclusive history look like? What are the stories I do not yet know? What lies am I clinging to? What do I gain from narratives that make me feel good about my country, myself, and people who look like me?

Whose food am I eating? Whose plunder provides my comfort? Who is hurt by the stories I tell?

– Amy Anderson
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The Spire

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