

Next issue deadline
Sunday, April 26

The Spire

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THE FIRST SUNDAY RECORD

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Sacred Space

Our lives have become all about space – keeping enough physical space between us, and keeping our living spaces stocked with supplies and free of contagion. We no longer gather on Sundays in the sacred space of our Sanctuary. How ironic that this space is no longer a sanctuary from danger, but hazardous when filled with people.

After our fifth meetinghouse burned in 1975, some members could not accept the modern design of its replacement and left the congregation. Their experience of church was all about the building – the space that held them in a comforting embrace that evoked ancestry and centuries of tradition. For most, though, church was all about the people, and they persevered through the chaos of rebuilding to forge a new kind of space, one that did not exclude those unable to climb stairs or cross thresholds. Our meetinghouse has flaws, but never underestimate the power of the fact that it is accessible to everyone. It symbolizes our beliefs as Unitarian Universalists.

How do we maintain our sacred space when we cannot be in it physically? My favorite Joseph Campbell quote is that “the promised land has nothing to do with real estate.” Our building is closed, but our relationships can continue and deepen. It puts me in mind of the synapses in our brain cells – gaps must be crossed for our minds to work. Our physical gaps are now larger, but they can be crossed, and we must overcome them and gather spiritually.

How awful this would all be without digital connections! Our isolation would be so much more

intense. I take immense comfort in interacting with others grappling with various challenges, and their humor, intelligence, and cleverness lightens – and enlightens – my days.

A friend asked for suggestions of ways to structure his copious time, and mine was to call someone every day. The longer it has been since you spoke, the better. He reports fresh and comforting conversations with friends and family. I am trying to follow my own advice.

May we remember that our sacred space is all about the people, and may we continue to fill our spirits with caring and joy.

– Diane Taraz Shriver, Editor



Please Be Careful!

Hundreds of churches, including First Parish, have been sent spam e-mails. Some people in our congregation have received messages, supposedly from our minister, describing some emergency and asking us to buy gift cards to help out. Our minister would never do this, and First Parish never asks for money in this way.

Whenever money is involved, please double-check the story and identity of the message. Scammers try to create anxiety so you will leap into action, so look before you click. Particularly troubling is “phishing,” where a hacker pretending to be a person or institution asks you to click on a link or open an attachment, which then lets malicious code into your computer. The message may look very convincing, but if you don’t know for sure who is asking, never click on anything in or attached to an e-mail message.

Our defenses go down when we see a message from our church, but we all need to stay safe.

Sharing the Joys of Ministry

A vital part of our church community are our Lay Ministers and Worship Associates. We need volunteers to fill these positions.

Our Lay Ministers reach out to congregants who are going through a difficult time, perhaps grieving a loss, dealing with a life transition, or managing an illness. A Lay Minister might arrange a visit with someone in their home or in the hospital, or talk by phone. They listen, offer encouragement and support, and perhaps a prayer. He or she might also arrange for a meal or gift package to be delivered through the church's Wider Network of Care. Lay Ministers also rotate in leading the Placing of Stones during services.

Our current Lay Ministers are Loren Gomez, Al Tosti, Natalie Tyler, Lorraine Cooley, Ellen Faran, Ebonie Smith Cooper, and Ann Abbott.

Worship Associates focus on the spiritual needs of the congregation by shaping services and seeing that they run smoothly on a practical level, both during the program year (September to June) and during the summer, when lay people lead services. Worship Associates work closely with the minister and coordinate with other church staff and volunteers as needed. They also compose prayers for services, assist with gathering children in the Time for All Ages, and help with recognition ceremonies.

Our current Worship Associates are Amy Anderson, Jo Guthrie, Kathleen Hennessy, Jitendra Singh, and Elizabeth Hunter.



If you are a member of First Parish, have regularly attended services for two years, and can commit to a two-year term, we encourage you to apply. Contact sharedministry@firstparish.info to speak with members of the Committee on Shared Ministry, and please feel free to talk informally with current Lay Ministers or Worship Associates.

– Committee on Shared Ministry:
Jim Ptacek, Amy Hadley,
Ruben Hopwood, Kit Hayes

Second Minister Update

The work of the Second Minister Search is progressing rapidly toward an anticipated happy conclusion. Like so much of the rest of the world, we have moved our deliberations on-line. It's been different, definitely, all this Zoom stuff. Not always in a bad way. I think most of us would say the same about Sunday services. Turns out it is possible to be together in community without being together physically.

We're almost a year into the process and our work is winding down. The next step is to make a formal recommendation to the Parish Committee, which will have the final say. Then we look forward to joyfully introducing our new second minister to the rest of the congregation. We will be planning meet-the-minister events for later this spring and early next fall.

I remember my mother's words when I was little and she was putting me to bed: "Have I told you today that I love you?" Well, channeling Mom, have we told you lately how much we love you? For pledging to the Second Minister Startup Fund above and beyond its \$200,000 goal. For responding so thoughtfully and in such large numbers to the fall congregational survey. And for participating with enthusiasm and seriousness of purpose in last winter's Beyond Categorical Thinking workshop. First Parish rocks!

As always, we welcome your comments. Maybe not in person at coffee hour, alas, but always at secondministersearch@firstparish.info.

Be kind, stay well, and keep a safe distance!

– David Whitford, on behalf of the rest of the
Second Minister Search Committee:
John Anderson, Lois Fine,
Rev. Marta Flanagan, Tina Silberman,
Carolyn Hodges (co-chair),
Marc Jacobson (co-chair), Tina Silberman

Taking Care of Our Spiritual Home

Recent events have been, to say the least, challenging. Some of us have lost our jobs, many are worried about our continuing health, and all of us are wrestling with fear about what the future holds for those close to us, and for those across the nation and the world.

Such deep concerns have driven many to seek the consolation and camaraderie of fellow First Parish members. Our on-line services have drawn as many as 294 households, all reaching out in virtual community to support each other. Clearly, we are turning to First Parish for hope and sustenance, eager to see, if only in a little box on our computer, the faces of those who have seen us through difficult times before now.

Members of the Stewardship Committee are heartened to see this outpouring of spirit and

generosity each Sunday. We remain committed to fostering the effort to keep alive this supportive community by making an annual pledge during the Leap Forward Campaign. So far, we have received 166 pledges for a total of \$525,000. Considering the circumstances, this is great progress, but we need more households to pledge to reach our goal.

If you have already pledged, *thank you!* If you have not, please take a moment to do so, on our website at firstparish.info, through Realm, or by contacting us at stewardship@firstparish.info.

—The Stewardship Committee:
Jamie Aronson, David Desjardins,
Kathy Greene, Julius Pereli,
Sue Sheffler, Phil Speare, Carolyn White

ParSnips

In the last month, our world has been turned upside-down. We've moved inside, learned what "social distancing" means (and wish they would call it "healthy spacing" instead), and tried to figure out how to hold our community together while keeping everyone in it safe.

The Parish Committee asked Tish Miller, Steve McMullin, John Hodges, and Lori Kenschaft to form a task force. They quickly pulled together the information we needed to make critical decisions: To move church outside, and then on-line, and to close the building except for groups whose function is medical or mental-health support.

Next we tackled the problem of how to create virtual connections when our physical connections are so limited. Anne Quaadgras stepped up to lead our tech team, who researched how we could go on-line, created documentation, and supported those for whom "zoom" is a word describing cars going fast.

Through all of this, our staff went into overdrive. They secured bigger zoom licenses that could accommodate us all, and sent out information on the web and in e-mails to let people know that, as long as you have computing capacity, we *can* come together and worship.



Marta, Chloe, and our Worship Associates have led us in meaningful and touching on-line services. Jonathan and Ken bring us the music we love so much, and Tina and members of the RE Committee talk with our children. It looks effortless to the over 250 participants and their families joining from their homes, but a host of people are busy behind the scenes, turning mics off and on, putting up slides, and dividing us into little breakout groups so we can still connect one-to-one.

As chair of the Parish Committee, I want to thank all of them, and all of you who are staying connected and keeping our community strong. This will be our world for some time to come, but, as Marta reminds us, "All shall be well." I'm looking forward to returning to our church building and seeing you all in person, but in the meantime, I am incredibly thankful for this community.

— Marie Meteer



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The Spire

Diane Shriver, Editor

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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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