

Next issue deadline
Sunday, April 25

The Spire

APRIL 4, 2021

THE FIRST SUNDAY RECORD

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

So Close to Our Goal!

As the promise and potential of April blooms all around us, we on the Stewardship Committee are overcome with gratitude at the generosity and resilience of our fellow First Parish members who, after a year of pandemic and social disruption, have put us at the threshold of achieving remarkable financial support for our beloved community.

Thank you dearly to everyone who has made a pledge to support First Parish over the next fiscal year, which begins July 1. Due to your generosity, we are only \$15,000 away from reaching our goal of \$705,000.

We chose “Together, Stronger Still” as our Stewardship theme this year, and you have shown how well that phrase captures our spiritual community. But we are not quite there. If you have been meaning to support First Parish financially, now is the time to make your pledge. In early April, the volunteers on our Parish Committee will need to know how much money our members have promised the church, so that they can budget for the good works it can set us on the path to achieve.

With your support, we can:

- help support our Lead Minister and our new Parish Minister, as well as give our staff cost-of-living adjustments.
- restore committee budgets to pre-pandemic levels to fund increased activities as we return to our meetinghouse.
- launch two special projects to increase safety and flexibility in our meetinghouse, by making improvements to the HVAC system and airflow in the building, and by installing audio-video equipment to allow remote participation along with in-person services.

We know that some of our members lost employment during this pandemic and are unable to pledge at



previous levels. We also know that the pandemic has had less severe effects on other members. Every gift, no matter the size, is appreciated and crucial to our meeting this financial challenge together.

Our goal is to gain pledges from 100 percent of our members. All gifts,

large and small, are welcome, and indeed crucial to First Parish’s continued good work. Additional information about our Stewardship Campaign can be found by visiting the church website at firstparish.info/give.

We’re very thankful for the continued strong support of our community. Every week, we rejoice that we are “Together, Stronger Still.”

— Stewardship Committee:
Jamie Aronson, David Desjardins,
Rev. Erica Richmond, Sue Sheffler,
Phil Speare, Heidi Swarts

Honoring Workers for Social Justice

At the Living Our Faith service on April 25, members of First Parish will speak about their social-justice activities. We look forward to hearing from Alice Austin, Genevieve Baldwin, and Jim Ptacek at this annual service organized by the Social Justice Committee. At 2 pm, in a walking tour of Mount Auburn Cemetery, we will visit the graves of people who once lived their faith through social-justice work. Join Rev. Erica, Arleen Kulin (a Mount Auburn

docent), and Maureen Dolan for about 90 minutes. Please register so we know how many to expect, at www.firstparish.info/events/mount-auburn-walking-tour

Hard and Important Discussions

In February the Racial Justice Coordinating Committee (RJCC) continued our exploration of policing, finishing a six-week series facilitated by Rev. Erica Richmond and Rev. Bill Gardiner. We used the book *The End of Policing* for reflection and discussion with about 30 community members who attended.

The discussions and learnings were powerful, difficult, and at times painful. The RJCC is grateful for the participation of all who struggle with the realities of injustice in policing and seek progress toward enlightenment, justice, equality, reform, and/or abolition. There is much work to do.

On Sunday, February 21, the RJCC hosted an interactive workshop on cultural appropriation, exploring how it may show up in our lives and at First Parish. With the 28 participants we framed our discussion with these questions:

- What is cultural appropriation and why does it matter?
- Where is the line between appropriation and appreciation?
- How do each of us bring an anti-oppression lens to celebrating and learning about cultures and traditions different from our own?
- How do we harm others and ourselves when we do not wrestle with the distinction between appropriation and appreciation?
- It is not always clear-cut. Where are the grey areas?

As expected, we ended our 75-minute session with more questions than answers, but also with a shared commitment to stay in relationship as we wrestle with this issue. Here are some examples of this wrestling:

If we are a faith that seeks revelation from all the world's religions and spiritual practices, how do we ensure that we are exploring respectfully? Many agreed that the following guideposts are important and even imperative: intent, respect, context, permission, and representation.

Music in April

Beatles Sing-along / Thursday, April 22, 7 pm

Revisit your favorite masterpieces by the Beatles, led by Diane Taraz. Lyrics will be provided.

Flute and Oboe / Thursday, April 29, 7 pm

Colton Ray Cox and Daniel Carlo play duets. Colton has joined our choir in several services featuring music by Mark Miller and John Rutter.

Brought to you by the Music Committee.

E-mail music@firstparish.info for the Zoom links.

As a largely white congregation, how do we avoid abusing our privilege by “borrowing” from other traditions? For example, is it appropriate to sing the Black National Anthem, “Lift Every Voice and Sing”? Is it enough to give explicit explanation and consideration of its meaning to the struggle of Black Americans? Is it possible for white people to appreciate the pain represented in the song? Can’t we just sing and celebrate all struggles for justice?



There were an unanticipated number of questions and concerns about our congregational Calling of the Directions at the Equinox and Solstice. Do we understand our intent? Do we create adequate context for its significance to Indigenous, Pagan, Earth-based religious and cultural practices? Are we “doing it right”? Is it performative? Is it genuine? Should we invite Earth-based religious practitioners to lead or guide us in this practice? I s seeking to honor our Earth-home and promote environmental justice reason enough to Call the Directions?

Many attendees expressed a desire for more opportunities to explore these issues.

In March we hosted a conversation on race and racism with Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum, and we are planning other events via Zoom. If you have ideas, questions, or feedback, please e-mail racialjustice@firstparish.info.

– Racial Justice Coordinating Committee:
Amy Anderson, Diane Barry, Marilyn Downs,
Lois Fine, Tom Estabrook, Stanley Pollack,
Tina Silberman, Sara Whitford

ParSnips

A Rewarding Survey

Thank you to the more than 130 people who completed the Parish Committee's communications survey in February. Many people wrote comments as well as answering the questions, and we heard that during the past year First Parish has been an especially important source of community for many of us, despite the fact we cannot be physically together.

Connection and spiritual sustenance via on-line services are highly valued. We miss in-person contact, live music, shared meals, and hugs.

Part of the survey's goal was to find out how we can improve communications. The results will be extremely helpful in guiding how we share information, as well as navigating the process of resuming in-person services.

People learn about what is happening at First Parish in many ways. The e-Bulletin and all-congregation e-mails are the most common primary sources of information. There is lots of interest in getting more information about First Parish offerings, especially adult education.

People have mixed views about whether they will continue to attend worship remotely, if available,

when in-person services resume. The most common answer was "occasionally," but some gave a strong "no" or "yes."

More than 80 percent would like to provide input about returning to in-person worship via a survey. We are working on that. Frequent and transparent communication on decisions about when we go back, and how, is obviously important.

Vaccine availability was the most frequently reported criteria for deciding when people would feel safe returning to in-person worship. Other common answers were state guidelines, the infection rate and COVID case prevalence, adherence to public-health recommendations, and adequate ventilation.

People have continued to contribute to our community in so many ways — attending on-line services, being a phone buddy, serving on committees, providing tech support, supporting social-justice initiatives, teaching religious education, maintaining our building, participating in Lectio Divina, joining covenant groups and other gatherings, donating their treasure, and much more!

— Sara Galantowicz, Parish Committee

Reflections

Visible from All Angles

As more of us get vaccinated, the prospect of returning to our meetinghouse becomes less theoretical. Each fall when we gather after the summer break it's always startling to see how much the kids have changed in just a couple of months. It may be hard to recognize them at all when we return after well over a year apart, and adults will have changed much more than usual.

We have seen each other in our Zoom boxes, but mostly from the shoulders up. This reveals some who have reverted to natural gray, some who have become delightfully shaggy, and some whose hairlines have drifted northward. But Zooming only our heads and shoulders lets us disguise the acquisition of the "Covid 19 pounds," if that has been our fate. It's daunting to think that before long I will be visible from all angles.

I have an excuse, having taken steroid medication for a year, finally finishing the tapering-off process a few weeks ago. Prednisone causes the munchies, and although I held the line for months I eventually began to gain. I hope to get back to roughly where I was before developing an immune-system disorder.

Complicating my situation is osteoarthritis in back and hips, making exercise difficult. I hope to resume swimming after I and my spouse get our shots this month. I had *just* found the perfect pool when everything went pear-shaped, including me.

My spouse is chomping at the bit to get back into his perfect pool at MIT. Maddeningly, he is pretty much the same shape as he was before the pandemic.

I look forward to seeing all of you, from all angles!

— Diane Taraz Shriver, *Spire* Editor



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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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The Spire generally deals with the big picture.
Time-sensitive details belong in the weekly
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