

Next issue deadline
Sunday, December 27

The Spire

DECEMBER 6, 2020

THE FIRST SUNDAY RECORD

VOL. 63, No. 4

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

Christmas Eve Service at 5 pm

This year we do not need to hold three services, as our on-line worship can easily accommodate everyone, near and far! Watch for the Zoom link and join in.

A Wealth of December Doings

Be sure to visit our church website at www.firstparish.info to see the many, many things going on at First Parish this month. There are activities for all ages and moods.

Gotta Sing!

If December just isn't right until you sing some traditional holiday songs, you have several chances coming up to warble over the eggnog (which you must supply yourself):

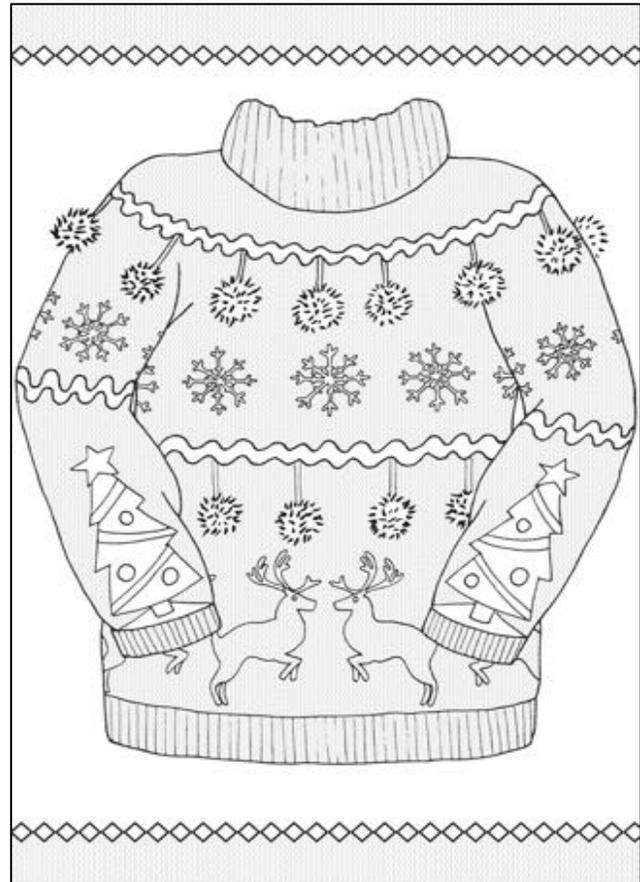


On Tuesday, December 8, First Parish hosts the **Maple Street**

Singers while the community center is being renovated. Join a friendly group at 12:30 pm for an hour of songs, some live, some recorded in duets, trios, and small choruses. Each leader encourages you to sing along, muted. Lyrics are provided in the chat window and in advance. To get the Zoom link, contact Cheri Minton at groupsing@firstparish.info.

On Thursday, December 17, enjoy a **Community Carol Sing** at 7 pm. Organist Will Sherwood and soprano Maria Ferrante lead an evening of carols, Messiah excerpts, and organ works that reflect the beauty of the season. Please stay afterwards for conversation. To get the link, contact music@firstparish.info.

On Saturday, December 19, Diane Taraz presents her annual **Carols by Candlelight**. It's not completely a sing-along, but there are many chances to join in. For the link, e-mail diane@dianetaraz.com.



Poetry Sunday

Each year, the Sunday after Christmas is an opportunity for us to share and celebrate the truths we find in our favorite poems. This year, those who would like to share a poem during the service on Sunday, December 29 should create a video of themselves reading it. Upload your video by December 26 at 5 pm by using the form at this link: <https://tinyurl.com/poetrysunday2020>.

After the service we will provide an opportunity for people to share poems live, open-mic style. If you have any questions, or trouble with the form, please e-mail Elizabeth Hunter at elizabethh@gmail.com.

Embracing the Darkness

On Friday, December 11, Zoom in at 7 pm for a contemplative service acknowledging that, for many, this time of year brings mixed feelings. As usual, music will be sung by the UUlations. In addition to poetry, prayer, and candles, we will share Oblaten or Oplatki, an Eastern European tradition of exchanging bread amid wishes for well-being in the coming year.

You can pick up a packet of Oplatki sweet wafers until December 11 at the main entrance to the church.

Look for the cooler by the clock tower. You need only one packet per family or attendee. If you can't get to the church, e-mail embracingthedarkness@firstparish.info and someone will deliver a packet. Of course, you can also use crackers or bread that you have at home.

To receive the link, visit www.firstparish.info/events.

Zooming Along on Sundays

Our virtual services are going quite smoothly. Here are some tips about how we do it:

Pre-service music. Music starts when we open the virtual doors. Every Sunday morning, we start to gather around 9:50 am with music playing while we wait for the service to begin.

Closed captioning. Thanks to modern voice-recognition technology, our words can now become text as we speak them in our services. To read along,



click on the button with the CC icon, which gives you a choice of seeing the words on the screen or following along in a transcript.

Breakout rooms. Many of you have told us how meaningful you find interacting with others in the breakout rooms, and we hope everyone finds them welcoming. But if you need a break from the breakout, it's completely okay to leave the room and go back to the main space to listen to music. We all need our space sometimes.

Social time. After each service one of our members hosts two breakout sessions of 15 minutes each. We've gotten a lot of positive responses to these gatherings. Come meet others in an unstructured time to catch up and just hang out with fascinating people.

Compliments and feedback. One of the hardest parts about being online is that we Worship Associates miss the time right after the service when we heard compliments and got feedback while you were thinking of it. We always want to know how we can get better, and we love to hear what works well for you and where we got it right.

If you have feedback or questions, please contact us at worshipassociates@firstparish.info.

— Jo Guthrie, Worship Associate

Celebrating Faith and Equality

The equality movement for the LGBTQ community has at times leaped ahead and at other times inched forward. We celebrate significant legal and cultural victories, yet much work remains to affirm a sense of full equality for individuals.

This year I began including at least one UU principle when writing to my legislative representatives. It lets me bring my "faith" to the presenting issue, whether it's climate change, racism, or human rights. When I think about equality for the LGBTQ community, these UU principles come to mind:

- 1st Principle: We believe that each and every person is important.
- 2nd Principle: We believe that all people should be treated fairly and kindly.
- 3rd Principle: We believe that we should accept one another and keep on learning together.

In that spirit, this month we celebrate Nicole Maines. Along of the back wall of our Vestry hangs a portrait of Nicole with her twin brother, Jonas. Their portrait

was created by artist Robert Shetterly as part of his series *Americans Who Tell the Truth*.

Back in 2017, Nicole Maines and her father, Wayne Maines, spoke at the Arlington Reads Together program about her trans activism and the importance of community acceptance. After the town-wide event, we invited Nicole to meet with our youth and Wayne shared a conversation with our adult members.

Nicole was the anonymous plaintiff, Susan Doe, in the Maine Supreme Judicial Court case *Doe v. Regional School Unit 26*, about gender identity and bathroom use in schools. Nicole, who is transgender, was barred from using the female bathroom after a complaint; however, the court ruled that it was unlawful to deny a transgender student access to the bathroom consistent with their gender identity.

It was a complicated road that took years of perseverance but eventually led to victory. On January 30, 2014, the court found that the school district had violated Nicole's human rights as a transgender student. This was the first time in U.S. history that a state Supreme Court ruled in favor of a transgender plaintiff in a case involving the use of a bathroom based on gender identity.

It is hard for me to realize that we need to legislate equality for this most basic and essential human need.

About the double standard she experienced, Nicole said, "I realized my gender at the same time my brother did. Yet everyone assumed that I didn't know what I was talking about. I couldn't possibly be old enough to make the distinction between whether I was a boy or a girl. Yet my twin brother was."

On the topic, her brother Jonas had this to say: "Hate isn't instinctual, it is learned. We teach our children to share the same ignorance and prejudices as us, and this is how they live on. Teaching a younger generation to love and understand will allow bigotry and hate to pass out of our lives."

Jonas' words bring me back to those UU principles: Each and every person is important; treat all people fairly and kindly; accept one another and keep learning together.

For more about the Maines family, please visit: <https://www.americanswhotellthetruth.org/portraits/nicole-jonas-maines>

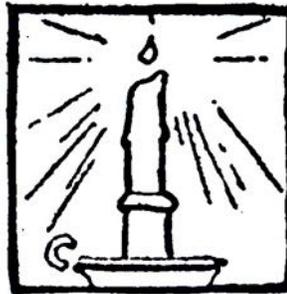
— Clarissa Rodriguez
Racial Justice Coordinating Committee

Racial Justice and Policing

As protests demanding law-enforcement reform and calls to "defund the police" continue across our country, we all have many questions and there is much to learn. As part of our theme for this year, Truth and Reconciliation, the Racial Justice Coordinating Committee (RJCC) is sponsoring a series of events examining race and policing through a faith lens. Our goal is to provide an opportunity to hear a wide variety of voices and a safe place to examine and discuss these complicated issues.

Policing is connected to racist histories within our country. What does that mean for the future of community safety? It is not easy to reimagine such an ingrained system, but our theological commitments to justice compel us to wrestle with challenging and complex topics. What do people mean when they advocate for "defunding the police"? Are you

befuddled by the notion that we could do without police? Do you think the phrase "defund the police" is divisive? Do you think policing is greatly influenced by systemic racism? How is your attitude toward policing influenced by your race or ethnicity? Are you looking for a place to examine and discuss these issues?



The first of the events, "Policing, Identity, and our Theological Commitments," will be held on December 9. In January, Rev. Erica Richmond and Bill Gardiner will co-facilitate a series, "Reimagining Policing and Community Safety in our Time," facilitated by with the introductory text, *The End of Policing* by Alex Vitale. More events will follow.

Please e-mail racialjustice@firstparish.info with ideas, questions, or feedback.

Here is a beginning list of resources for thinking about these topics:

- Action of Immediate Witness resolution on policing adopted at the UUA General Assembly: https://www.uua.org/sites/live-new.uua.org/files/20200625_aiw_amen_uprising.pdf
- <https://www.uuworld.org/articles/president-special-message-policing>

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

Reflections

Carols by Candlelight

Tis the season for singing the same old songs, and their very sameness is what we find so comforting. I am so grateful for the technology that allows me to continue sharing my music.

For most of us, the journey through this pandemic would be so much harder without the magic of Zoom. For all its limitations, it lets us see and hear one another live, a balm that helps us keep going.

Since 2007 I have marked the turn of the year with a concert called Carols by Candlelight. For a decade I held it at the Church of Our Saviour in East Arlington, a cozy setting just right for the 70 or so folks who came every year. (I did not do it at First Parish because our building is traditionally overbooked in December, and it cannot be accused of being cozy.)

The first year I was overjoyed to score a prominent mention in the *Globe* – a magical feat in the musically crowded month of December. I had acquired the key to the church's balky front door, I had received a tutorial on how to run the 1920s heating system, and I was joyfully planning refreshments, including raisin pie and whipped cream.

The week before the show I slipped on our icy stone steps and fell on my back. I seemed to have escaped serious injury and went through my day with just some aches. Then at bedtime I rolled over, and something came apart. They say the main reason to get married is so there is someone to call 911, and John did that as I panicked.

Strong (but not particularly attractive) firemen strapped me to a chair and carried me downstairs, then onto a gurney, then into a fire-department ambulance that had *no shock absorbers whatsoever*. I made a lot of noise throughout the whole process, up until the emergency room folks gave me a shot of something that sent me into orbit around Saturn. Climb onto this hard X-ray table? No problem!

The verdict was a couple of fractured ribs. Unfortunately there is no treatment beyond painkillers and time, lots of time. After a couple of days on the couch, focusing all my concentration on avoiding coughing or laughing or breathing too hard, I decided to try and do the concert. I was damned if I was going to waste my hard-won *Globe* publicity!

With the help of a controlled substance, I could sing and play as long as I didn't move around much. The hardest part was getting in and out of the car, as that necessitated twisting the torso. I made it through the show and the crowd enjoyed it, but I vowed that I would enjoy it more myself the next year.

And I did! Carols by Candlelight became a beloved tradition. Some shows I did solo, and some years I had guests. The Uulations joined me for a memorable evening of wonderful acoustics for our blended voices.

In 2017 I stopped hauling instruments and microphones and candles and tablecloths and decorations and refreshments across town and moved Carols by Candlelight to my living room. I had been doing house concerts for a while and had everything I needed to host a couple of dozen guests. It got so popular that in the last few years I offered two shows. New people always turn up, but welcoming the same old faces to join in on the same old songs is very comforting.

This year, of course, Carols by Candlelight has moved to Zoom. I will still sing in front of a crackling fire, surrounded by candlelight. Feel free to join me on Saturday, December 19, at 7 pm, as we bid a not-so-fond farewell to 2020, a concept I think we can all support with enthusiasm.

May the new year bring us better times and the continuing comfort of traditions.

– Diane Taraz Shriver
Spire Editor





Staff and Contact Information

Rev. Marta Flanagan Lead Minister
marta@firstparish.info

Rev. Erica Richmond Parish Minister
erica@firstparish.info

Office 781-648-3799 *churchoffice@firstparish.info*
website: *www.firstparish.info*

Hours Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and
Friday, 9 am to 5 pm
Wednesday, 11 am to 6 pm

Sara Hidalgo Office Manager
officemanager@firstparish.info

Sara DeLong Office/Communications Associate
sara.delong@firstparish.info

Religious Education

Tina Schultz Director of Religious Education
dre@firstparish.info

Rose Sawyer Marsh Youth Coordinator
youthadvisor@firstparish.info

Music

Jonathan Brennand Music Director
musicdirector@firstparish.info

Kenneth Seitz Pianist,
Music Director Emeritus

Parish Committee *parishexec@firstparish.info*

Marie Meter (chair), Sara Galantowicz (vice chair)
Maggie Carey, Tom Estabrook, Paul Hollings,
David Klingsberg, Steve McMullin,
Anne Quaadgras, Celia Wcislo

Finance Committee *finance@firstparish.info*
David Dreyfus

Human Resources *humanresources@firstparish.info*

Lay Ministry *layministry@firstparish.info*
Loren Gomez

Leadership Development *leadership@firstparish.info*
Helene Newberg

The Spire

Diane Shriver, Editor

Next issue: Sunday, January 3
Submissions due by Sunday, December 27
Items may be edited for space and clarity.

E-mail to *spire@firstparish.info*.
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
Bulletin – send to *weekly@firstparish.info*
by Wednesday at noon.

Membership *membership@firstparish.info*
Susan Moore

Music *music@firstparish.info*
Robin Baker

Property *property@firstparish.info*
Mike Birenbach

Religious Education *re@firstparish.info*
Wendy Fields, Janis Fleishman, Rose Sawyer Marsh,
Tina Schultz, Sarah Short, Pamela Baldwin,
Chris Barton, Anne Ehlert, Anthony Fernandez,
Julie Garry, Melinda Vanderpile

Social Justice *socialjustice@firstparish.info*
Mary Cummings, Maureen Dolan

Stewardship *stewardship@firstparish.info*
David Desjardins, Carolyn White

The Alliance *alliance@firstparish.info*

Trustees of Trust Funds *trustees@firstparish.info*
Jeff Keffer

Worship Associates *worshipassociates@firstparish.info*
Amy Anderson, Jo Guthrie, Jitendra Singh