

Next issue deadline
Sunday, February 28

The Spire

FEBRUARY 7, 2021

THE FIRST SUNDAY RECORD

VOL. 63, No. 6

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

We Are All Stewards

Daylight is lengthening, a new president has been inaugurated, and vaccines are making their way to people. We on the Stewardship Committee are feeling hopeful, and we hope you are, too. Still on the horizon is a resumption of in-person Sunday services. It may take a while but our hearts gladden at the thought of greeting old – and new – friends again.

Our theme for 2021's Stewardship Campaign is "Together, Stronger Still," and it marks our

sense of the resilience of our spiritual community. As we all know, it is the responsibility and joy of each of us to keep First Parish vibrant. Each year we dig deep into our pockets to make financial pledges that sustain and enhance our community.

Our pledges are crucial to allowing us to continue the good work we do for each other, our neighbors, and in the larger world. Think of our many inspired efforts: religious education, social justice, building community, bringing solace to those dealing with great challenges in their lives. None of these can happen without financial support from all of us, which we renew each year when we make our pledge.

This year's campaign, which will begin on February 28 with a special Stewardship Sunday service, aims to help us tackle major priorities that will improve the safety of our meetinghouse and let us include those who would like to continue attending services and events remotely. We hope to improve the HVAC system and airflow in the building, and obtain audio-video equipment to allow remote participation.

Other goals are to increase funds to support our new Parish Minister, Rev. Erica Richmond, and give our staff cost-of-living adjustments (and to make up for last

year, when such adjustments were cut back). We also need to restore operating funds for our church committees to pre-pandemic levels.

Watch for a letter in the coming weeks, requesting that you pledge generously as an invested member of our faith community. Many of you will also get a call in March from a Visiting Steward, who will arrange to meet with you, probably via Zoom. Please be open to their invitation. Our intention is not to interrupt your busy life, but to connect meaningfully with you about our community.

Additional information about our campaign can be found by visiting www.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."

– The Stewardship Committee:
Jamie Aronson, David Desjardins,
Rev. Erica Richmond, Sue Sheffler,
Phil Speare, Heidi Swarts, and Carolyn White



Together, Stronger Still

Two Conversations about Spirituality

Surveys over the last 12 years have consistently revealed that half the people at First Parish are Theists of one sort or another and half are Humanists of one sort or another. Let's talk about what we know and sense to be true. Rev. Marta Flanagan will facilitate two conversations, on March 2 and 9 from 7:30 to 9 pm. Please register in advance to receive the Zoom link, at our church website (www.firstparish.info).

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What is the Fan Room?

(answer on p. 6)

Seeing Indigenous People

Do you know the history of the land in the Arlington area, the place where our meetinghouse sits and our congregants dwell? Do you know which Indigenous people historically or currently inhabit this and surrounding communities?

How about the Indigenous people and communities that live in this region? Do you know their visions and struggles? Are you acting in relationship or solidarity with any of them?

If your answer to any of these questions is “no,” it is not because these questions are irrelevant or unimportant, but because the continuation of our colonial and white-supremacy power structures depends on us not knowing, not caring, and not connecting.

The wealth of the United States is based on the theft of Indigenous land and the enslavement of people of African descent. In order to maximize wealth, colonizers sought to eliminate or minimize the number of people who could claim Indigenous rights to land, natural resources, and sovereignty. These attempts, which continue, have included genocide, forced removal, forced assimilation, and the systemic erasure of Native people through invisibility in education, the media, and pop culture.

Millions of Indigenous people and hundreds of Indigenous nations have resiliently survived more than 400 years of systemic and violent attempts to eliminate them. They continue to assert their sovereignty and their rights and relationship to their homelands, natural resources, culture, and spiritual practices. Indigenous people are still here, and their lands are still occupied.

Leading up to the 2020 General Assembly (GA) of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), UUA President Susan Frederick-Gray convened a task force that worked to center Indigenous voices, counter white-supremacist erasure, and lift up Indigenous resilience and resistance at GA. This task force proposed an Action of Immediate Witness (AIW) to “Address 400 Years of White Supremacist Colonialism,” which was overwhelmingly passed by congregational delegates.

This AIW (available under uua.org/action/statements) calls for congregations to “Research, identify, and acknowledge the Indigenous peoples historically and/or currently connected with the land occupied by

congregations, and find ways to act in solidarity with or even partner with those Indigenous peoples.”

Shall First Parish members undertake such a process, perhaps in collaboration with UU congregations in adjacent communities? If this process were happening within our congregation, might our lives be enriched and our work for justice strengthened? If you would like to participate in exploring these questions and discussing possible courses of action, please contact us at socialjustice@firstparish.info.

– The Social Justice Committee,
UU Ministry for the Earth,
and authors of the AIW

Virtual Talent Show Next Month

On Thursday, March 18, the Music Committee will host a virtual Talent Show via Zoom. The event is a fundraiser for Arlington Eats, and all proceeds from free-will donations will benefit that worthy effort to make sure our neighbors do not go hungry.

The show will run from 7 to 8 pm, with time until 8:30 for socializing.

If you would like to perform, please apply with one selection no longer than three or four minutes. We can accept prerecorded video or audio files, or a live performance on Zoom. The deadline for submissions is March 4. To sign up, please use this link to submit your information:
www.signupgenius.com/go/5080E49A5A629A0FD0-march

Slots are first come, first served until our 60-minute program is filled.

– Robin Baker, Chair
Music Committee

The Love You Take = the Love You Make

When I was new at church, I found that attending services was not enough to make me feel connected. I had a sense that what I could receive might be a bit related to what I gave – as the song goes, “The love you take is equal to the love you make.” But I was wary of getting over-committed.

I started looking for small ways to get involved. I didn’t run the Pie Palace on Town Day – I didn’t even bake pies (and you should all be grateful for that). I took a two-hour shift selling pies. I didn’t join

the Harvest Moon Fair committee — I waited tables in the cafe. I had fun, and some of the connections I made at those events became friends.

I still go back to low-level tasks in between more demanding roles. Maybe you're in the same boat. If so, here are a few ideas:

Music Committee

- Doing music-production setup or reception
- Creating on-line flyers for Community Sings
- Performing or helping with the Spring Music Talent Show and Music Sundays

Property Committee

- Fall/Spring “spruce ups”
- Repairing and cleaning Sanctuary chairs
- Trimming hedges and bushes
- Making our windows sparkle

Tech Committee

- Handling slides during services
- Helping with services or other events

First Parish has many ongoing activities and groups, including Action Sunday, covenant groups, blood drives, and book groups. They all need volunteers.

Our church website has a section called <https://firstparish.info/ways-to-get-involved/>. Check it out, and feel free to contact any member of the Leadership Development Committee at leadership@firstparish.info.

— Amy Fardella, Helene Newberg, Aaron Kitzmiller, Georgia Critsley, and Julius Pereli

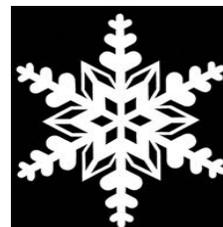
Legislating for Climate Protection

The old advice “think globally, act locally” very much applies to combating destructive climate change. While Massachusetts is a small part of the world, our energy intensive ways of living have a significant impact on the global climate. Progress we make toward reducing our reliance on fossil fuels has meaningful effects, both directly and through our influence on others. We can make beneficial changes as individuals, but large-scale systemic changes require collective action, and the legislative process is a one of the most powerful ways for Massachusetts residents to act collectively. Our congregation’s Climate Action Working Group (CAWG) therefore makes Massachusetts state legislation a major focus.

For two years, a coalition of more than 200 organizations called Mass Power Forward has advocated for legislative measures that would put us on a path toward a green economy, while equitably sharing the burdens and opportunities that come with change, providing a just transition for those currently employed in the fossil fuels industry, and ensuring that communities most impacted by climate deterioration have a say in how changes are made. After many months of delays interspersed with flurries of activity, the Massachusetts House and Senate passed a wide-reaching climate protection bill right at the end of the 2019-2020 legislative session.

The content of this compromise bill was (as usual) hashed out in a back-room process that gave the public no insight into legislators’ positions on various elements that had been proposed. The bill does not get us where we need to go as quickly as we need to get there, but it does provide major progress in several areas. It would promote environmental justice, accelerate development of clean energy in Massachusetts, and create a “net-zero stretch building code.” That stretch-code provision allows communities to adopt climate-friendly building codes and is essential for meeting Arlington's commitment to achieve net-zero emissions of climate-damaging greenhouse gases by 2050.

Governor Baker vetoed the bill in early January. There were enough bill supporters in both the House and the Senate to override a veto, but the 2019-2020 session had ended.



An identical bill was filed in the new legislative session and, during the last week of January, the bill was passed again with supermajorities in the House and the Senate, and again it has gone to the governor.

Gov. Baker has indicated that he intends to send this bill back to the legislature with proposed amendments that would weaken some of its provisions, including the net-zero stretch building code. Our next challenge is to encourage legislators to vote down his proposed amendments and, if he then vetoes the bill, to encourage them to override his veto. At that point, we can start working on priorities for the 2021-2022 legislative session. The Mass Power Forward coalition has been engaged in a collective discernment process and will soon begin to publicize those priorities. Please feel free to contact us at climateaction@firstparish.info.

— The steering committee of the Climate Action Working Group

Issues of Racial Justice

In early December the Racial Justice Coordinating Committee (RJCC) hosted “Policing, Identity and our Theological Commitments,” a discussion that provided an opportunity for members of the First Parish community to gather and share our thoughts on this important topic. We continued our exploration of policing in January, when we launched a six-week series co-facilitated by Rev. Erica Richmond and Rev. Bill Gardiner, using the book *The End of Policing* as a launchpad for reflection and discussion. While this book presents a particular perspective on policing (hence the title), and one that not all agree with, it has been helpful as a tool for us to share our reactions and diversity of viewpoints on this complicated issue. We will provide an update on this program when it ends in February, as well as a preview of RJCC programs for March through June.

Later this month, the RJCC will host an interactive workshop on cultural appropriation. Please join us on Sunday, February 21, from 3 to 4:15 pm.

The session will explore how this issue shows up in our congregation and in our own lives, and will address these questions:

- What is cultural appropriation and why does it matter?
- What 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 ourselves and others when we do not wrestle with the distinction between appropriation and appreciation?

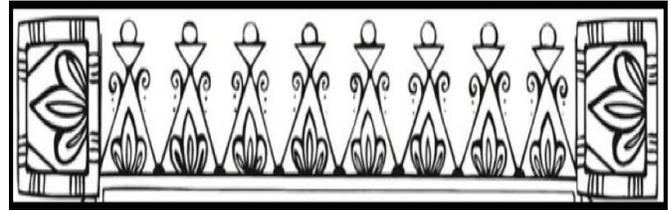
All are invited. To participate use this link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88693245449>

Finally, we share in grieving with our neighbors in Belmont over the killing of Henry Tapia in an apparent racially motivated road-rage incident. It is a horrible reminder of the extent to which racism exists in our communities, and our need to educate ourselves and confront these pervasive problems. Please visit the Belmont Against Racism website (<https://belmontagainstracism.org/>) for more information, upcoming events, and ways to donate to support the Tapia family.

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

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



Reading African American History

Few of us could have foreseen the recent growth in awareness of racial injustice in this country. Following the unconscionable murder of George Floyd and nationwide protests, books about racial justice have crowded the bestseller lists. Though public interest waxes and wanes, the imperative to learn remains constant, and we are fortunate at First Parish to have many books that you can borrow to learn and grow. We have histories, memoirs, biographies, novels, short stories, analysis, sociology, and books for children and teens! Thanks to wonderful donations in recent months, we have even more books than we had when last we were together in our building.

Here's a tiny sample:

For grades 3 to 5, *The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales*

For grades 6 to 8, *Voice of Freedom: Fannie Lou Hamer*

For Arlington's upcoming Community Read, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*

For dipping into history without committing to a whole book, *Freedom's Daughters: The Unsung Heroines of the Civil Rights Movement from 1830 to 1970* and *Voices in Our Blood: America's Best on the Civil Rights Movement*.

For a full list of our library collection, to borrow a book, or to ask questions, please e-mail racialjustice@firstparish.info, or contact me directly via my e-mail address in the Realm database. With the help of Sara DeLong in the church office, we will retrieve the books you want, then e-mail you to arrange for a contactless drop-off or pickup.

– Mary Fusoni

ParSnips

Tending to Our Community

The Parish Committee (ParCom) is looking for input from the congregation on which types of communication are most useful, where there may be gaps in communication, and preferences about future communication, especially regarding returning to in-person worship. To support this work, we launched an on-line survey during the January 31 service that is still available on our church website at www.firstparish.info/survey/. Please respond by February 21 if you have not already done so. Thanks for sharing your thoughts on this important topic.

As we prepare for our Stewardship Campaign, here is an update on our financial status. First Parish had a very strong first half of the year, despite the technical challenges of remote services and gatherings, the emotional challenges of isolation and loss, and the financial challenges that some in our congregation have faced. We are thankful for the careful planning and generosity of the community that raised our Second Minister Fund two years ago. This fund helps support our new Parish Minister, Rev. Erica Richmond. Also, the quick action of our office managers and the Parish Committee secured a

Paycheck Protection Program loan, now fully forgiven, which added nearly \$50,000 to this year's funds.

We are grateful to our staff and committees, who tightened their belts a little during this difficult year. And most of all, we're very thankful for the continued strong support of our community. ParCom expects our finances to remain strong, and to end the fiscal year in June on budget.

While our Sanctuary has been bereft of worshippers, it became a secure home for FoodLink. They should be able to move into their new building on Summer Street this month. It has been our pleasure to share our meetinghouse with an organization that works tirelessly to get food to those who would otherwise go without. They paid us a small rental fee, which covered

expenses and helped our budget. We are also happy to have Red Cross blood drives back in our building. While we haven't been able to use our space to come together, it has been good to be able to use it to live our mission.

– Celia Wcislo, Clerk



Reflections

The Wishing Shell

While eating a bowl of macaroni and cheese, Lucas, whom I babysit, picked up one of the slippery shells and announced that it was a "wishing shell." Okay, I thought, this is a fun make-a-wish game.

"I wish we had a piano in the living room," he said.

"I don't understand," I said. "There already is a piano in the living room."

"Exactly," he replied. "That's why I wished for it!"

What an ingenious way for a seven-year-old to feel in control of his environment! If he wished for what he already had, he would definitely get his wish. But it also seemed like a nugget of wisdom about life – like a

variation on the old Crosby, Stills and Nash lyric, "If you can't be with the one you love, love the one you're with." That is, if you wish for something that you already have, you won't be disappointed.

But if you never look beyond what is present now, you'll never move onto something bigger and better – right? Perhaps. But I think wishing for what you already have feels like a practice in gratitude. I wish I had a quiet and calm apartment to myself. I wish I had warm and loving friends. I wish I had delicious food to eat. I wish I could walk through the woods whenever I want. I wish I could sing and dance. And guess what? All my wishes have come true!

– Lynn Rosenbaum

Learning New Tricks

A year of isolation has meant sorrow and suffering for many, but there are some silver linings. In my case I have been jostled out of comfortable ruts and forced to grow as a performer.

For many years I have sung in large rooms, often without amplification, projecting to reach the folks in the back. I seldom use microphones for historical shows, as they clash with my period attire and subject matter. I am also in several groups where projecting is part of the style; even while singing softly you must blend and be heard.

When my performing switched exclusively to Zoom, these habits were all wrong. Singing loudly, and especially playing instruments vigorously, overwhelms the technology. My live-in tech guy has upgraded my mic, but I still have to scale everything back.

I gradually developed a much more intimate style. Everyone has a seat up front, unless they wander off to get a cup of tea or tend to a toddler. Rows of Zoom boxes are my new normal, and I enjoy the freedom to include much more softness in my shows.

Along with softness came a need to slow down, as Zoom video is easily overloaded by rapid movements. Once again, instincts honed over decades were no longer useful. My historical programs are stuffed with great material that doesn't fit easily into the standard one-hour slot, so I am always leaving things out in the interest of time. This has prompted me to speak and perform at a sprightly tempo to get more in. I have been working on slowing down, and find that I really enjoy being able to take my time and not be so concerned about exactly when the concert will be over.

I am very familiar with how I sound, having recorded hundreds of songs. But before Zoom I seldom watched myself perform. Discoveries abounded. There was swaying, which is fine during a song but not so desirable while speaking. There were obsessive adjustments of hats and hair and clothing and glasses. I have worked on reducing these habits and am happier with the way I come across on camera.

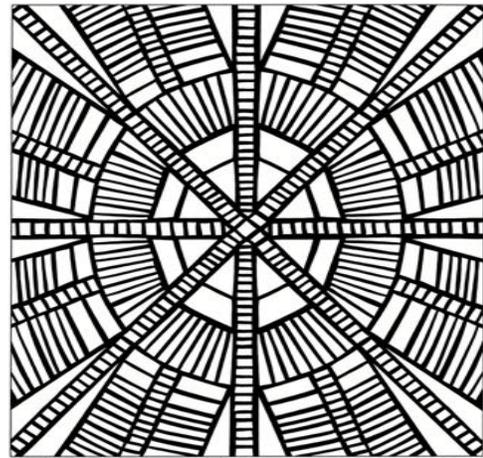
Then there's the temptation to watch the people in the boxes, gaining human contact I miss in my seclusion. But I have to look *into my camera*, a tiny thing perched atop a mic stand. I am getting better at smiling warmly at a block of plastic.

Another absorbing activity has been creating programs with various themes, learning new songs, or trying out songs I know but have never performed. Sometimes a

simple-sounding song turns out to be beyond my instrumental abilities (Buddy Holly's "Everyday" has a bridge from hell). But often a great song fits perfectly on the dulcimer (I am currently *in love* with Bobby Darin's "Dream Lover") or forces me to learn a new progression on the guitar.

All this is no doubt excellent exercise for my aging brain. I hope you, too, have found some silver linings that provide growth and comfort in this strange, isolating time.

– Diane Taraz Shriver, *Spire* Editor



The Fan Room is located off the stairway to the balcony, behind a locked door. Inside lurk the bulky mysteries of the equipment that heats and ventilates our building.

According to fire regulations, *nothing* is to be stored in the Fan Room. Of course, in the 30-odd years that your *Spire* editor has been traipsing around First Parish, that room has *always* been full of stuff.

Once upon a time a great deal of Fan Room space was taken up by an architect's model of the fifth meetinghouse, on a huge table encased in heavy glass. It was not even accurate, as changes had been made between planning and construction. Tidiers conferred with several people, who all said it should be kept, but none of them could provide a good reason to do so. Off it went, and no one has mentioned it again.

We are doing better these days, but I'm afraid we will never conform to the regulations. We have so little storage space at First Parish that items used only once or twice a year inevitably wind up there.

So now you know about the Fan Room. Please try not to put anything up there!



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, March 7
Submissions due by Sunday, February 28
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