

Next issue deadline
Sunday, January 31

The Spire

JANUARY 3, 2021

THE FIRST SUNDAY RECORD

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

The Alliance Doubles Down

The First Parish Women's Alliance plans to donate twice as much to help women and families.

The Alliance is a fellowship and service organization whose members offer programs and sponsor an annual Sunday service. They financially support First Parish and nonprofits that provide services to women and families. These donations are possible because the Alliance has its own trust fund from gifts given since the 1800s by women of First Parish.

In our second three-year giving plan, Alliance members enthusiastically voted to more than double our annual giving, up to \$13,500, to these local, national, and global organizations:



\$1,800 to the First Parish operating budget.

\$750 to our Youth Group, for camp scholarships, service trips, and the like.

> Locally, \$4,900 to groups based in Arlington:

- The Children's Room, for grief support.
- Respond, Inc., focusing on domestic violence.
- The Arlington Youth Counseling Center, which offers mental-health services.
- The Housing Corporation of Arlington, which aims to prevent homelessness.
- Families for Justice and Healing, which works to end the incarceration of women and girls.
- Women's Health Services.
- The Mass Transgender Political Coalition, focused on issues that affect LGBTQ people.

> **On the national level, \$2,300** to Everytown for Gun Safety, which works on violence prevention; to RAICES, which provides immigrant legal services; and to NARAL, a pro-choice advocacy group.

> **On the global level, \$3,000** to the UU Service Committee and to MADRE, which supports women's rights.

> **An additional \$750** in discretionary funds, to be approved by the Alliance board.

Alliance members also support the UU Women's Federation and its grant-making program through their dues of \$35 per year. Membership is open to all women, and our programs are open to everyone in the First Parish community.

To find out more about the Alliance or to join us at one of our programs, please visit our page on the church website, at <https://firstparish.info/ways-to-get-involved/womens-alliance/>

– Louise Strayhorn, The Alliance

When is the deadline for *The Spire*?



(answer on page 3)

Our Vital Blood Drives Continue

- > Wednesday, January 6, 11 am to 4 pm
- > Saturday, January 16, 8 am to 1 pm

We need help with setup and cleanup, taking donor temperatures at the door, and on-line check in. We should have touch-free forehead thermometers by then! To donate, please make an appointment in advance. Visit blooddrives@firstparish.info. Thank you!

– John Hodges

Musical Offerings

On Saturday, January 23, Diane Taraz will present “Songs of the Sea” at 7:30 pm. Enjoy sing-along chanteys, thrilling ballads, and fascinating true stories of life on the bounding main. Contact Diane for the Zoom link, at diane@dianetaraz.com.



On Thursday, January 28, at 7 pm, Charles Overton will play jazz, classical, and contemporary works on harp. Charles made his First Parish debut with us on Music Sunday. For the Zoom link, contact music@firstparish.info or visit the Music events page on our church website, www.firstparish.info.

The Challenges of Stewardship

Last year’s Stewardship Campaign asked us to **Leap Forward**, and 2020 ended up demanding every last bit of spiritual agility we had. The pandemic challenged us in deep, heart-wrenching ways, and an election of almost unimaginable rancor put us through an emotional wringer.

We are comforted by the fact that our community came through those trials united in our determination to lean on each other for spiritual sustenance. Using social-connection tools, we flocked to virtual services that allow us to see the faces we miss so much. In breakout rooms we laughed and shared our joys and sorrows. We also joyfully welcomed our second minister, Rev. Erica Richmond. In a word, we sparkled, showing the hardiness that has kept First Parish alive here in Arlington for hundreds of years.

Conscious of these successes, yet aware that more challenges await, your Stewardship Committee will launch our 2021 campaign on February 28 with a three-week pledge drive. Our theme is **Together, Stronger Still**. Details will come soon, but we look forward to honoring the donors and benefactors who kept our spiritual home humming over the past year. We will work toward further growth and rejuvenation to keep our community strong. As our mission statement says: “Called to love and upheld by joy, we live our faith.”

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

Pies, Phones, and Postcards

Usually, when summer is on the wane, the Social Justice Committee starts focusing on the Pie Palace, our annual Town Day fundraiser in September that supports our social justice work. Committee members walk around during coffee hour with clipboards and signs to get commitments from folks to work the booth, bake pies, or help with setup or breakdown. We usually collect some 100 pies, which we sell in slices to people who don’t mind waiting in the inevitable line that forms. In 2018 and 2019 we made about \$3,000.

In this unusual year we discussed various options but decided to postpone until the spring of 2021. Then we heard from church members who *really* wanted to have some version of Pie Palace happen in the fall.

We decided to sell whole pies for \$30. We got commitments from the many excellent bakers at First Parish, advertised them on Realm for a couple of weeks, and opened it up to buyers. All 54 pies sold by the Saturday before Thanksgiving and earned \$1,600.



We got lucky with a day that hit 60 degrees, enabling us to have contactless pickup outside the library-side door. The pies were gorgeous and we heard that many folks could not wait for Thanksgiving to eat them. We also had to turn away several passers-by who asked if they could buy a pie. One man was disappointed but made a \$20 donation after he heard about the social justice causes that we were funding.

The most important of those activities during 2020 was the huge effort to send postcards and make calls to get out the vote and educate people about early voting. This effort continues as several of our “Jewels of Justice” folks joined a National UU The Vote phonebank for the Georgia Senate runoffs, was co-sponsored by UUSJ and UU Mass Action. Callers had fallen off significantly after the general election, but the 25 UUs from Massachusetts helped raise the number to 100. Many thanks for all who joined that effort or continue to make calls at home.

If you would like to make calls together or on your own, please contact Mary Cummings at socialjustice@firstparish.info.

– Maureen Dolan and Mary Cummings
Chairs, Social Justice Committee

Facing the Mess with *Active Hope*

Are we in the midst of a Great Turning toward a just and sustainable society – or are we heading toward extinction and collapse? How do you live your life in the midst of such uncertainty? We will explore these questions on four Mondays beginning February 8, through the book *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in Without Going Crazy* by Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone.

Active Hope puts our times into perspective. It supports us to honor all our emotions, including the painful ones, and challenges us to act. *Active Hope* is about finding and offering our best response to the complex situations unfolding in our world.

Drawing on decades of teaching an empowerment approach known as the Work That Reconnects, the authors of *Active Hope* guide us through a transformational process informed by modern psychology, spirituality, mythic journeys, and holistic science. This process equips us with tools to face the mess we're in and become more nourished, energized, empowered, and inspired to act for life on Earth. You can find out more about *Active Hope* here: <https://www.activehope.info/contents.html>

We will read through this accessibly written 288-page book over our four sessions, trying some of the activities and practices. We request that you commit to all four weeks of this group, which will meet from 7 to 8:30 pm. Our leader is Anne Goodwin, a certified

facilitator of the Work That Reconnects, a climate activist, and a long-time member of First Parish.

Please get the book and read the first chapter before the first meeting. It can be found in the Minuteman Library system or ordered on-line from Porter Square Books at www.portersquarebooks.com.

To register, please e-mail star@firstparish.info.

– Monique Chaplin,
STAR Adult Education Committee

The Spire comes out on the first Sunday of each month, and the deadline is one week before that, anytime the previous Sunday. For your convenience the next month's deadline appears at the top right of the first page of every issue.

There is a lot of leeway in this deadline, but your editor likes to keep it officially a full week before. This allows for unforeseen circumstances, and lets the forgetful beg for mercy, which your editor nearly always grants. It makes her feel benevolent and bountiful and kind.

A few items can arrive late without consequences, but if everything comes in too long after the deadline the task becomes onerous. Your editor enjoys the process and would like it to remain as stress-free as possible, so please try to honor the one-week-before-the-first-Sunday deadline.

ParSnips

Many Questions to Ponder

The Parish Committee (ParCom) would like to wish all of you a safe and happy New Year! Many of us are relieved that 2020 is over. We look forward to a new vaccine, a new president, and a short winter.

ParCom does not plan to start in-person services before May 2021 because of the continuing spread of the virus. In preparation, we are having our ventilation system evaluated, and we hope to improve it for the building and offices before all staff return.

ParCom task forces are working with other committees on these issues:

- **Services in the “new normal”:** How might our services be different? Should we consider ways to enable virtual participation after a return to the

building, as a permanent or temporary feature? What seating arrangements will make people feel safe? When will children return to their RE classes in the building? How might we modify our rituals?

- **New technology:** Will changes in how we worship require new technology? What would we need, what would it cost, and what is reasonable to expect from our volunteers?
- **Communications:** We plan to survey the congregation about which type of communications they prefer, and where gaps may exist. Please watch for a survey sometime in early to mid-January and respond to us. The more responses, the better our decisions will be.

Budget planning for 2021-2022 has begun, as we prioritize spending needs. Our current budget is

holding up well, supported by the Second Minister Fund and a Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan of \$90,000, which has been forgiven.

The PPP loan has been a lifesaver for First Parish, allowing us to keep our full staff employed, including those who work only on Sunday mornings, through the rest of the church year. It also provides a cushion to manage future loss of income. Knowing that the effects of the pandemic will extend far beyond this year, our 20-21 budget included only half of this

amount, saving the remainder for next year. Please join me in giving our heartfelt thanks to Joan Dyer, Steve McMullin, and Sara Hidalgo for their quick action in securing the loan and staying on top of the forgiveness process.

Here's to a happier and brighter 2021!

– Celia Wcislo, Parish Clerk

Reflections

Mysterious Time

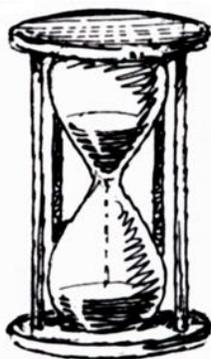
Nowadays people seem to fall into two camps: those whose work continues and has intensified into a stressful, all-consuming Zoomfest, and those whose work came to a screeching halt and now have *way* too much time on their hands, which is stressful in a different way. I fall into the second category, and have been musing on the mysterious nature of time.

I was 10 when my younger brother was born, and I recall thinking, “When he is 10, I will be 20, and when he is 20, I will be 30.” My young brain could not conceive of ever being older than 30, so my calculations ended there. But, sure enough, we have passed these numbers.

Throughout my youth, the year 2000 loomed in the distance. I calculated that I would be 43 when the digits of the year changed so drastically – another impossible age for me to wrap my mind around. But, sure enough, after several decades it came time to end a millennium.

On New Year's Eve 1999 I performed at First Night in Boston. When my shows ended at around 11:30 I jumped into a cab and cried, “Get me to Arlington by midnight!” The chatty driver, who turned out to be an Arlington native, was happy to speed through the deserted streets as the magic hour approached.

We made it, and John and I woke up our six-year-old daughter to witness midnight. We figured she might remember if we didn't and hold it against us for life. She sleepily watched the countdown and the descent of the glittery ball in Times Square, then went back to bed. I don't think she remembers, so we are safe.



As one ages, time goes by faster and faster. For a child a year is an eternity, but now I buy five-year calendars and book events far in advance. The months gallop by, and the seasons pass at an ever-brisker pace.

John and I agree that time has both dragged *and* flown by during our months in quarantine. Just before everything shut down, I was diagnosed with an immune-system condition, so I have stayed home while he ventures out for supplies and scrubs vigorously upon his return. His work has continued essentially unchanged, except that his “office” is now our living room. He misses interacting with his workmates in person, but enjoys the intellectual stimulation of collaborating with others every day.

I am grateful that I am essentially a solo performer, so concerts have been able to continue on a regular basis, though not at the pace to which I am accustomed. But all group rehearsals have ended, a sad adjustment. I miss my fellow UUulations. I have continued to Zoom with the Lexington Historical Society Colonial Singers, and my Renaissance group Vox Lucens has managed to *almost* sing together with something called Soundjack, but it is not the same.

I am so grateful to John for upgrading my concert setup, with a good mic and camera. He has been, quite literally, a lifesaver, keeping me safe and relatively sane during these months. I suppose this is a good test of our relationship, and it seems to be just fine.

My mood has improved with light at the end of the vaccine tunnel. It is very hard to deal with a situation that has no scheduled end, but we can now envision resuming our lives sometime not too long from now.

May your time in this new year pass in a good way.

– Diane Taraz Shriver
Spire Editor



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The Spire

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Items may be edited for space and clarity.

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