

Next issue deadline  
Sunday, September 6

# The Spire

JUNE 7, 2020

THE FIRST SUNDAY RECORD

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## Fighting for Electoral Justice

At least 17 million voters were purged from voter rolls nationwide between 2016 and 2018, according to a study by the Brennan Center for Justice. Efforts to disenfranchise voters have increased in number and stringency in 2019 and 2020.

People of color are the primary target of these purges and other insidious methods of voter suppression, including unreasonably strict voter-ID laws, cutting voting times, closing polling places, restrictive registration, and voter intimidation. Visit the websites of the ACLU or the Brennan Center for Justice to learn more.

The Unitarian Universalist Association has activated thousands of Unitarian Universalists to mobilize for electoral justice through their “UU The Vote” initiative. From First Parish, 32 of us have been fighting voter suppression by working with nonpartisan organizations, especially Reclaim Our Vote (ROV). We have sent 1,500 postcards warning eligible voters that they might have been taken off state voter rolls, and telling them how to check their registration and re-register if necessary. We have also sent 200 postcards encouraging Georgia voters to vote early and by mail in their primary election. Some of us are also working with VoteForward, writing “Get Out the Vote” letters that will be sent in swing states in October.

Reclaim Our Vote is an amazingly effective nonpartisan action group. In December 2017, calls from their phone bank helped increase turnout

among rural voters of color by 35 percent in the Alabama special Senate election. In 2018, teaming up with Black Voters Matter, they made 185,000 calls to Georgia voters for the midterms; about 65 percent of those calls resulted in votes. In 2019, 20 to 25 percent of their postcards sent to nine counties in

North Carolina resulted in a voter registration.

This year, ROV plans to expand its volunteer base and work toward a 20-percent increase among voters of color in at least four states, and a significant percentage increase in others. So far they have sent out 1.3 million postcards to eligible voters of color for the 2020 election.

ROV is now transitioning from voter registration to getting out the vote, and there will be a pause in sending postcards until the middle or end of June, when they will contact registered voters and encourage them to vote, especially by mail when possible. In the meantime, they need people to make phone calls to promote

voting in the Georgia primary election on June 9. E-mail [phonebanks@reclaimourvote.org](mailto:phonebanks@reclaimourvote.org) for their newest training materials, and for Georgia-specific voting information.

Few people like to receive political phone calls, and few like to make them, but this election is so critical, and the extent of voter suppression so vast, that many of us are picking up our phones to fight for electoral justice. We will host virtual phone banks and writing parties later in June. Imagine a phone bank in which all other callers are muted!



## Here are some resources to explore, with links:

*Suppressed: The Fight to Vote.* A 40-minute documentary by Brave New Films that focuses on Georgia in 2018.

<https://vimeo.com/361900677>

Discussion Guide from *Suppressed: The Fight to Vote*  
[https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/bravenew/pages/13859/attachments/original/1569286428/Suppressed\\_Action\\_Guide.pdf?1569286428](https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/bravenew/pages/13859/attachments/original/1569286428/Suppressed_Action_Guide.pdf?1569286428)

*Rigged: The Voter Suppression Handbook*  
A 10-minute excerpt focusing on North Carolina.

<https://vimeo.com/313224930>

*Rigged: The Voter Suppression Handbook.*  
The full film covers the national situation; you can stream it on Amazon Prime.

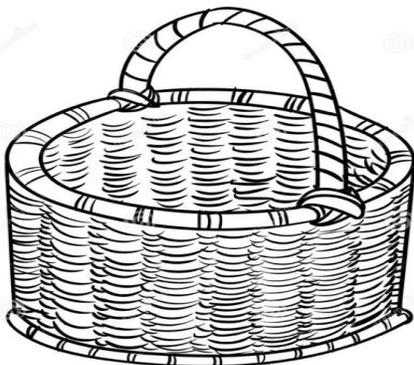
<https://www.riggedthefilm.com/?fbclid=IwAR05p3-S6gL2zWwdwlg4vpalcsu8weO-QLndUI9hQFRjMauKevB1DRkLChg>

*Voting Restrictions by State.*  
A map of suppression in 25 states since 2010, from the Brennan Center for Justice.

<https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/new-voting-restrictions-america>

Many thanks to our heroic postcard-senders: Andrea Winslow, Andrew Leonard, Ann Mathes, Anne Goodwin, Anne Wright, Annie Hewitt, Carolyn Hodges, Chloë Briedé, Clarissa Rodriguez, Ebonie Smith-Cooper, Elizabeth Blumenthal, Elizabeth Hunter, Emily Farmer, Freda Flammer, Jen Birenbach, Jennifer Smith, Joanne Pohl, Kate Lenox, Kate Tranquada, Kiki Giatis, Leslie Lewis, Linda Hanson, Liz Blumenthal, Lois Fine, Lynn Rosenbaum, Maggie Schramm, Marilyn Jackson, Mary Breen, Mary Fusoni, Maureen Dolan, P. J. Gardner, and Sharen Leonard. I apologize if I left out anyone.

– Mary Cummings, Co-Chair  
Social Justice Committee



## A Grateful Farewell to Chloë Briedé

With both gratitude and sadness we say goodbye to Chloë Briedé, our intern minister for the past year. What a year it's been!

We've gotten to know Chloë well – her kind heart, her calming smile, and her many gifts of ministry. She accompanied us as we entered the Zoom era, providing support (both technical and emotional!) and engaging us in new ways to help us continue to feel connected. We will dearly miss her warm presence and the many gifts she has brought to us.

On behalf of the Ministerial Intern Committee, and the entire congregation, we wish her all the best on her ministerial journey, and we feel lucky to have been a part of it.

Here are some thoughts from Chloë about her experience with us.

**Intern Committee (IC):** What has been the most rewarding aspect of your time here?

**Chloë (C):** First, I want to thank everyone at First Parish for letting me spend the church year learning with you all. I am especially grateful to the Intern Committee for providing guidance and support through the process.

By far the most rewarding part of my time has been getting to spend time with the people who make up this community. I have really enjoyed getting to know each and every one of you. You are smart, funny, generous, kind, and spiritual. Thank you for inviting me into your lives, letting me perform funerals and weddings for you, and sharing so much with me. I will miss this community.

**IC:** What have you learned?

**C:** I have learned a lot! First Parish is a healthy and vibrant congregation. Much of what I learned came from observing such a well-functioning community. I loved getting to participate in meaningful justice work, a fun and vibrant music program, energetic religious education, and deeply spiritual worship.

There is no secret to what makes First Parish vital and successful. We do our best to continually engage the community and our members in events and projects that have meaning and work for justice. This quality programming and the efforts of everyone are what make a difference. I have learned how to engage people in meaningful work, and I will take that with me to other congregations.

**IC:** What are you most proud of?

**C:** The pandemic was the biggest thing that happened during my internship year. I am proud of my work with the First Parish tech team and with Spirit Talks. They both provided an opportunity for me to take leadership and make a difference during this difficult time. I will always remember how First Parish pulled together during this crisis.

**IC:** What did you find challenging?

**C:** I am continually working on being a more spiritually minded person. I am grateful that Marta, a trained Spiritual Director, was my mentor for this year. She constantly reminded me to ask deeper spiritual questions both in my pastoral encounters and in my sermons.

**IC:** You have offered us wonderful prayers over the months. What is your prayer for us moving forward?

**C:** First Parish, I send you prayers of gratitude for the support and love you showed me through this internship. I send you prayers of love during this time of pandemic. I hope you know you are doing important work, and I hope that you continue to support each other through the grief of this time. Finally, I send prayers of hope for next year and for your new ministry with Erica. You will do great work together! May it be so. Amen.

**IC:** What will First Parish's relationship be with you in the future?

**C:** Sadly, my ministry with First Parish is over, and the guidelines for ministers specify that I should minimize my presence and influence in the congregation after I leave. You will be in the capable hands of Marta and Erica, and you should go to them with all of your future ministerial needs.

I will miss you all, and I will think of this community often.

Please know that you have greatly shaped the future of my ministry.

**IC:** What's next for you?

**C:** Starting in August, I will be the Interim Director of Religious Education at Old Ship Church (UU) in Hingham, Mass. Their longtime DRE is retiring, and they have asked me



to help them navigate that transition. I will also help them plan their RE program. I am grateful that Tina Schultz has been such a good mentor; I will bring a lot of what I learned at First Parish to Old Ship.

**IC:** You recently got a dog. What's the funniest thing he's done so far?

**C:** I got Dobby halfway through my internship. He is a tri-colored rat terrier mix. He has been a wonderful companion to me and my partner during the pandemic. It's hard to pick the funniest thing, but I love when he gets a new toy. He gallops around the house with pride, showing off his new item. So cute!

**IC:** We thank you for your service to us, Chloë! We will miss your loving presence.

**C:** Thank you for having me. I will truly miss First Parish.

– The Ministerial Intern Committee:  
Sanjay Newton, Mara Prentiss, Cindy Tavilla,  
John Shriver, and Tina Silberman

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## Our New Parish Minister

Thank you to everyone who tuned in to Zoom church on Sunday, May 3, to welcome our soon-to-be Parish Minister Rev. Erica Richmond to the pulpit! We were especially gratified by how many of you stayed afterwards for the Q&A, as was Rev. Erica. She has thoroughly enjoyed getting to know us. Since then, she has taken part in several small-group introductions, including one with current and past Parish Committee members. Those sessions will continue in the weeks and months ahead, leading up to her formal start date in August.

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## Ferry Beach?

What is happening with First Parish's annual retreat at Ferry Beach in Saco, Maine, currently scheduled for October 2 to 4? The Ferry Beach Committee hoped to have an answer in time for this *Spire*, but due to the pandemic, we do not. Please check the retreat page on our church website for the latest information during the summer. The link is <https://firstparish.info/ways-to-get-involved/seeking-community/ferry-beach/>

– The Ferry Beach Committee

# ParSnips

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## Ending a Church Year Like No Other!

For the last few months, the Parish Committee (ParCom) has been consumed by issues related to the pandemic, and ways to keep our church thriving in these difficult times. Thanks to the dedication of our staff and the tech team led by Anne Quaadgras, we have successfully held many virtual services, along with dozens of smaller meetings. We actually have more people engaged, though at a distance, than we did before the viral outbreak.

Please check out this short video by Julius Pereli interviewing some of our members about First Parish: <https://youtu.be/VreFn2pO5DI>

One thing ParCom had to figure out was how to keep our congregation running within the restrictions of

our by-laws. We needed to hold an annual meeting by May 31, to re-elect officers and approve a budget. We did it! Our Zoom Annual Meeting included over 137 members, and another dozen guests listened in. We elected Marie Meteer, Tom Estabrook, and Paul Hollings to ParCom, and Katharine MacPhail as Moderator. Committee reports were received and next year's budget adopted.

We want to thank all the members, volunteers, and staff that allowed this to happen so smoothly. And we say a special goodbye to Chloë Briedé, our intern minister. ParCom believes she has done an outstanding job, and we wish her all the best!

— Celia Wcislo, Clerk

## Reflections

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### Decades of Musical Connection

Summer is nearly here. The sun still shines; the birds sing their ancient songs and raise the next generation. I cling fiercely to the comfort that provides, trying to maintain an even keel in the midst of storms.

Over the past several months I watched in dismay as all my performances were canceled and my weekly rehearsals stopped. Of course, I miss not just the singing, but the people I sang with: The UUlations, friends I have known for decades, through many changes in our lives. The First Parish Choir, in which I have sung for decades, through many directors, but always finding deep meaning in being part of the whole. Vox Lucens, the Renaissance group in which I have spent decades making timeless music and sharing the lives of a dozen fascinating fellow singers. And the Lexington Historical Society Colonial Singers, a group I have led for over a decade, a batch of quirky characters who love history and music as much as I do.

Praise be, Vox Lucens completed four recording sessions just before the shutdown. Listening to all the takes gave me a much-needed task, and finishing the project will provide focus and comfort. And *praise be*, I continue to perform. Friday evening Zoom concerts hosted by Lori Kenschaft have thrown me a lifeline

and let me spend hours creating new sets on various themes. Leading toddler sing-alongs on Tuesday mornings, hosted by Tina Schultz, always lifts my mood as I watch kiddos sing and dance, and distant grandparents gratefully soak in their little faces. I always include the Hokey Pokey so I can watch Tina's feet fill up her Zoom box.

In June I will "visit" Bidwell House in the Berkshires. For a decade I have opened their season, and this year will do so from home. I will don my Colonial-era garb, play my antique instruments, and rejoice that, at least in this case, the show will go on.

I also plan to make a recording of songs to be offered at Star Island. After the loss of performing and rehearsing, the canceling of the Star Island season has been the most painful thing to bear. John and I have gone there *every* August for over two decades. This year we will be home in August, and probably for even longer, as we are now defined as "old," and I am having treatment that weakens my immune system. So even as the rest of the community opens up, I am destined to remain at a distance.

Like many, as I struggle to stay afloat, I am so grateful for the life preservers tossed my way!

— Diane Taraz Shriver, Musician & 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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