

# The Spire

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## Queries for Yom Kippur

These questions were offered at our September 12 service by our lead minister, Rev. Marta Flanagan.

The Jewish New Year begins with Rosh Hashanah and ends ten days later with Yom Kippur. Rosh Hashanah marks the anniversary of creation. What a wondrous thing! Sweetness, apples and pomegranates and honey, and much delight!

But things quickly get complicated. On the sixth day, according to Hebrew tradition, Adam and Eve were placed in the garden, ate the fruit, were exiled, and were forgiven by God. This story, however fantastic, underscores the idea that creation cannot survive without forgiveness.



How do we experience renewal? The practices of the Jewish New Year tell us to look honestly at what we have done and our ways of being; consider and acknowledge how we have fallen short; make repair; and offer and receive forgiveness that all might begin again.

Yom Kippur is the holiest of the Jewish holidays. In synagogues and shuls the world over, people fast, engage in contemplation and confession, and seek forgiveness and renewal. To mark Yom Kippur I offer questions as an invitation to examine ourselves, a spiritual practice. When one strikes you, linger with

it, turn it over in your heart, and let your thoughts wander in reflection.

At our service, after the last question, we heard the traditional song *Avinu Malkeinu*. Roughly translated, it means, “Let us bring forth all that we are. Let us become more loving and just, setting free the divine spirit within us.” And so we begin this self-examination, the process of renewal:

Have I harmed another?  
Have I acknowledged the damage I have done?  
Have I offered a word or an act of reparation?  
  
Have I forgiven those who have harmed me?  
Have I seen in the other what is worthy as well as what is not? Have I examined my part?

Have I neglected another person or people in need?  
Have I spoken of others with respect?  
Have I spoken up when needed?  
Have I kept quiet when wise?

Have I welcomed the stranger, one unlike myself?  
Have I opened my heart to one I consider “other” —  
one much richer, much poorer than I;  
more educated, less educated than I;  
one who votes differently, thinks differently than I?

Have I been tender toward those I know?  
Have I remembered the good in them?  
Have I let go of what is unimportant?

Have I engaged in healthy living?  
Have I consumed what I need and no more?

Have I grown? Has my heart softened?  
Has my mind engaged something new?

Do I know awe, joy, peace?  
Do I know I am the recipient of many gifts in life?  
Have I given thanks?

Do I pay attention? Do I speak with love?  
Do I act swiftly with kindness?  
Do I move with patience, avoiding the hurried way?  
Do I turn when called?

*Avinu malkeinu*, we bring forth all that we are.

## Fatherly Love

From Saturday, October 2 through Tuesday, October 5, we can view the beautiful documentary *A Father's Kaddish*, offered to the community on-line by Lay Ministry.

*A Father's Kaddish* tells the story of how Steven Branfman used the art of pottery to help him work through his grief after the death of his 23-year-old son. The film is a moving journey through the universal experiences of loss, mourning, and rebuilding a life.

On Tuesday, October 5, please join us for a Q&A session with Steven Branfman and the film's director/producer, Jen Kaplan. We will gather via Zoom at 7 pm.

The film and the Q&A require registration. If you haven't done so already, please e-mail [RSVP@firstparish.info](mailto:RSVP@firstparish.info).

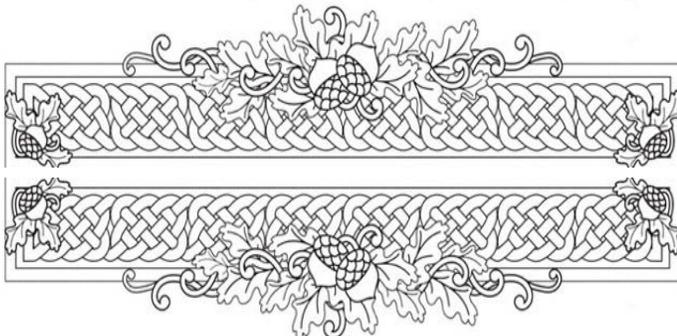
– Caryn Sandrew, on behalf of Lay Ministry

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## Giving First: Hope for Haiti

On August 14, an earthquake in Haiti killed over 2,200 people and injured more than 12,000. The nation had not fully recovered from a 2010 earthquake and has been struggling with political upheaval. Because the need is so urgent, the Social Justice Committee voted to change our Giving First schedule to send our October donations to Hope for Haiti, an organization of "Haitians Helping Haitians."

Hope for Haiti has three decades of experience in southern Haiti and is well-positioned to use the best available resources. Their team lives and works in the communities they serve; they are Haitian doctors, nurses, program managers, and others dedicated to improving their own country. In addition to trauma care and general health care at their clinic, which was partially damaged, they distribute critical supplies such as food, water filters, matches, candles, tents, and tarps. These micro-distributions are an example of work that ensures the most vulnerable receive help.



## Welcoming New Neighbors

The ArCS cluster, a group of volunteers centered at First Parish, is coordinating with other nonprofits to support Afghan refugees coming to Massachusetts, part of the more than 100,000 people who have sought safety since the government fell.

After screening at U.S. military bases around the world, people will be flown to re-settlement sites. We will help these newcomers secure housing, settle kids in school, find jobs, and deal with the many details of moving across the globe. We expect individuals and families to start making it to Massachusetts over the next few weeks or months.

In the meantime, we are gearing up – recruiting volunteers, making plans, and raising money. If you would like to help, please see the options at our website, [ArCSCluster.org](http://ArCSCluster.org), or write to Eric Segal at [arccluster@firstparish.info](mailto:arccluster@firstparish.info).

If you think you might be able to provide housing, please write to us at [arcshousing@gmail.com](mailto:arcshousing@gmail.com) <http://arcshousing@gmail.com>. Note that we are not accepting material donations at this time.

Many people are seeking asylum in Massachusetts from all over the world, not just Afghanistan. We are hearing requests for help from Haitians, Egyptians, Central Americans, and many more. Everyone deserves a safe place to call home, so we will not be reducing or changing our commitment to all the other people we have been supporting, year in and year out. Please help us help them.

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## Books, Books, Books

First Parish's library has a million books on racial justice themes – well, maybe not that many, but a lot. To count them yourself, click "View the Collection" on our church website, at [firstparish.info/racial-justice/racial-justice-library/](http://firstparish.info/racial-justice/racial-justice-library/)

Keep scrolling to find thousands of books for children and teens – well, 70 at least!

We have novels, short stories, biographies, memoirs, history, sociology, and analysis for all ages. Forty new titles were added this summer. It makes me sad to think of them sitting unread on the shelves.

To borrow a book, email [rjlibrary@firstparish.info](mailto:rjlibrary@firstparish.info) and I will make it my life's mission to get it to you.

– Mary Fusoni

# ParSnips

## The Return to Worship Survey

Since our hasty move to Zoom services in March 2020, the Parish Committee has repeatedly discussed when and how we might return to in-person services. Our conversations have been robust as we weigh science, federal/state/local guidelines, and our desire to be with one another.

Our Communications survey in February 2021 provided lots of detail about the experience of virtual community and Covid considerations. Most respondents wanted to provide additional input on returning to worship through a dedicated survey. This aligned with the committee's goal to hear from as broad a representation of the congregation as feasible.

The resulting Return to Worship survey is on our website, at <https://firstparish.info/survey/>

It covers five broad areas:

- demographics, such as age and household composition, to understand if we are hearing from people across the congregation.
- vaccination status, to estimate the prevalence of fully vaccinated congregants.
- personal considerations in returning to in-person worship, to better understand what matters to individuals.
- feedback about support for potential requirements for attending in-person worship, such as distancing or vaccine attestation.
- past, current, and potential future attendance.

Please fill out the survey by October 5. It should only take about 10 minutes. We enthusiastically encourage everyone to respond to help inform important decisions as we work to bring our beloved community together safely.

— Sara Galantowicz, Parish Committee

## Reflections

### If You're Happy and You Know It

In 2020, on April 7, I began leading sing-alongs for babies and toddlers via Zoom. After some 60 sessions, it's time to bid farewell.

A particular reward of the last 17 months was giving several sets of grandparents the chance to visit with their grandchildren, some living in different states, and some in the same town but unable to gather. As some kids moved on to preschool and such, I received some lovely notes that made me feel very good about being able to *do something* to make a difficult time a little better.

I first started doing sing-alongs for the very young, newborn to about age four, when my daughter (now 27) was a toddler. I began at the Robbins Library, then rented the Calvary Church in East Arlington, where for years I drew an average of 60 kids and their caregivers.



I always have an entertaining view of the audience's participation, or lack thereof. Some kids just stare, but I often hear that those same kids later sing the songs all the way home. Many are not quite ready to clap or depict the eensy-weensy spider, but the adults are quite good at it, and their enthusiasm is thrilling.

One little boy was fascinated by my sound system, watching intently as I plugged mics and wound cords. I let him push the speaker button, and he carefully placed equipment in bags. For Christmas, his mom said, they bought him a mic stand.

After I retired from renting the church hall, I did single shows at local libraries, and still do now and then. A few years ago I tried to revive the sing-along at First Parish, but the time for attending a live event seems to have passed. Families are busy, and all my songs are available for streaming, anytime.

I'm sure I am not done with these ancient songs, little time-capsules that spring from our universal need to rhyme, dance, and sing — together.

Diane Taraz Shriver  
— Spire Editor



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## The Spire

Diane Shriver, Editor

Next issue: Sunday, November 7  
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*Items may be edited for space and clarity.*

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