

Next issue deadline
Sunday, October 3

The Spire

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THE FIRST SUNDAY RECORD

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

Into the Autumn

As you probably have heard, worship at First Parish will remain virtual through most of the fall. After our September 12 Ingathering service on Zoom, we will meet in person at an “Outgathering” held safely outdoors. The Parish Committee made that call at a special meeting on August 31.

With great hope back in May the committee voted to return in person for Ingathering. But the falling rate of infections as vaccination levels grew didn't last. We were sufficiently concerned that at our August 18 meeting we decided to require masks and have no food or drink served in the building so people could keep their masks on. At the time we thought these precautions would be sufficient.

But conditions continued to change: The Arlington Board of Health required masks in all indoor settings; the governor mandated vaccines for state employees; 15 area theaters (including the American Repertory Theater and the Huntington) announced they would require proof of vaccination at indoor shows; and the *Boston Globe* predicted a rise in death rates in Massachusetts. We called a special meeting on August 31 to reconsider.

This pattern of making hopeful decisions and having to change them isn't new. After moving services online in March 2020, in June we voted to return no earlier than November 1, then pushed that out to February 2021, then again to May 2021, and then finally until after Labor Day 2021, before picking Ingathering this fall as the return date. It's been exhausting, and at times discouraging.

The Parish Committee considers national guidance from the CDC, state and local restrictions, infections and death rates in Massachusetts by county, UUA guidelines, and feedback from the congregational survey we conducted in February. Our goal is always to make the best possible decision at the moment to keep our community safe.



We are extremely blessed to have Worship Associates and an amazing Tech Team who have made our online services really special. Our vibrant community has hung together, taken care of each other, and continued to live our values despite the challenges and uncertainty we each face.

We are also extremely blessed to have an incredible Property

Committee that has spent this last year and a half making our meetinghouse more beautiful by taking on many deferred projects, such as painting the Sanctuary, and prioritizing projects to improve safety:

- HEPA air purifiers in the bathrooms
- touchless faucets
- new HVAC in offices providing separate airflow
- windows in the Sanctuary and Vestry that open
- an engineering evaluation of airflow in the Sanctuary, Vestry, and Parlor

A contract has been signed to upgrade the Sanctuary ventilation system and parts have been ordered.

We will delay in-person services until early November to have time to get better information on how this latest surge will progress. This date gives our ministers

and Worship Associates time to plan for the change. Our Religious Education program will offer outdoor activities on Sunday mornings throughout the fall. We are also planning more opportunities like “Outgathering” to assemble outside this fall.

We would like to hear more from all of you on how and when we should return. We’re putting together a congregation-wide survey which will be followed by “town hall” meetings to discuss the results. We are a community and want to bring your voices into our decision process.

Thank you all for your patience and support as we navigate these uncertain times. The members of the Parish Committee so appreciate the incredible strength this community has shown throughout the pandemic. And we are so looking forward to putting this behind us and being back together in-person.

– Marie Meter, Chair,
for the Parish Committee:
Sara Galantowicz, Carolyn Hodges,
Celia Weislo, Tom Estabrook, Jeff Keffer,
Steve McMullin, Anne Quaadgras, and Al Tosti



Working Through Grief

Lay Ministry invites you to register to watch the half-hour documentary *A Father's Kaddish*. It will be shown online on Saturday, October 2, through Tuesday, October 5. The film tells the story of how a father used the art of pottery to help him work through his grief after the death of his 23-year-old son.

We will offer a Q&A with the subject of the film, Steven Branfman, and the director/producer, Jen Kaplan, via Zoom on Tuesday, October 5, at 7 pm.

To register, please e-mail RSVP@firstparish.infotext.

Reflections

Watching the Basket

We won't be in our Sanctuary for Ingathering after all, but we will mingle afterwards outside. We have learned by now that no plan is secure and changing conditions constantly affect our best intentions.



A quip ascribed to Mark Twain (but probably first said by Andrew Carnegie) notes that although the old proverb advises, “Don't put all your eggs in one basket,” you should in fact put all your eggs in one basket and then *watch that basket*.

Our church leadership has been watching our basket intently for a long time now, and surely are weary of the view. Their ability to rearrange our eggs time and time again is commendable and deserves our gratitude and gentleness.

Driving past the meetinghouse always makes me sad, wishing we could get back inside. But this issue's Parish Committee report shows that a lot is going on in there, and we must be patient and trust that our Sanctuary will be even better when the time is right.

A building cradling a community has stood on our corner for *hundreds* of years. We will come back.

– Diane Shriver
Editor



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The Spire

Diane Shriver, Editor

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If you do not have e-mail, contact the office.

The Spire generally deals with the big picture.
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