

Next issue deadline
Sunday, April 26

The Spire

APRIL 5, 2026

THE FIRST SUNDAY RECORD

VOL. 68, No. 10

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

Questions and Concerns

The Parish Committee, our governing board, would like to acknowledge the questions and concerns we are hearing about Rev. Erica's contract, which will end on June 30, 2027. Although previous communications on this matter have been shared, we acknowledge that reaching everyone is not easy. We hope this message provides additional clarity.

This is a period of transition and high emotion for our community, and many are feeling grief and apprehension. These responses are natural, and we ask for your grace and patience as we go through this transition together. Many congregations have navigated this process before us, and we are tapping their hard-won wisdom by following best practices suggested by the UUA (Unitarian Universalist Association). We will follow the recommendation that we consider the overall ministry more important than individual ministers.

Rev. Erica's contract as Parish Minister has always been tied to the settled ministry of First Parish. When she was hired in 2020 – in close collaboration with Rev. Marta Flanagan and the Second Minister Search Committee – her contract was tied to Marta's ministry. If Marta left, Rev. Erica was to submit a letter of resignation for the Parish Committee's consideration.

When Marta retired in June 2025, the Parish Committee voted to offer Rev. Erica a new short-term contract through the Interim Ministry period, ending June 30, 2027. During the summer of 2027, Rev. Jonipher will depart and our new settled Lead Minister is expected to start.

Our new Lead Minister should be involved with, and have significant input regarding, the hiring of any additional ministers.



This interim period allows the congregation to look at the bigger picture. The Transition Team is currently guiding the congregation through a process to define and prioritize our needs. The Settled Minister Search Committee will also help lead this work, which will:

- Identify our strengths, constraints, and possibilities.
- Inform which staffing model best fits First Parish at this time.
- Help shape our budget decisions.

Much remains unknown. There are many staffing models to consider – assistant minister, co-ministers, membership coordinator, etc. – and we must weigh administration demands.

It is also hard to predict our finances because healthcare costs are rising, the local economy is under stress, we need to replace the meetinghouse boiler, and we strive to competitively compensate our staff.

Finally, we want to give our new Lead Minister the space and flexibility to build their own fresh vision of ministry at First Parish, one aligned with the priorities and needs we identify during this time of discernment.

Earlier this year, Rev. Erica shared that she will not apply for the Lead Minister position. We know that the prospect of losing her is painful. She has been a true gift to this congregation – a steadfast leader for social justice, a compassionate pastoral presence, and a source of grace and humor. Both Rev. Erica and First

Parish are in a period of discernment and reflection. This process is all happening in real time. Rev. Erica will soon go on sabbatical, where she will have the opportunity to explore her next chapter.

We encourage everyone to actively engage in setting the direction of our future:

- Attend listening circles and other events to provide input.
- Reflect on what matters most to you.
- Provide feedback on options as they are presented.

Please also visit our church website at www.firstparish.info to read our FAQ on this topic, which provides additional context and information.

The Parish Committee is available to listen. Congregants may share their feedback through an online form, or by e-mailing the Parish Committee at parcom-members@firstparish.info. Parish Committee representatives will also be available to meet in-person on April 5 and April 12 in the Grady Room during coffee hour.

Just as our congregation weathered change 17 years ago, we are confident we will emerge from this interim period stronger – with a new settled ministry aligned with our shared priorities and needs.

In Faith, the Parish Committee:

John Anderson, Carolyn Hodges (Treasurer),
Marie Meter (Chair), Susan Moore,
Joanna Pushee (Clerk), Amy Speare,
Al Tosti, Kate Tranquada (Vice Chair)



Rebuilding Our Front Corner

The Parish Committee has established a team to investigate rebuilding the front corner of the church grounds to welcome the broader community, honor Marta's 16 years of service, and reinforce our corner as an area of public witness.

In addition, we would like to reinforce the handicap access to our Sanctuary entrance, perhaps bring back the historic horse trough donated by the Robbins sisters to the town, upgrade the Wayside Pulpit, and create ways to remember our maple tree, which has graced that corner for many decades and is nearing the end of its long life.

We plan to apply for funds from the Town Community Preservation Act and Community Development Block Grants next fall, and we need design concepts for those applications. To this end, after an open bid process, we have hired Hedlund Design Group landscape architects, a firm that is based in Arlington.

We are also committed to an open and participatory process, welcoming input from all members of the congregation. We will have a listening session on April 12 from noon to 1 pm in the Sanctuary to hear your ideas. There will also be virtual sessions for input.

To jump-start our discussions, we will post design ideas from previous years on the rolling board in the Vestry. We hope to show preliminary drawings to the congregation before the end of the church year. This will be followed by more sessions in early September.

Please feel free to discuss your ideas with any of the members of our team: Allan Tosti, Andrew Leonard, Mark Wilke, Phil Speare, John Galantowicz, Peggy Gardiner, and Sanjay Newton.

Giving First

The recipient of half of our offerings in April will be the Cambridge Women's Center, which provides a supportive community space for empowerment, learning, healing, trauma support, and understanding. Many of the women who come to the center are experiencing homelessness, poverty, food insecurity, domestic violence, childhood abuse recovery, and more. The center was nominated for our Giving First program by the First Parish Women's Alliance, who recently hosted a program featuring the film *Left on Pearl*, which explores the organization's history.

Your Human Resources Committee

Hello! To help you get to know us better, we'd like to share a bit about our values and focus.

Our mission statement sets the tone for our work: We are committed to warm welcome, compliance, transparency, and promoting the best possible working conditions for First Parish's fabulous staff.

Broadly, we observe and seek to understand First Parish through the lens of employer/employee relationships, rights, and responsibilities. We consult Massachusetts and federal employment law as needed or by request. We do annual check-ins with staff to hear, reflect on, and understand their experiences as members of our community, and as employees in particular. As part of our commitment to welcoming and compliance we seek to partner with the congregation on respecting staff boundaries, preferred pronoun usage, and schedules. We promote a zero-tolerance policy for harassment of any kind.

We celebrate with staff when things are going well! We encourage questions about the church's Employee Handbook, opportunities for professional development, and benefits such as family and medical leave, sabbaticals, and other paid time-off. We support the hiring process by providing guidance and helping with interviews, if needed. We serve as a resource for both our staff and lay leaders.

We welcome new committee members who share our commitment to these goals. Human-resource experience is appreciated but not required. The great benefit of our work is the opportunity to get to know our staff, whose critical contributions often take place behind the scenes.

The current Human Resources Committee is Sara Galantowicz and Sara Whitford. We are longtime First Parish members with many years of varied volunteer experience. If you think you might be interested in joining us, please contact us at hr@firstparish.info. During this time of transition our work is challenging and vital!

Sara Whitford



We Proclaimed “No Kings”

Thousands came to our First Parish lawn on March 28 to stand up for our communities and reject increasing authoritarian excesses and corruption. According to reporting from *YourArlington*, an estimated 3,000 people gathered peacefully, with no arrests or distracted-driving accidents. The rally, co-sponsored by our Defending Democracy Working Group and Indivisible L.A.B. (Lexington, Arlington, Belmont), was one of thousands of similar events that took place across the country and internationally. Many attended the Boston event later in the day.

Congregational Art Show

Gather in the Parlor on Sunday, April 12 at 11:30 am to celebrate the opening of “Hope & Resistance in Difficult Times.” All are welcome to enjoy light refreshments and chat. The work of our artists will be on display until September 4.

Ferry Beach Registration

It's time to register for First Parish's annual Ferry Beach Retreat, from September 25 to 27 in Saco, Maine. We're sharing the campus with another group this year, so sign up soon for best choices of accommodation. For information, contact ferrybeach@firstparish.info.

Opening Doors Concert

On May 8 at 7 pm come to the Sanctuary for an all-ages, free concert sponsored by our Social Justice Committee. *Shades of Black: The Hip-Hopera* features music and conversation with Zakiyyah, who explores themes that centralize marginalized communities. As an actress and classically trained singer, she uses opera, hip-hop, jazz, and R&B to craft a sound that is uniquely her own, including her most well-known creation, “hip-hopera.”

This concert is presented by the Opening Doors Project, an organization dedicated to amplifying voices of color and advancing interracial conversations about race through the arts, and will be hosted by Grammy nominated singer-songwriter Alastair Mook. There's more information at www.OpeningDoorsProject.org.



Staff and Contact Information

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and mission of First Parish.

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The Spire

Diane Shriver, Editor

Next issue: Sunday, May 3
Submissions due by Sunday, April 26
Items may be edited for space and clarity.

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

Time-sensitive details belong in the Weekly E-mail
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by Wednesday at noon.

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