

Next issue deadline
Sunday, December 29

The Spire

DECEMBER 1, 2024

THE FIRST SUNDAY RECORD

VOL. 67, No. 4

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

From Our Lead Minister

Dear Ones,

Oh my, what a hard letter this is to write. The time has come for me to retire from full-time settled parish ministry.

What an honor it has been to hold your stories, your pain, and your joys these last sixteen years. What a privilege it has been to speak from your pulpit telling our stories, offering words of both comfort and challenge. How exciting it has been to chart a course with you of spiritual growth, community connection, and turning outward to the larger world!

Over the next seven months I will continue to serve you as lead minister. We will have plenty of time to remember, give thanks, and nurture the ongoing work of this remarkable religious community. My last day will be the last Sunday of our program year, June 9.

The Parish Committee, in consultation with the Unitarian Universalist Association, will create a plan to hire an Interim Lead Minister after my departure in June. First Parish is a vital and attractive congregation. I have confidence that you will have a strong Interim Lead Minister in place by next fall, to support you through the next steps.

I was ordained to the ministry 38 years ago. In recent years the demands of full-time parish ministry have begun to affect my health. In retirement Charlie and I will make Vermont our home. I look forward to a more balanced life. I plan to resume work as a spiritual director, meeting one-on-one with people

nurturing their relationship with the Holy. And I expect that like sabbatical ministers who have served First Parish over the years, I will occasionally provide ministry to congregations in temporary need.

I approach this last chapter of our ministry together with much love for you and a deep commitment to the future of First Parish.

With great affection and faith,

— Marta

Marta Morris Flanagan, Lead Minister

Parish Committee Notes

The Parish Committee is hard at work organizing an interim ministerial search committee, and is working with the Committee on Ministry to plan listening sessions in light of Rev. Marta Flanagan's retirement. Marta will be deeply missed — our community has received so many gifts from her.

We also express deep gratitude to everyone who helped make the Harvest Moon Fair such a success!

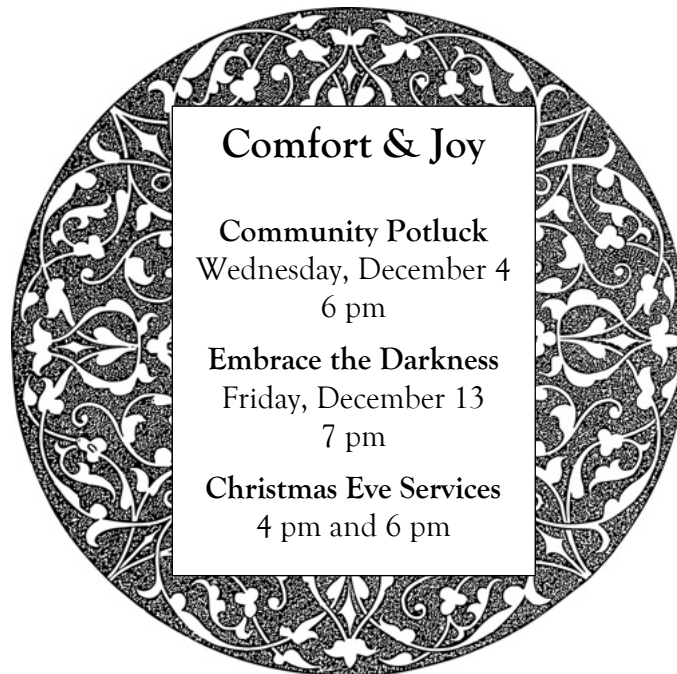
The Defending Democracy Group will meet this month to discuss the First Parish flagpole and issues around displaying flags.

Joanna Pushee, Clerk

Seeking Suggestions

If you have an idea for an event or program, the STAR Committee can help make your idea a reality. Maybe a get-together for families?

A topic you'd like to explore with others? An activity to share? Please contact us with your ideas at star@firstparish.info.



Get Involved for Social Justice

Social justice is how we share our hope for the community of Earth and challenge the excesses and injustices of our time. It's central to our UU faith and our life at First Parish. The Social Justice Committee offers a variety of opportunities to get involved in important ethical and social issues of the day.

We have working groups focused on racial justice, indigenous justice, climate action, refugee immigration, defending democracy, and the UU Urban Ministry, plus task groups handling Giving First, emergent issues, the Pie Palace, and our social justice-related services (Living Our Faith and the Shinn service). There are many ways to get involved. It could be deeply, like joining a working group or task group, or just as you can, through participating in activities organized by such groups.

The past year has seen a wealth of activities sponsored by the Social Justice Committee, including the process leading up to our Land Acknowledgment and our Reckoning & Repair Resolution. The Defending Democracy working group sent out 3,500 postcards and sponsored a debate watch, plus a high-school civics day. We participated in UU Mass Action Hours and Advocacy Day, and began an engineering study of options for transitioning our facilities off fossil fuels. We considered the controversies around the war in Gaza, and formed a task force on peace and justice in Israel/Palestine.

We supported the Mariposa refugee shelter. We created a partnership with UU Mass Action and added a budget line item to maintain it. We supported Haitian refugees, held an MBTA Communities Act information session, sponsored a Transgender Resilience Day vigil, carried a banner in the Boston Pride Parade, partnered with the STAR Committee for the Braver Angels program, and worked with the UU Bedford Parish to hold a Landscape of White Supremacy workshop offered by Standing Up for Racial Justice.

The coming year holds many opportunities to get involved in similar social justice work. To receive e-mails about upcoming activities, please contact socialjustice@firstparish.info. Our bulletin board in the Vestry has lots of information. Feel free to reach out and we'll be happy to talk with you.

Alan Linov, Ellen Leigh, Joanne Pohl,
Maggie Carey, Anne Ehlert,
Tish Miller, and Melissa Berczuk

Congregational Art Show

The theme of our next congregational art show is Climate Change and the Environment. The exhibit will open with a reception in the Parlor on December 8 and run through early February. The deadline is today — contact art@firstparish.info.

Christmas in Gagy

Our partner church in Gagy, (pronounced Gaje with a mostly silent e), Transylvania, in Romania, stands at a crossroads in the village center. A banner celebrates 450 years of Transylvania, Land of Religious Freedom in Hungarian, Romanian, and English. It is affiliated with the Unitarian Church of Transylvania, which adopted religious ideals recognizable to us before the Pilgrims arrived in Plymouth.

In 2011 a group of folks from First Parish, including Rev. Marta, made a pilgrimage to Gagy, and in 2012 the church's minister, Rev. Zoli, and his wife, Magdika, visited Arlington.

I asked Rev. Zoli to share some of his congregation's Christmas traditions. In Transylvania and Hungary an angel brings gifts on Christmas instead of Santa Claus, but Santa arrives on December 6, so kids get presents twice in the last month of the year.

On the first day of Christmas they have a service and share communion. They also hold a service in the small village of Kismedesér, two miles away, in a small church on the hill. On the second and third days of Christmas there are more regular services. On the third day packages arrive from Germany with food supplies for older members of the church.

Rev. Zoli recalls that once he asked an elderly woman what she got for Christmas, and she said, "Nothing." "I told her she was wrong, because I was sent to deliver her Christmas present. Her face became happy and she began to smile. That was the moment when I understood how meaningful our job is."

Talent Show

The Music Committee invites you to the Talent Show on January 25 from 3 to 4:30 pm, a fundraiser for the Piano Fund. We encourage musicians to sign up to perform — first come, first served — in any genre and style, from soloists to ensembles. Ken Seitz can accompany on piano if needed.

Reflections

Two Elizas and a Rebecca

In his 1904 memoir about First Parish, George Wellington wrote about the church's first Sabbath School, founded in 1817 by Eliza Bradshaw, 33; Rebecca Whittemore, 21; and Eliza Tufts, 15.

Eliza Bradshaw's parents were Henry Bradshaw and Hannah Cooke, and Hannah's father was none other than Samuel Cooke, the church's very first minister. Henry and Hannah's first child was Rebecca Cooke Bradshaw, born in 1782, given a second name to honor her grandfather. Then came Eliza in 1784, the year that Rev. Cooke died. Another daughter, Anne, was born in 1786, and Samuel Cooke Bradshaw, another namesake, was born in 1788.

Some of her grandfather's grit came down to Eliza Bradshaw, for she defied the wishes of Rev. Cooke's successor, Thaddeus Fiske. Rev. Fiske was opposed to the newfangled idea of Sunday schools. He felt that religious education was the duty of parents and should be conducted by them in the home. He did not want his flock avoiding that duty by sending their children to church for spiritual indoctrination.

Indoctrination is the correct word, for church doctrine was a major focus. The two Elizas and Rebecca surely mentioned the Golden Rule, but they mostly imparted details of theology by rote learning, the method of the day. Children memorized Bible verses and the Ten Commandments. Daydreamers were disciplined, probably physically. "Spare the rod, spoil the child" was the prevailing philosophy, and we have no evidence that this school was any different from other settings in which children were expected to sit quietly, speak only when spoken to, memorize passages, and recite back the wisdom dispensed by their elders.

Most schools at this time were for boys only, but it seems likely that girls were included, for females were in charge.

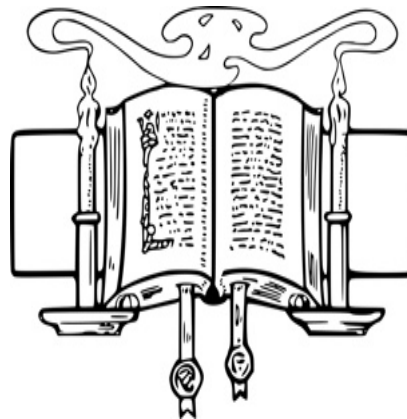
Eliza Bradshaw does not seem to have married, or at least no records show that she did. She lived to be 59, dying in 1843.

Rebecca Whittemore was born in 1796 to Jonathan and Rebecca Munroe Whittemore, who were married

in 1795 in Lexington. She was the first of their nine children. Her mother was probably part of the Munroe family that ran Munroe Tavern, still standing on Mass. Ave. in Lexington. Her father's mother had the evocative name of Love Stone before she married Samuel Whittemore, Jr. in 1747, in Menotomy.

There are no records of Rebecca Whittemore getting married. She died in 1877 at age 81.

Eliza Tufts was a granddaughter of William and Rebecca Cutler, who enslaved at least six people in the church's early days. Eliza's mother was named Rebecca after her own mother. She had married John Tufts in 1802, and the Tufts family had been in Menotomy for a long time.



Eliza was just 15 when she helped start the school. To us this sounds like a young teen, but "adolescence" was not yet recognized as a stage of life. Girls of 16 or 17 regularly married and had children, and boys of that age began apprenticeships or worked beside their fathers on farms or in workshops.

Eliza married Abner Pierce in 1826 when she was 24. They had James Harris Pierce in 1828, Henry Austin Pierce in 1830, and Francis E. Pierce in 1840.

Their middle son, Henry, married Mary Elizabeth Frost in 1854. Her descendants would eventually found the Frost Insecticide Company, which was in business from 1906 to the 1960s. The town's many farms needed its products to ensure healthy crops, as did the wider world. A best-seller was Arlington Oil, to be applied with the company's own patented pumps and sprayers.

In 1909 Frost built an imposing headquarters at 22 Mill Street. Those who visit that building today may not find it reassuring that it was where the company manufactured its poisonous products, one advertised as a "beautiful mist" of lead and arsenic.

Eliza Tufts Pierce lived to be 85 years old and had a batch of grandchildren.

We have had a Sunday school ever since these strong women first gathered children in the church vestibule in 1817. Rev. Fiske had denied them a room in the church itself, but they found a way.



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and mission of First Parish.

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The Spire

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Next issue: Sunday, January 5
Submissions due by Sunday, December 29
Items may be edited for space and clarity.

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