

Next issue deadline  
Sunday, December 28


# The Spire

DECEMBER 7, 2025

THE FIRST SUNDAY RECORD

VOL. 68, No. 4

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



**Music Sunday** December 7 10 am  
The First Parish Choir offers selections from  
Britten's *Ceremony of Carols*, plus works by  
Stephen Paulus and Kenneth Seitz.

**Advent Service** December 14 10 am  
Music from the Unitubular Saxiversalists sax quartet and the C Winds flute quintet.

**Embracing the Darkness** Friday, December 12 7 pm  
A quiet gathering honoring the season's mixed emotions. Music, Diane Taraz.

**Winter Solstice Service** Saturday, December 20 6 pm  
Marking the longest night, with music from Diane Taraz and the Handbell Choir.

**Advent Service** December 21 10 am  
Music from our youth and adult choirs, and the Handbell Choir.

**Christmas Eve** Wednesday, December 24 4 & 6 pm  
Carols, candles, and community.

## Covenants and Transitions

The Parish Committee (ParCom) has developed a covenant for our committee with the guidance of Rev. Jonipher and Rev. Erica. As many of our church committees update their agreements to each other, we applaud the staff and the Transition Team for creating fabulous ones that demonstrate our shared values. Once it is finalized, the ParCom covenant will be posted on the church website.

In November, ParCom, the Transition Team, and our ministers were joined by representatives from the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) for a Startup Leadership Retreat. ParCom and the Transition Team continue to work together to understand the history of First Parish while moving forward and hearing from the congregation about what our church community needs. Both committees will meet again in December to continue the discussion on church size theory, ministerial models,

and the transition timeline and process. We thank Hilary Allen and Emily Cherry of the UUA, Rev. Jonipher, Rev. Erica, and Rev. Stevie for their time and insight during the retreat.

At our regular monthly meeting ParCom updated two policies. To bring the Display Space Policy in line with reality, we unanimously approved adding language to include outdoor displays, as well. The second policy, made to ensure fairness, states that members of First Parish may not be hired as First Parish employees. To view all of our policies, visit [www.firstparish.info/fp-workings/](http://www.firstparish.info/fp-workings/) and click on Policies and Procedures.

In the spring we will encounter more changes, with some temporary greetings and good-byes. Our Minister of Religious Education, Rev. Stevie Carmody, will go on leave as he and his wife, Liz, await the arrival of Baby Carmody in January. Our Parish Minister, Rev. Erica Richmond, is in her sixth year with us and will take a two-part sabbatical in 2026. ParCom expresses deep gratitude to our ministers for managing coverage so that the congregation will be cared for during their leaves. Time for family and rejuvenation is important for our fearless ministerial team.

During Rev. Stevie's leave, Rev. Emily Conger will be our Adjunct Director of Religious Education, from January 15 to March 5, and from April 15 to May 13. During Rev. Erica's sabbatical, which runs from April to June, we will welcome Rev. Carolyn Patierno, who recently provided sabbatical coverage at the Follen Church in Lexington. We are fortunate to gain two seasoned ministers during this time of transition.



As the calendar year comes to a close, a quote from the Covenant Groups comes to my mind. First Parish currently has over 80 people in Covenant Groups, which gather in person or on-line for deep sharing each month. Conveners (group leaders) develop a theme each month, and last month the theme was "Joining In," to pair with the Engage project launch.

December's theme is balance. Writer Stephen Hall notes that we have choices about how we spend our time, saying, "Balancing what you need to do with what you want to do can lead to happiness and success." Wishing you, your loved ones, and the greater community a well-balanced holiday season in which all your needs are fulfilled.

Joanna Pushee, Clerk

---

## In Search of Healing

At our Annual Meeting in May 2024, First Parish voted to acknowledge the involvement of the founders of our church in the institution of slavery.

A task group of the Reckoning & Repair Working Group, called the Outreach and Partnership Group, has built on our congregation's historic relationship with the Unitarian Universalist Urban Ministry to explore how we can develop a relationship with the Roxbury Youth Program.

On November 9, after the service, staff members from the UU Urban Ministry offered a presentation about the Roxbury Youth Program, which empowers youth to create pathways to social and economic success. It provides learning experiences, leadership skills, and knowledge of the history of racial injustice. We have discussed with the leaders of that program ways to provide financial support for their after-school programs, and opportunities for First Parish members to engage with the youth who attend.

To support this effort, we launched a fundraising drive for a reparative process with the Roxbury Youth Program, representing institutional support for such an endeavor. The Parish Committee placed \$5,000 into the annual budget to support this effort, and \$1,500 came from the Racial Justice Coordinating Committee. In November members of the congregation donated \$21,000. As of November 27, the fund has \$27,500.

You can donate by writing a check to First Parish with a memo-line note "Reckoning and Repair Fund." You

can also donate through Realm, at [onrealm.org/FPUU/give/reckoning-repair](http://onrealm.org/FPUU/give/reckoning-repair).

The members of the Reckoning & Repair Working Group are excited to engage in this reparative work. We are mindful that it was primarily young people who were enslaved by our religious ancestors.

Bill Gardiner  
Reckoning and Repair Working Group

---

## The Birds and the Bees, And the Flowers and the Trees

Is it a coincidence that the busy, buzzy Bailey Room sounds like a literal beehive when the 35-plus volunteers from the Mystic Charles Pollinator Pathways are at work? Industrious as any foraging bees, they come to First Parish each November to prepare native perennial seeds for winter sowing, a ritual since 2022.

In the odd, dark time of the year when Halloween decorations overlap with early Christmas lights, these cheerful participants support a longer timeline. Winter will provide the cold needed to sprout hundreds of tiny seeds in springtime (“cold stratification” is the official term).

In our typical gaudy seasonal timeline, garden stores sell mass-produced annuals hyper-charged with fertilizer so they’ll grow for a single season until frost. In a more natural timeline, native plants that have always grown here, instead of being imported from other parts of the world, come back every year. Butterflies lay eggs on them in springtime; bees, moths and other insects gather pollen for food, and in doing so they pollinate our food crops. In my backyard, goldfinches ride flower stalks like hobbyhorses, foraging seeds. Native plants also store carbon, prevent erosion, and add beneficial microorganisms to the soil.

The volunteers prepare seeds in hopes of spreading native plants to help with sharp declines among pollinators and bird species. Seed-cleaning can be a complicated process, but these spunky volunteers are up to it. On my visit, a spreadsheet laid out “cleaning

and packaging notes” for more than a hundred plants, and tables were arranged by the processes required to clean each kind of seed.

Multiple procedures were required. Coneflower seeds were coded “shk/sv/ppl” on the Master List, shorthand for a three-stage process of shaking them in jars to separate them from seedhead pods, then sieving them, and last of all shaking them gently onto a paper plate to separate them from the last of the chaff.

I was intrigued by the table labeled FLUFF, where people were shaking seeds in jars with metal bolts, including de-podded milkweed. Instead I wound up at a table peeling apart papery pods that released eighth-

inch round seeds. Other seeds looked like tiny tufted arrows; most were smaller than pepper grains and barely visible.

Two kinds of seeds that went into separate jars looked like identical ovals, but one kind grows a yellow flowering three-inch senna plant and the other redbud trees that get much taller. Such are the mysteries of seeds where size doesn’t matter, and a tablespoon’s worth can make a meadow.

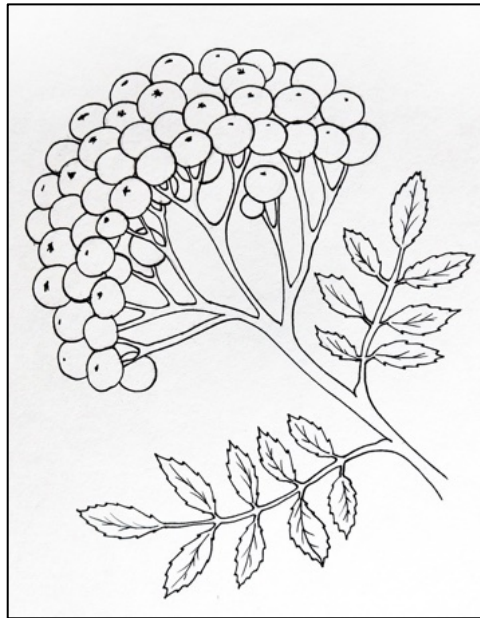
At the end of the day, a very large plastic chest was packed with dozens of boxes of infinitesimal seeds.

I couldn’t wrap my mind around how many were there. More than stars in the galaxy? Enough, at least, to carpet Massachusetts, strategically spread.

An upcoming event at the Medford Library will see them packaged and labeled in tiny envelopes. Made available in several public places, the seeds can be planted outside now through February, sprinkled or winter-sown in milk jugs or any planters protected from critters. The internet abounds with how-to’s and YouTube videos.

To volunteer for upcoming events with the Mystic Charles Pollinator Pathways, find information about their monthly Zoom meetings or seed libraries, or join First Parish on the local map of greenways and home gardens that support native species, contact [www.sustainablebelmont.net/mystic-charles-pollinator-pathways-group/](http://www.sustainablebelmont.net/mystic-charles-pollinator-pathways-group/)

Cathie Desjardins





## Staff and Contact Information

Staff serve the members, leaders,  
and mission of First Parish.

**Rev. Jonipher Kwong** Interim Lead Minister  
*leadminister@firstparish.info*

**Rev. Erica Richmond** Parish Minister  
*parishminister@firstparish.info*

**Office** 781-648-3799 *churchoffice@firstparish.info*  
website: *www.firstparish.info*

**Hours** Monday to Friday, 10 am to 3 pm

**Ebiere Omoregie** Office Manager  
*officemanager@firstparish.info*

**Allison Sillers** Office & Communications  
Associate *office@firstparish.info*

**Jacqueline De Jesus** Sexton

### Religious Education

**Rev. Stevie Carmody**, Minister of Religious  
Education *mre@firstparish.info*

**K. Milano** Youth Program Coordinator  
*youthadvisor@firstparish.info*

### Music

**Daniel Parsley** Director of Music  
*daniel.parsleyr@firstparish.info*

**Kenneth Seitz** Director of Music, Emeritus

**Parish Committee** *parishexec@firstparish.info*  
Marie Meter (Chair), Kate Tranquada (Vice Chair),  
Carolyn Hodges (Treasurer), Joanna Pushee (Clerk),  
John Anderson, Jeff Keffer, Susan Moore,  
Amy Speare, Allan Tosti

**Finance Committee** *finance@firstparish.info*  
Lissa McBurney

**Human Resources** *humanresources@firstparish.info*  
Sara Galantowicz

**Lay Ministry** *layministry@firstparish.info*  
Carolyn Carlson

**Leadership Development**  
*leadership@firstparish.info* Kiki Giatis

## The Spire

Diane Shriver, Editor

Next issue: Sunday, January 4  
Submissions due by Sunday, December 28  
*Items may be edited for space and clarity.*

E-mail to *spire@firstparish.info*.  
If you do not have e-mail, contact the office.

Time-sensitive details belong in the Weekly E-mail  
Bulletin – send to *weekly@firstparish.info*  
by Wednesday at noon.

**Membership** *membership@firstparish.info*  
Amy Anderson

**Music** *music@firstparish.info*  
Robin Baker, Bob Rowlands

**Property** *property@firstparish.info*  
Greg Ruccio

**Religious Education** *re@firstparish.info*  
Betsy Carlton-Gyson

**Social Justice** *socialjustice@firstparish.info*  
Melissa Berczuk

**STAR Adult Education**  
Lyn Fulton-John *star@firstparish.info*

**Stewardship** *stewardship@firstparish.info*  
Joel Carlton-Gysan

**The Alliance** *alliance@firstparish.info*  
Andrea Winslow

**Trustees of Trust Funds** *trustees@firstparish.info*  
Julie Dunn

**Worship Associates**  
*worshipassociates@firstparish.info*  
Loren Gomez