

The Spire

FEBRUARY 6, 2022

THE FIRST SUNDAY RECORD

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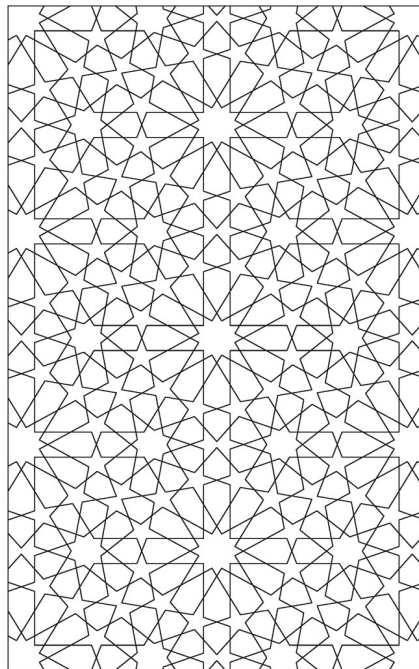
Cultivating Caring Community

It's time for our annual Stewardship campaign, a call to each member of First Parish to join in the spirit of joy that comes from giving with the intention of taking care of our precious community.

Your Stewardship Committee reflected deeply on the meaning of First Parish in our lives, and we invite you to do the same: *What have I given?* How have my material, relational, or spiritual investments contributed to the lives of others and my own personal experience of living life? *What have I received?* How have material, relational, or spiritual gifts sustained me in a moment of need, or enhanced my experience of living life?

Our individual and collective answers to these questions led us to this year's theme: Cultivating Caring Community. We look forward to collaborating with all as we carry out this annual ritual.

— 2022 Stewardship Committee:
John Anderson, Jamie Aronson,
Kiki Giatis, Sue Sheffler, Phil Speare,
Heidi Swarts, Rev. Erica Richmond



It's easier to get familiar and friendly with your representative than you might think. I contact Dave at least a few times a year as I advocate for climate legislation, so he knows that I care a lot about action to protect our climate. He knows that I want him to make legislation a high priority in his work as a

representative. If your representative doesn't know very well that you care a lot about climate protection, I suggest you change that.

In the Climate Action Working Group here at First Parish, we support the legislative agenda of the Mass Power Forward (MPF) coalition. The agenda gets developed through a nomination and review process involving their many member organizations, including UU Mass Action. The process includes consulting with organizations that represent communities on the front lines of harm from climate change and other environmental hazards. UU Mass Action keeps us apprised of the status of MPF priority bills, letting us know when it's time to contact legislators.

When appropriate, we spread the word to First Parish members who have signed up to receive our "action alert" e-mails, with guidance about whom to contact and what message to convey. Legislators pay attention to which constituents contact them.

An especially effective way to get to know your representative, and for them to get to know you, is by meeting with them. You can attend one or both of the upcoming Zoom meetings where interested First Parish members will talk about climate legislation with Sean and with Dave — on March 2 and February 28, respectively — organized by the Climate Action Working Group. Watch the E-Bulletin or the church website for details about those meetings.

Another opportunity is coming in April, when UU Mass Action runs Advocacy Day. They arrange group

Does Sean or Dave Know That You Want Climate Action?

I mean absolutely no disrespect in using first names to refer to Representatives Sean Garballey and David Rogers who, with side-by-side districts, represent most First Parish members in the Massachusetts legislature. They are happy to be on a first-name basis with their constituents, as both of them are with me, even though I'm in Dave's district and not Sean's.

meetings of UUs with their representatives and provide talking points.

To find out more about the Climate Action Working Group, or to sign up for our action-alert distribution list, contact us at climateaction@firstparish.info.

And if you see Sean or Dave around town, please tell them I said hi!

— Alan Linov

Chaplains on the Way

Hastily rearranging a few chairs in the Sanctuary after the service on the Sunday before Christmas, I was happy that a handful of churchgoers stayed to hear the presentation by Chaplains on the Way, the Giving First recipient for December. (Giving First is our tradition of donating half our non-pledge offering each Sunday to a worthy cause.) Eight of us settled in for a cozy hour to listen to Jill Gauling, their Executive Director, Randall Shaw, KJ Robertson, Janey Solis, and Judi Goldberg tell us about their important and transformative work. Jill gave us the history of Chaplains on the Way (COTW), as well as her own history of attending Harvard Divinity school with an activist background.

COTW is a non-denominational interfaith organization based at Waltham's First Parish, a Unitarian Universalist church. The group formed in 2008, when Rev. Joan Murray, a United Church of Christ minister, began walking along the streets of Waltham to meet people experiencing homelessness. Rev. Murray's intent for COTW was to offer a ministry of presence on the streets, at soup kitchens, and in shelters. The work continues with two chaplains, Jill Gauling and Justi Godoy, as well as a chaplain intern, several part-time chaplains, and many volunteers from a variety of faith backgrounds and traditions. Their unique ministry is one of presence, one-to-one spiritual direction, a weekly interfaith practice, a weekday hot-breakfast program, and a weekly Leadership Group, composed of COTW clients and volunteers.

In our talk at First Parish, we met two formerly unhoused clients who are now active leaders in the community. They wore matching pendants, a symbol of COTW, that, to me, resembled an open-armed

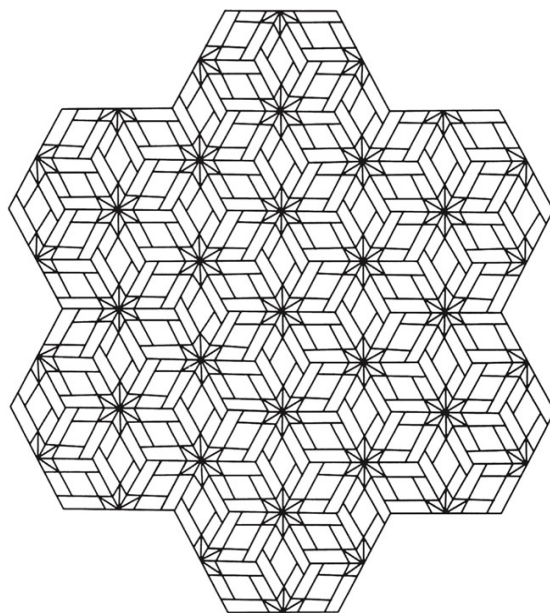
figure buffeted by the wind. Randall spoke of living in his car for almost two years before securing an apartment. He parked overnights at a specific rest stop off Route 128, where access to a bathroom was reliable. KJ spoke of living on the streets on and off for 10 years, avoiding law enforcement. He spoke of how the chaplains listened to him, and how the leadership team gave him his voice to discuss his own situation, as well as the agency to work with others to find solutions to problems. Through the Leadership Circle, KJ realized that he had the ability to lead and organize, skills that were previously unknown, even to himself. From the Leadership Circle discussions, one such solution was to work with the City of Waltham to provide a portable toilet during the pandemic, as both bathroom options, McDonalds and the public library, were closed.

What impressed me was that although no housing is provided, COTW spiritually supports and companions folks on their journeys. It calls to mind the first UU Principle: recognizing the inherent worth and dignity of every person. Close behind are other

principles: Justice, Equity, Compassion, Democratic process, and Peace, to name a just a few that I recognized in the afternoon circle.

Janey and Judi spoke about what they do to support COTW as volunteers. These uber-volunteers are diligent: cooking food, picking up food, and attending meetings and services on a weekly basis. I was struck by how they spoke with fondness about what is clearly their community.

Our First Parish group learned that it takes 5 to 10 years to get an apartment after applying for housing. One question from our community about what a person should do if they are immediately faced with homelessness brought into focus the raw reality of being unhoused. The first response was, "Find some cardboard for insulation. Don't put blankets over you, put them under you to keep the heat from leaving your body." Then, "Avoid the police." And only then, "Get in touch with social service agencies in your area." It is not a surprise that several folks from our church asked about volunteer opportunities at COTW, of which there are several.



Upon reflection, I realized that with holiday preparations, not to mention the threat of Covid-19, I didn't expect a great number of attendees at this talk. In regard to homelessness, however, there never is a really good time to talk about it. And, while we don't often bring it up, homelessness is still going on, during the holidays, during the pandemic. As we listened, I couldn't help but think about the news. If people living outside at Boston's Mass and Cass area, and

everywhere, could be supported spiritually, rather than looked down upon, what a difference it would make. When I left that Sunday before Christmas, I knew that the work of the COTW, of connecting hearts and lifting up individuals, is nothing short of miraculous.

Chaplains on the Way can be found at <https://www.chaplainsontheway.us/>

— Loren Gomez

Reflections

Microbial History

Until quite recently people endured epidemics that came and went with fearsome regularity. In the developed world, the death of children is now an uncommon tragedy; many people have just one or two kids and assume they will grow up. But not long ago families buried child after child after child, and many adults, as well, taken by smallpox, measles, yellow fever, cholera, mumps, scarlet fever, typhus, influenza, diphtheria, polio, pertussis, and other plagues.

One of the first attempts to battle an infectious disease was smallpox inoculation. People in the 1700s wrote of their anxiety as they faced the ordeal of getting just a little bit of pox in hope that their immune system would fight it off and spare them a deadly, full-blown case. Henry Knox, who hauled cannons from Fort Ticonderoga to Dorchester Heights and scared the British out of Boston, wrote to his wife, Lucy, that he hoped the inevitable scars from her inoculation would be symmetrical. He playfully ordered one in the middle of her forehead, one on each cheek, and one on her nose. Lucy and their toddler daughter both survived with minimal scarring.

George Washington secretly inoculated his entire army, for his soldiers were useless if they could not leave their beds. His successful tactic affected the outcome of the war and the course of history.

Many at the time railed against this "unnatural" intrusion into God's plan. How dare we tamper with our fate? But perseverance eventually freed us from the scourge of smallpox, followed by victories against many other diseases.



A slight scratch can still lead to tetanus, once known as "lockjaw," a bacterium that causes muscle contractions so violent they break bones, then takes away the ability to move, swallow, and eventually breathe. Henry David Thoreau's brother, John, cut himself shaving and died in agony a week later in Henry's arms. He was 27 years old. Henry's stay at Walden Pond was partly an attempt to deal with John's death.

Today a simple shot spares us this awful fate, a shot routinely required for attending school or summer camp. It usually includes protection from diphtheria and pertussis, or whooping cough. Those bacteria mainly go after children, causing trouble breathing, heart failure, paralysis, and death. Most people don't even know what they are anymore, although pertussis is becoming more common.

In 1918 there was no vaccine against the influenza virus, but the value of social distancing and masks was clear. Even so, anti-mask societies sprang up, and crowds defiantly gathered at big events, resulting in a fearful toll.

The country mobilized in the 1950s to fight the polio virus. Small pockets of resisters were overwhelmed by a nation of parents desperate to spare their children paralysis and death. Today, superstition and conspiracy theories have stymied attempts to completely eliminate polio, which persists in war-torn countries. Pneumonia, malaria, and tuberculosis still afflict millions around the world.

Reluctance to be vaccinated is nothing new. What is new is our instant connections that allow the spread of lies and myths. As the latest wave of this latest virus recedes, let us count the blessings of protection and hope for more victories against the microbes — and the wisdom to welcome them.

— Diane Shriver, *Spire* Editor



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The Spire

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