

Next issue deadline
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The Spire

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Two Flags at First Parish

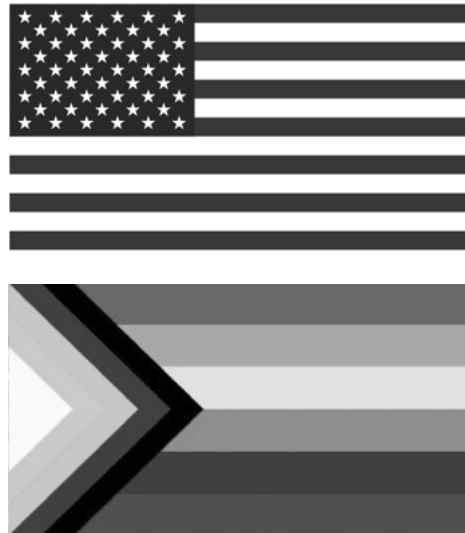
In December the Parish Committee voted to display two flags on the First Parish flagpole: the U.S. flag and the Progress Pride flag, which has rainbow stripes affirming LGBTQ+ diversity and chevrons representing trans people and racial diversity. This combination was recommended by our Defending Democracy Working Group and is intended to convey our congregation's desire for a healthy and contextualized patriotism that includes people of all identities and colors and backgrounds, values the well-being of all Americans, and is committed to sustaining and improving American democracy and civil society. There will be a small flag-raising ceremony before or after the service sometime in January.

Earlier in the fall, the Parish Committee consulted with the Defending Democracy Working Group and asked for feedback from the congregation. Parish Committee members hosted a Zoom session, staffed a table for a few weeks during coffee hour, and received comments by e-mail.

More than 80 people commented through at least one of these forums. A few people indicated that they are opposed to flying the U.S. flag. They see it as an irredeemable symbol of U.S. imperialism, militarism, and white nationalism.

One person expressed ambivalence. He remembers the Vietnam War and not flying the flag then, but he has reflected on what it might mean to reclaim the flag.

The large majority of those who commented supported flying a U.S. flag in front of First Parish. They are aware of the negative associations with this flag, and some of them described feeling wary or afraid when they see it elsewhere. Many people spoke, however, about the importance of reclaiming the U.S.



flag as a symbol of national unity and solidarity, with all Americans included.

Nearly half of these people felt that First Parish should fly the U.S. flag by itself. They argued that we have public-witness banners on our lawn, and that flying the U.S. flag alone would be a simpler and stronger message that we care about our whole country. It would also, they felt, be more attractive.

Several people, however, expressed intense discomfort with flying the U.S. flag by itself. They felt that a solo U.S. flag would easily be experienced as a symbol of white nationalism and exclusionary politics.

The most common opinion was that First Parish should fly the U.S. flag with one or more other flags that express our commitment to pluralism and justice.

*A collective poem
written by on-line and in-person
attendees at the December 29 Poetry
Service, during the Time for All Ages led by
Rev. Stevie Carmody. Each of us holds a different
part of the truth of the nature of this community.*

First Parish is like . . .

a big extended family, a garden,
a community of candles

the roots of a tree,
a universal-sized hug,
an umbrella to shelter from the rain

a kaleidoscope
a light in the darkness
a campfire

hot chocolate on a cold day

People suggested a variety of options for these companion flags. Some suggested changing them regularly to represent our congregation's multiple commitments, while others thought this was the role of the public-witness banners. Some wanted a U.N. flag; others wanted to focus on diversity and solidarity within the United States. Some wanted to fly a Black Lives Matter flag, but others felt this would associate our congregation too tightly with the Black Lives Matter organization. Our congregation is committed to the belief that Black people's lives matter, but this does not mean that we agree with all of the policies and actions of BLM.org. Our public-witness banner provides some context on why we say Black Lives Matter, but there wouldn't be space for that on a flag.

In consultation with the Defending Democracy Working Group, the Parish Committee voted to fly the U.S. flag and the Progress Pride flag. The Progress Pride flag symbolically affirms multiple types of diversity, and flying it next to the U.S. flag shows that our form of patriotism celebrates diversity and seeks the well-being of all Americans. The U.S. flag reflects our commitment to unity and solidarity with other Americans, of all kinds. Together, these flags express our faith that our country — though deeply flawed — can be moved to better live up to its values of democracy, equality, and justice.

Joanna Pushee, First Parish Clerk

Treasury Update

Hello from Carolyn Hodges, treasurer, and Annie Hewitt, assistant treasurer. We volunteer to manage the church's finances. As we welcome the New Year, we are grateful that First Parish is financially stable.

Working with our relatively new office staff remains a pleasure. The tenacious efforts of Office Manager Ebire Omoregie and Assistant Allison Sillers keep members of our community in good hands. Our bookkeeper, Liz McKersie, also provides invaluable assistance. Please thank them when you see them!

Our church depends on our combined stewardship, and we are grateful for the congregation's generosity and willingness to honor pledge commitments. Each year the Stewardship Committee sends each donor the status of pledges and gifts; please watch for yours to ensure your data is accurate and up to date.

In November First Parish held its annual Financial Summit, attended by members of committees that

Looking for a way to contribute but have a limited amount of time? You could be one of our "on-call counters" and periodically help out by counting the Offering, working with another volunteer. If interested, please e-mail treasurer@firstparish.info.

support the financial infrastructure of First Parish — specifically, the Parish Committee, Finance, Stewardship, Trustees, Human Resources, Property, and Leadership Development. The proactive work of this dedicated group helps ensure that our fiscal year proceeds smoothly. Each group has established priorities, and we collaborate to help achieve them.

Our Parish Committee closely reviews the spiritual, social, and financial health of First Parish each month. We are grateful that our leadership remains committed to supporting our ministerial staff as well as our wonderful community by prioritizing volunteer

In addition to the charitable deduction you may be able to take if you itemize deductions on your federal return, you may be able to maximize your giving and reduce your taxes further when you pay your pledge (even if you don't itemize deductions) using one of these ways to contribute:

- Donate stocks or mutual funds, which can eliminate the capital-gains tax if they have appreciated in value. You can find instructions at www.firstparish.info/connect/give/securities-donation.
- Give from a donor advised fund, which you can set up at most large financial institutions such as Fidelity or Charles Schwab. You can take a charitable deduction when you fund such an account, using cash, securities, or other non-cash assets. You can then make a contribution from your donor advised account, known as a grant, to First Parish and other tax-exempt charities that you support. It is convenient and you may be able to save on income and capital gains taxes in the year(s) you fund your account.
- Make a qualified charitable distribution from your IRA if you are 70 ½ years or older. As long as the funds go directly from the IRA to First Parish, you won't pay income taxes on the withdrawal. If you are 73 or older, the distribution can also count towards the IRA's required minimum distribution.

support, community connections, and continued outreach, all while ensuring fiscal prudence.

As a reminder, many give to First Parish on-line through Realm, using debit and credit cards. Please review your Realm activity, for transactions require updated information — the amount, plus a valid card number, expiration date, and security code. If this information changes, transactions may not be fully processed, so please update Realm if your circumstances change.

Instructions for using Realm are on the First Parish website — visit www.firstparish.info/give/pledge-pay-options. If you need help, contact the office at 781-648-3799, or e-mail treasurer@firstparish.info.

Thank you so much for your willingness to help ensure that the First Parish community continues to thrive. Many hands make light work — please consider joining one of our groups; it is a great experience working with kind and knowledgeable colleagues to support our community. If you have questions or would like a more detailed update, please contact us. With all of us providing “time, talent, and treasure” we can ensure that First Parish remains vibrant.

Carolyn Hodges, Treasurer
Annie Hewitt, Assistant Treasurer



Discussing *Authentic Selves*

Next month the Welcoming Congregation Committee will host a four-part discussion on the book *Authentic Selves: Celebrating Trans and Nonbinary People and Their Families*, part of the Common Read.

The Common Read is an annual program of the Unitarian Universalist Association that facilitates

discussions about a selected book to invite individuals to engage in a new way with their own stories to more deeply understand themselves and others in their congregations and communities.

Participating in a UU Common Read is an opportunity to explore what it means to be human right now, and calls us into accountability in our society and the world, which hold both joys and hardships.

Authentic Selves challenges the social narratives about trans and nonbinary people that often focus only on stereotypes, struggles, and discrimination. It offers compelling narratives and photographs of trans and nonbinary people, their partners, families, and others in their lives. The book invites readers into the lived lives of people who offer glimpses of their challenges, joys, and how having support from others is life-changing.

Each discussion will be led by co-facilitators and encourage active participation. The first session does not require having read *Authentic Selves*; participants will read it on their own between sessions.

The discussions will be on February 7, February 28, March 14, and March 28 from 7 to 8:30 pm in the Parlor. Light food and snacks will be provided, and childcare is available.

We ask that anyone who registers commit to all four sessions. There is a cap of 12 participants; if more than 12 people register, we will use a random selection process. We may offer a second round of sessions in the spring if there is enough interest. Please register at <https://forms.gle/F36ni6RfrZUozAZm9>. Registration is open until January 28.

If you are able, please buy the book, available at the inSpirit UU Book and Gift Shop. Visit www.uuabookstore.org/AuthenticSelves-P19547.aspx. Also indicate on the registration form if you can get an extra copy for someone, if you need to borrow one, or if you need help buying one. We have a few to lend.

Reuben Hopwood
Welcoming Congregation Committee

Parish Committee Update

Save the date for Rev. Marta Flanagan's retirement party on Saturday, May 31. Plans are coming together as we show our deep appreciation for Marta's dedicated leadership and steadfast ministry. Many thanks to the Committee on Ministry for organizing listening sessions so congregants could begin to voice reactions and reverberations.

The Parish Committee approved the continued hiring of Choral Scholars through the program year, after which the program will be subject to the standard annual budget process. Many thanks to Daniel Parsley, Robin Baker, and the Music Committee.

The Charting the Course working group collected survey information from the congregation as we seek broad input to help guide future priorities and investments. Thank you to all who responded!

Joanna Pushee, First Parish Clerk



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and mission of First Parish.

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The Spire

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Items may be edited for space and clarity.

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