

Next issue deadline
Sunday, September 5

The Spire

JUNE 6, 2021

THE FIRST SUNDAY RECORD

VOL. 63, No. 10

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

Thoughts on Returning

Joyful news from our ministers and Parish Committee: We will return to in-person worship in September at our Ingathering service. Although we look forward to it, we might harbor concerns about what it will look like to be together again. Our Worship Associates invite you to share those concerns in two listening sessions, via Zoom:

- o Sunday, June 6, noon to 1 pm
- o Thursday, June 10, 7:30 to 8:30 pm

We welcome suggestions about how to adapt elements of our service to our changing and changed reality, from the stones of Joys and Concerns to the post-service receiving line. What have you loved from this year of remote services, and do you think it could be adapted to in-person worship? Please join us for this discussion about our community.

— First Parish Worship Associates

So Many Exciting New Books!

The First Parish library has about 40 new books on a variety of racial justice themes. They are here for you to borrow; just e-mail rjlibrary@firstparish.info and we will arrange a drop off or pickup. Here's a small sample of the new offerings. Click on the links for more information.

The Vanishing Half by Brit Bennett

A novel of identical twins and racial identity. "Beautifully written, thought-provoking and immersive."

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/576782/the-vanishing-half-by-brit-bennett/>

Such a Fun Age by Kiley Reid

A provocative page-turner of a novel, full of tough questions about race, class and identity.

<https://www.npr.org/2019/12/28/791747689/such-a-fun-age-is-a-complex-layered-page-turner>



They Called Us Enemy by George Takei

A graphic-novel adaptation of the actor's childhood experience of incarceration in a World War II camp for Japanese Americans.

<https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/george-takei/they-called-us-enemy/>

My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies

by Resmaa Menakem

Hard to sum up; just check it out!

<https://www.publishersweekly.com/978-1-942094-47-0>

How to Make a Slave and Other Essays

by Jerald Walker

"The essays in this collection," says the *New York Times*, "are restless, brilliant, and short....[the author] can alight on a truth without pinning it into place."

<https://ohiostatepress.org/books/titles/9780814255995.html>

The Line Becomes a River by Francisco Cantu, formerly an agent for the U.S. Border Patrol

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/555764/the-line-becomes-a-river-by-francisco-cantu/>

***The Turtle Watchers* by Pamela Powell**

A novel for young folks (and adults, too), set in the Caribbean with an environmental message by First Parish's own Pamela Powell.

<https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/pamela-powell/the-turtle-watchers/>

Last summer about 30 First Parish folk read and discussed *Stamped from the Beginning* by Ibram X. Kendi. Now Kendi has worked with writers and illustrators to produce two remixes of this powerful book for teens and middle-grade kids. As NPR said, these books are finding a way to teach about racism to a new generation. Brilliant! Check them out:

- ***Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You***
by Ibram Kendi and Jason Reynolds
<https://www.npr.org/2020/03/14/814630039/a-history-book-that-isnt-finding-a-way-to-teach-racism-to-a-new-generation>
- ***Stamped (For Kids): Racism, Antiracism, and You***
by Kendi, Reynolds, and Sonja Cherry-Paul
<https://www.lbyr.com/titles/jason-reynolds/stamped-for-kids/9780316167581/>

These books and many more are here for you to enjoy and to help us as a community grow in understanding about our diverse land. For a list of the full collection, e-mail rjlibrary@firstparish.info. There is something for everyone on our shelves.

— Mary Fusoni

The Re-Cycle of Life: A Tale of Boxes

Act I — Letting Go of the Past

I post on the First Parish list:

Dear Beloved Community, I am having to move from the house/the home/the upstairs-downstairs home I created with my mother, with my partner and contractor, Eric, with my children, with piano notes and caroling parties and birthday gatherings and quiet naps on the daybed with the smell of lilac from the garden wafting in. I am seeking sturdy moving boxes.

The offers come, boxes to pick up on porches or stoops around town. I wrap packing paper around the flowered bowls purchased in a market in Istanbul and brought home in a carpet bag. Some items are the divided-up spoils from my mother, like pirate's loot spread out on the table and tossed into sea chests.

Photographs and spreadsheets sent to my siblings. Mostly I try not to take too much. I keep reminding myself; the things are not my mother, but it is hard to let them go. Gradually, over time, it is almost all done. All accounted for. Including the packets of origami paper, the puzzles and games gifted, sold, picked up from the porch or donated elsewhere. The boxes begin to pile up empty in the new garage and then it is time to move those, too, to pass them along to the next person in transition, the next person on the First Parish list.

Act II — Meeting the Present

Wendy Page was thinking of downsizing and moving sometime, but when First Parish folks Maggie and Allan Schramm moved to Philadelphia to be near their grandchildren, a rare opportunity for a smaller home was suddenly front and center. And what her ultimate decision to move into their apartment entailed was: Boxes. Some to pack up her worldly goods, and some for everything delegated elsewhere. She tried to think of it as Spiritual Practice, assessing, at age 70, "What to Be Doing Now/What Not To Be Doing." That meant giving away unfinished art projects, yellowing novels, and yes, even the clarinet, and (alas!) gardening tools since she would have no earth to dig in. Through the FP Connections Board, Wendy inherited boxes printed in Dutch from a UU family recently returned from a year in the Netherlands. And she was next up for the boxes I had unpacked. Whatever she didn't part with went into her final winnowed three carloads of boxes.

Act III — The Future

After her move, Wendy drove the biggest boxes to the Pleasant Street side of First Parish. There they were flattened and spread on the ground among the large shrubs people like to call the Muffintop or Gumdrop bushes. They joined two flattened boxes from Prairie Moon Nursery that held native plant plugs now nestled in chicken-wire circles in the Pleasant Street garden. With names like Zizia, Ironweed, and New Jersey Tea, they are on a slower timeline for the Future than the showy annuals in garden centers. A few inches high, they're not likely to flower or even flourish much this year. If they survive possible drought and voracious bunnies, they may bloom next year in tune with some pollinator buzzing by, or feed caterpillars that will hatch to butterflies who somehow communicate to their offspring to return there in years to come.

In this slower Future Time, it will take a year for the cardboard, spread with sweet-smelling leafmeal mulch provided by Greg Ruccio, to smother weeds and scraggy grass so that small native plants can be planted, then at least a few years for a mini-meadow to bloom.

Future Time is a spacious realm where ideas can swirl around: What if UU ideals of stewardship and service could spread out in Nature like the mycelium network that links tree to tree? What if teaching gardens grew along with our children? What if native shrubs and trees replaced our dead crabapples and flourished in blank spots around the building? What if our mycelium network spread out to other organizations like the Arlington Tree Committee, Sustainable Arlington, Pollinator Pathways, and our own Climate Action Working Group?

A start in that direction is a new Garden Committee under the umbrella of the Property Committee.

Because the Property Committee has plenty on its plate with infrastructure and maintenance, it makes sense to have a separate committee for our outdoor gardens. One immediate need is for people to water church gardens over the summer. Eric Siegal has stepped up to make a sign-up sheet:

<https://tinyurl.com/3avajnan>

And the boxes have a new, final incarnation, slowly becoming mulch for the dream of a native, pollinator-friendly mini-meadow.

— Pamela Powell and Cathie Desjardins

For more information or to join the Garden Committee, contact Peggy Gardiner at peggy.gardiner@gmail.com or Cathie Desjardins at cathiedes@icloud.com.

Reflections

Reflections on Juneteenth

Celebrated by African American communities for centuries, Juneteenth originated in Texas in 1866, one year after Union General Gordon Granger rode into Galveston with 1,800 soldiers to announce, “The people of Texas are informed that, in accordance with a proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free.” Black historians remind us what most history books leave out: Since the first Africans were sold into bondage in Virginia in 1619, enslaved people had been freeing themselves and each other through rebellion, advocacy, organizing, and flight. But we tend to focus on Lincoln, the Great Emancipator, and the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, although it freed enslaved people only in areas controlled by the Confederacy. There were not enough Union troops in Texas to enforce Lincoln’s proclamation, and enslavers in Texas continued to hold a quarter of a million people until confronted by Gen. Granger and military might two months after Lee’s surrender at Appomattox.

Juneteenth is now recognized in 47 states as a state or ceremonial holiday. After the May 25, 2020, police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis,



Massachusetts recognized Juneteenth Independence Day as a state holiday.

First Parish, too, has added Juneteenth to its list of holidays. Also known as Jubilee Day or Liberation Day, Juneteenth is sometimes referred to as American’s second Independence Day.

As I look ahead to Juneteenth, discussing with other members of First Parish’s Racial Justice Coordinating Committee (RJCC) whether and how it should be marked in our predominantly white community, I am suddenly struck by the historical fact that a second Independence Day was needed. Jarred from an uncritical but soothing stupor of accepting past events as somehow having been inevitable, I find myself wondering why it wasn’t unthinkable that a nation “conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal” could spend a single moment — let alone 246 years — enslaving human beings.

A passage in Ta-Nehisi Coates’ book *Between the World and Me* drives the point home, chastising me for ever thinking of slavery in the abstract: “Slavery is not an indefinable mass of flesh. It is a particular, specific enslaved woman, whose mind is as active as your own, whose range of feeling is as vast as your own; . . . who excels at dressmaking and knows, inside herself, that she is as intelligent and capable as anyone. . . . But when she dies, the world — which is really the only

world she can ever know — ends. For this woman, enslavement is not a parable. It is damnation.” For those who do not know liberation in their lifetimes, what can it matter that the moral arc of the universe may bend toward justice?

How much do I, a white woman, really understand — in my gut, in my DNA, in my soul — about the meaning of enslavement and the meaning of liberation? How clearly do I see the present-day, ubiquitous manifestations of white supremacy that endure in our institutions? How have I benefited from — and how do I continue to benefit from — those inequities?

It’s easy to look with contempt on 19th-century Texans who persisted in enslaving people for two and a half years after Emancipation and for two months and 10 days after Appomattox. It’s harder to acknowledge that I benefit from rigged systems that claim to value life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all while simultaneously placing constraints, limitations, impediments, conditions, and exclusions on all who are not white. What force do I have, and with whom can I join, to bend the moral arc of our nation toward justice?

The RJCC will mark Juneteenth by gathering in our courtyard to reflect on the meaning of the day and the links between enslavement, Emancipation, and the current conversation about reparations for slavery. Schiffon Wong, Chair of the Reparations Committee of the Mystic Valley chapter of the NAACP, will speak about the mission to keep reparations in the public discourse by sending a copy of *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century* to every member of Congress.

Congress has before it H.R. 40, a bill that proposes a commission “to study and consider a national apology and proposal for reparations for the institution of slavery.” H.R. 40 is named for General Sherman’s promise that the formerly enslaved would each receive 40 acres of seized Confederate land, a promise President Andrew Johnson rescinded after President Lincoln was assassinated.

The bill demands that we look critically and honestly at ourselves as a nation to explore the legacy of slavery: “its subsequent de jure and de facto racial and economic discrimination against African Americans, and the impact of these forces on living African Americans to make recommendations to the Congress on appropriate remedies.”

Until we formally acknowledge that our current inequities were not, in fact, inevitable, we will fail to see how our choices perpetuate them. Until we tally the wealth amassed by whites on the backs of enslaved Africans and African Americans and own up to our use of racism to hoard that wealth, we will persist in the delusion that America is a meritocracy. Until we ask for forgiveness and take concrete steps toward repairing our wrongs, we may congratulate ourselves for no longer enslaving, but we should not make the unsubstantiated claim that we value liberation.

— Amy Anderson, a member of the Racial Justice Coordinating Committee.

The views in this piece are hers alone.

See RJCC’s resources on Juneteenth and reparations here: <https://tinyurl.com/srpxvk63>

A Unique Ingathering

We will probably meet again in person at Ingathering on September 12. It will be a reunion unlike any other in the long history of the church. During the 1918 pandemic, services were suspended for a time, but no break ever lasted as long as this one.

It is heartening that we persisted so well as a community, holding well-attended virtual services and engaging in a wealth of on-line activities.

We welcomed a new parish minister and got to know Rev. Erica at a physical but not a spiritual distance. And we soared past our Stewardship goal!

As a musician I have grown, adjusting to a virtual environment, and the themes of my various concerts caused me to seek out new material. Every Tuesday morning I lead a small but enthusiastic group of toddlers in a half-hour of joyous songs. Some are First Parish members, but others live at a distance. They lift my spirits, and I will continue as long as there are happy faces in the Zoom boxes.

I also plan to keep doing concerts on-line, on the first Saturday of each month, as they are available to folks who could never get to a live show. Some have attended from as far away as Australia!

I look forward to seeing faces and holding hands in gloriously real time.

— Diane Taraz Shriver
Spire Editor





Staff and Contact Information

Rev. Marta Flanagan Lead Minister
marta@firstparish.info

Rev. Erica Richmond Parish Minister
erica@firstparish.info

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

Hours Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and
Friday, 9 am to 5 pm
Wednesday, 11 am to 6 pm

Sara Hidalgo Office Manager
officemanager@firstparish.info

Sara DeLong Office/Communications Associate
sara.delong@firstparish.info

Religious Education

Tina Schultz Director of Religious Education
dre@firstparish.info

Rose Sawyer Marsh Youth Coordinator
youthadvisor@firstparish.info

Music

Jonathan Brennand Music Director
musicdirector@firstparish.info

Kenneth Seitz Pianist,
Music Director Emeritus

Parish Committee *parishexec@firstparish.info*

Marie Meter (chair), Sara Galantowicz (vice chair)
Maggie Carey, Tom Estabrook, Paul Hollings,
David Klingsberg, Steve McMullin,
Anne Quaadgras, Celia Wcislo

Finance Committee *finance@firstparish.info*
David Dreyfus

Human Resources *humanresources@firstparish.info*

Lay Ministry *layministry@firstparish.info*
Loren Gomez

Leadership Development *leadership@firstparish.info*
Helene Newberg

The Spire

Diane Shriver, Editor

Next issue: Sunday, September 12
Submissions due by Sunday, September 5
Items may be edited for space and clarity.

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

The Spire generally deals with the big picture.
Time-sensitive details belong in the Weekly E-mail
Bulletin – send to *weekly@firstparish.info*
by Wednesday at noon.

Membership *membership@firstparish.info*
Susan Moore

Music *music@firstparish.info*
Robin Baker

Property *property@firstparish.info*
Mike Birenbach

Religious Education *re@firstparish.info*
Pamela Baldwin, Chris Barton, Anne Ehlert,
Anthony Fernandez, Wendy Fields, Janis Fleishman,
Julie Garry, Ellen Robie, Tina Schultz, Sarah Short,
Melinda Vanderpile

Social Justice *socialjustice@firstparish.info*
Mary Cummings, Maureen Dolan

Stewardship *stewardship@firstparish.info*
David Desjardins, Carolyn White

The Alliance *alliance@firstparish.info*

Trustees of Trust Funds *trustees@firstparish.info*
Jeff Keffer

Worship Associates *worshipassociates@firstparish.info*
Amy Anderson, Danie Descoteaux, Jo Guthrie,
Elizabeth Hunter