

Next issue deadline
Sunday, September 1

The Spire

JUNE 2, 2024

THE FIRST SUNDAY RECORD

VOL. 66, No. 10

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

A Summer Rest

In summer our staff relaxes from the demands of our very busy congregation, and *The Spire* is not published in July and August. The church office will have reduced hours; check the church website for details, at www.firstparish.info.

Our website is the place to find out all kinds of things about First Parish. Timely events appear on the website and the weekly e-mails. *The Spire* generally deals with the “big picture,” including reflections on our community and issues of the day. Please feel free to submit such reflections. There is virtually no length limit; just say what you want to say, and your *Spire* editor will gently ease it into reader-friendly condition.

The Spire comes out on the first Sunday of each month, except for July and August. The September issue is delayed a week due to Labor Day.

Covenant Groups Forming for the Fall

Looking for an opportunity to reflect on your life in community with others? Seeking deeper connections at First Parish? A Covenant Group could be right for you. We are currently enrolling new members for groups that will start in September and meet monthly through June 2025.

At a typical meeting a group of up to nine people begins with a check-in, followed by short readings and questions around a given theme. The heart of the meeting is sharing reflections on the theme, with each person having time to respond. Topics are wide-ranging, including subjects such as rules, winter light, acceptance, forgiveness, and silence.

Members commit to regular attendance as part of the covenant the group makes with one another. This helps build the close, trusting relationships that are a hallmark of Covenant Groups. For more information or to sign up, contact covenantgroups@firstparish.info.



Our Annual Meeting

At least 128 people attended our gathering on May 19, in person and on-line. We approved a balanced budget in line with our values, and elected officers and committee leaders. The Parish Committee, our governing board, welcomes Carolyn Hodges, Annie Hewitt, Pam Linov, Steve McMullin, Susan Moore, Allan Tosti, and Kate Tranquada.

Congratulations to the elected leaders of standing committees:

Finance: Lissa McBurney

Human Resources: Kay Snowden, Sara Galantowicz

Leadership Development: Kiki Giatis

Membership: Lois Fine, Jerry Silberman

Music: Robin Baker, Heidi Swarts

Property: Lori Kenshcraft, Aaron Kitzmiller,
David Dreyfus, Mara Prentiss

Religious Education: Katherine (Kat) Cass

Social Justice: Tish Miller

Trustees of Trust Funds: Martha Pereli, Alan Schweitzer,
Bob Fowkes

Votes on Affirmation and Acknowledgment

Both of the special congregational proposals passed.
Thank you to all who expressed their positions.

Reckoning & Repair Affirmation: 107 in favor,
17 against, 5 abstentions

Land Acknowledgment: 119 in favor, 7 against,
1 abstention

The clerk thanks the Parish Committee chair, Anne Quaadgras, for her enthusiasm and leadership. Deep appreciation is extended to our moderator, David Whitford, and acting parliamentarian, John Hodges, for keeping the proceedings running smoothly.

Thank you to all the First Parish volunteers including: Kate Tranquada and Al Tosti for handing out materials; Celia Wcislo, Rev. Erica Richmond, and Sara Galantowicz for checking in members; Jason Merrill, Zoom host; John Shriver, camera operator; Loren Gomez, room tech person; Sara Galantowicz, Annie Hewitt, and Brian Miller, ballot counters; John Anderson and Carolyn Hodges, runners; Rev. Erica Richmond, timekeeper. We also thank the First Parish office staff, Ebiere Omoregie and Joe Cook, for preparing materials and making updates to the website; and Rev. Marta Flanagan, ex officio, who served as an essential voice in the planning stages of the meeting.

Thank you to all who helped clean up and put away furniture. Thanks to the youth group and Rev. Stevie Carmody for having lunch available. Thank you to the Leadership Development Committee, especially to Kiki Giatis and outgoing chair Helene Newburg, for identifying and endorsing all leaders and nominees.

Copies of the Annual Report can be found on the church website under Workings, and a few paper copies are available in the office.

Joanna Pushee, First Parish Clerk

UnFerry Beach

On Saturday, September 28, we will console ourselves that we cannot be at Ferry Beach this year (due to a scheduling conflict) with a day of food, fun, activities, outings, music, and the Talent/No Talent Show. From 10 am to 9 pm we will enjoy “UnFerry Beach: A Day of Fun at the Meetinghouse and Beyond.”

Participate as much or as little as you like. Explore museums, play at Spy Pond, relax in rocking chairs in the Courtyard, and gab with your friends. Join a jam session, indulge in some arts and crafts, make puzzles, and play games. The planning committee would love to hear your ideas for activities, and volunteers are welcome. Contact us at ferrybeach@firstparish.info with questions, suggestions, or offers to participate.

The Ferry Beach Committee:
John Chamberlain, Monique Chaplin, (co-chair),
David D'Antonio, Mary McCartney,
Katy McNeill, Mike Rie, co-chair, Rachael Stark



STAR Opportunities

Chances to gather and learn are offered by our STAR Committee, which stands for Spirit, Transformation, Adventure, and Reflection.

The Melville Book Group

Fourth Thursdays, 7 to 8:30 pm, in the Parlor.

Share your thoughts and reactions to Herman Melville's classic *Moby Dick*. Group limited to 11.

Wednesday Evening Potlucks

6 to 7:30 pm in the Vestry or the Courtyard.

Braver Angels:

Depolarizing from Within, June 2, 1:30 to 4:30 pm.

Bridging the Divid, June 6, 7 to 8:30 pm.

Defending Democracy

June 7, 7 pm, and June 8, 11 am to 2 pm,
at First Parish in Concord, 20 Lexington Road.

The STAR Committee is co-sponsoring the First Parish Defending Democracy team for the upcoming UU Democracy Concord Discussion and Festival. For more information, contact: defendingdemocracy@firstparish.info.

Reflections

Revising Our Timeline

A lot has happened in the decade since I created the First Parish timeline in 2015, and I am currently revising it to include recent events and more about our founding and the evolution of our theology.

There has been a church here for centuries, long before there was a United States. As the town grew the church took new names and its philosophy moved from rigid Calvinism to Unitarianism. We eventually reunited with breakaway Universalists to form our current congregation, marked by inclusiveness and a thirst for justice.

The 18 founders would not even consider us a church, with our female ministers and lack of creed. Their Calvinist world view was based on patriarchy and predestination. God was in charge of everything, and he had placed everyone right where they belonged, some with higher status and others with lower. Before you were born God had decided whether you were saved or damned, and only the saved – the “elect” – were allowed to enter into church covenants. It therefore seemed logical for about half of the church’s founders to enslave people, for they saw the Bible as the absolute word of God, and slavery was sanctioned in the Bible.

The timeline now includes more about the brutal process by which settlers took over land and nearly eliminated the tribes of New England. Many Indigenous people who managed to survive were enslaved. The timeline already had a great deal about the process of winning freedom for other enslaved people, but it now includes those who attended the church in its earliest days and were baptized here.

Wars and violence recur with terrible regularity. Each conflict created winners and losers, and the winners wrote the history. The myth of the “vanished Indian” pervades our world, especially in the East, where few people know anything about the original inhabitants.

They are still here, however, and our Land Acknowledgment urges us to know more not just those whose lives and culture were destroyed, but especially about the Wampanoag, Nipmuc, Wabanaki,

Penobscot, and other people who still live where their ancestors dwelt for tens of thousands of years.

Do we bear collective guilt for this history of domination and erasure? Do we bear collective guilt for the enslavement perpetrated by some of our founders? Guilt is not an appropriate or useful reaction to our history. Feeling guilty creates a defensive attitude – *we’re* not to blame because *we* were not alive when these things happened. *Our* families arrived long after the time of enslavement.

No, we are not personally guilty. But, as one of our principles states, everything is connected. Things that happened centuries ago, or a few decades ago, have long repercussions that affect each and every person alive today. We live in a world created by others, and the effects of the past cannot be denied.

Guilt is not the issue. The issue is the current conditions that were the direct result of past actions. Our affirmations pledge that we will seek to understand those conditions and what caused them, grapple with ongoing injustice, and try to do something about it.

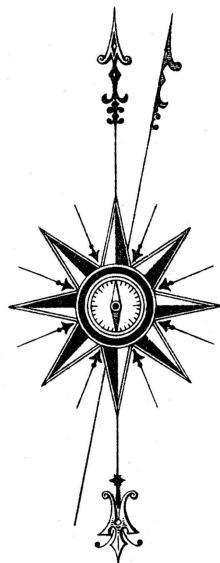
To begin at all, we must first know what happened. We must know the names of the people involved and break the silence that has shrouded their lives. Being erased from history is a particularly awful fate, your sufferings and joys forgotten as unworthy.

Rose, Punch, and their daughter, Venus, deserve to be remembered, and they are now on our timeline, along with many other people who were part of our story. We cannot extend a hand to their actual descendants, but we can help their spiritual descendants.

We have heard Indigenous people speak at First Parish and have pledged to listen more to what they have to say about the past, the present, and the future. We welcome people of color into our pulpit to enhance our awareness of ongoing struggles for equal rights. Whatever actions we decide to take in the future will be guided by our democratic process and reflect the intentions of the congregation as a whole.

Healing is needed to continue our story with hope and goodwill. Our updated timeline can help us more clearly see our place in the arc of history.

Diane Taraz Shriver





Staff and Contact Information

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

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daniel.parsleyr@firstparish.info

Kenneth Seitz Director of Music, Emeritus

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(Vice Chair), Carolyn Hodges (Treasurer),
Joanna Pushee (Clerk), Jeff Keffer, Steve McMullin,
Allan Tosti, and Kate Tranquada.

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The Spire

Diane Shriver, Editor

Next issue: Sunday, September 8
Submissions due by Sunday, September 1
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.

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