

Next issue deadline  
Sunday, March 26

# The Spire

MARCH 5, 2023

THE FIRST SUNDAY RECORD

VOL. 65, No. 8

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

## Committing to What Matters

March is Stewardship Month, when we ask everyone in our community to be good stewards by committing financially to the life of our congregation. This year's theme, Committing to What Matters, captures the essence of our spiritual home.

Our experiences and disruptions over the past three years have made "what matters" poignantly clear. For many, the work and community of First Parish has helped us hold onto what is most important in our lives. Committing to What Matters gives us each the opportunity to reflect on what is personally important to us, whether it be the weekly service, social justice work, the music program, religious education, or the connections we make in Covenant Groups, Lectio Divina, and other groups in this community.

Just like the mosaic in our Sanctuary is made of different and unique parts — pieces of glass, stone, or other items contributed by members of our congregation — we combine to form a whole greater than the sum of its parts.

Together we live our faith. Together we live out our values, both within and beyond the meetinghouse walls. As we reconvene, whether in person, virtually, or in creative combinations, our goal is that every one of us commits to what matters as individuals — and as a community.

We ask you to pledge looking ahead to our next fiscal year — July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024. What do you anticipate you might be able to give? By committing to a specific amount, you make it possible for us to plan our budget and ensure that we keep our expenses in line with our income.

Your financial contributions are essential to support our ministers, staff, building, and all of the

programming that goes on. There is no outside organization that provides support. Over 70 percent of the funds required to run First Parish comes from your contributions; the rest is from building rentals and a small amount from investment earnings. Although on average it would take a contribution of \$2,500 from every household to meet our budget, what's most important is that everyone contributes as generously as they are able.



We are seeing increases in costs this year and expect even more next year. Inflation has hit First Parish just as it has hit all of us, and expenses have risen, from the cost of living for our staff, to the cost of goldfish snacks for Religious Education, to the heating bill.

If you have not already done so, please go to [firstparish.info/give](http://firstparish.info/give) and pledge generously to support what matters to you at First Parish. If you have questions, please contact [stewardship@firstparish.info](mailto:stewardship@firstparish.info).

Thank you!

— The Stewardship Committee:  
John Anderson, Stephanie Franzosa, Marie Meteer,  
Sue Sheffler, Amy Speare, and Heidi Swarts

## Taking Good Care of Our Resources

Each year as we approach the annual budget development process, the Parish Committee affirms that our First Parish budgets are, at their core, statements of our values. Our allocation of funding and our investments in people, initiatives, and activities reflect our principles. Once the budgets are approved by the congregation, these extend to making sure that we are managing our finances responsibly.

To that end, this past November the Parish Committee, under the leadership of our Treasurer Carolyn Hodges, engaged an outside vendor to conduct a review of our financial controls. Over a period of about two weeks, professionals from Your Part-Time Controller met with staff and volunteers, reviewed processes, examined reports, and conducted a deep dive into our internal controls and audit procedures, accounting operations, financial reporting, and donation software. This transparency was an important test of the robustness of our controls, as well as an opportunity to identify potential improvements.

The bottom line? The review found no significant exceptions or errors. Your Part-Time Controller was highly complimentary of First Parish staff and volunteers as knowledgeable and prudent, and reviewer Karen Manlove noted that the mere fact that First Parish undertook the review was evidence of the soundness of our financial management. This review yielded a detailed report, which was presented to the Parish Committee, the Treasurer, Assistant Treasurer Shay Crawford, and First Parish's volunteer auditor Pam Linov. We are reviewing the recommendations to identify priorities to further ensure that our resources are well-stewarded and our financial processes are strong.

We are grateful to all who gave their time to support the review, to the staff and volunteers whose hard work and commitment to good management was evident in the findings, and to all whose financial contributions make our community possible. A copy of the full report is available upon request by contacting [treasurer@firstparish.info](mailto:treasurer@firstparish.info).

— Sara Galantowicz  
Chair, Parish Committee

## Reckoning and Repair

We've explored our own backyard. Now what?

Last October Rev. Erica's sermon *Knowing Our Own Backyard* shared her research into the history of what she has referred to as First Parish's "entanglement with slavery." She told us that several of the 17 founding members of First Parish — those who purchased pews to raise the money to establish the church in 1739 — enslaved people. Rev. Erica found the names of some of those people in the church records, kept by Samuel Cooke, the first minister.

Records show that Kate, baptized by Rev. Cooke in 1754, was a "gift" to Jason Russell. Rose, enslaved by innkeeper William Cutler, had been baptized by 1754. She married Punch, who was enslaved by Samuel

Brooks. Rose and Punch's daughter Venus was baptized in 1759; she was also enslaved by William Cutler, as was Dinah, a person unrelated to Punch or Rose, who is also listed in Rev. Cooke's baptismal records.

Flora Reed died at age 60 in 1791, eight years after slavery was outlawed in Massachusetts in 1783, but we don't know if Flora was freed by the Reeds at that time. We do not know what happened to her six children.

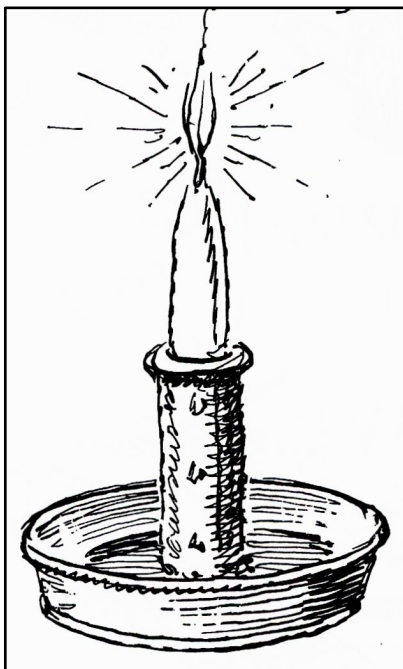
Rev. Erica followed up with a four-part workshop entitled *Exploring Our Own Backyard*. Roughly 30 of us joined her to learn more and reflect on the implications of what we learned.

We visited the Jason Russell house and walked through the rooms where Kate

worked. We wondered with a docent whether Kate might have slept on the floor by the fire in the kitchen, in the hall between the upstairs bedrooms, or in the chilly attic.

We viewed the documentary *Traces of the Trade: A Story from the Deep North*, in which members of the DeWolfe family, originally from Rhode Island, explore their connection to the largest slave-trading family in United States history.

We visited the unmarked area in Arlington's Old Burying Ground that, according to Rev. Samuel Abbott Smith, was "used for the burial-place of the slaves." During a small-group discussion Tom Estabrook and Amy Anderson confided that they each



had enslaving ancestors. Tom and Amy told their family stories during the February 5 worship service.

Many other workshop participants have committed to asking ourselves and our congregation what we are called to do with the fact that some of our church's founders enslaved human beings. Now under the leadership of First Parish's Racial Justice Coordinating Committee, our group has taken the name Reckoning and Repair. We have established subcommittees for continued learning, discussion, listening, and soul-searching, in the richness of our community.

We are eager to engage with the congregation as we ask what it means to value the lives and the untold stories of Kate, Rose, Punch, Venus, Dinah, Flora, and other enslaved people whose names we do not know. Given that their unpaid, forced labor helped to enrich founding members of our congregation, what can we do to repair this injustice?

— The Reckoning and Repair Working Group

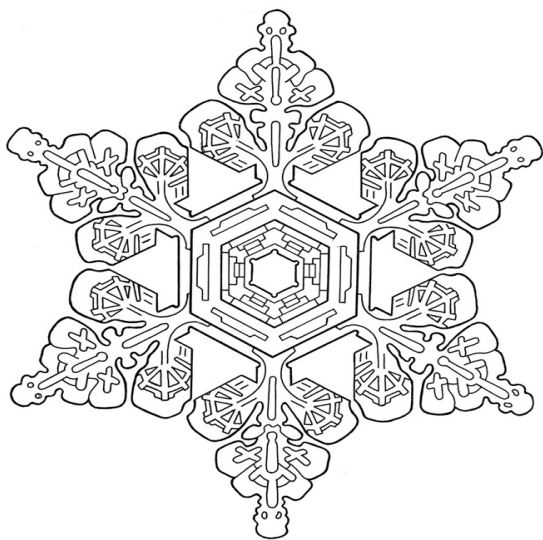
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## Save the Date for Ferry Beach

This year's congregational retreat will be September 22 to 24, at the Ferry Beach Retreat Center in Saco, Maine. It's a wonderful weekend of fun, relaxation, and community in a beautiful spot right on the beach. All are welcome!

The Ferry Beach Retreat Planning Committee welcomes new members to help plan the 2023 retreat. Please e-mail [ferrybeach@firstparish.info](mailto:ferrybeach@firstparish.info) for more information or to volunteer. We'd love to have you join us!

— David D'Antonio, John Chamberlain, Monique Chaplin, Mary McCartney, and Mike Rie



## Wrestling with Reckoning and Repair

In the spirit of humble yet persistent seeking, the Reckoning and Repair group offers this litany, a set of prompts and responses that reveal some of what is on our hearts and minds as we take up this work.

**What are you wrestling with as you reflect on First Parish's history of enslavement and the lost stories of those who were enslaved?**

- What does it mean to make repair?
- Who benefitted then? Who benefits now?
- How can any "repair" erase the horrors of what was done?
- What does it mean to be complicit?
- What are we called to do?
- What have we inherited?

**What does wrestling with this work mean to you? Why is it important to you that you engage in it?**

- It is important to correct, as best we can, the horrific errors of our past.
- I must do something; I have been blind to this for too long.
- Changing the systemic racism in our society is a requirement for all Americans; it would be unpatriotic to continue to ignore it.
- It means no longer running away from a history I chose not to examine as I learned about it.
- It means justice.
- It means being willing to listen and learn, and then to support a vision of reckoning and repair that goes beyond symbolism, regardless of my own discomfort or hardship.

**Why is it important that we — as an institution — do this work?**

- Our ancestors were wrong, even though the norms of society said otherwise.
- Institutions sometimes lead the way.
- Our church's founders were wrong in the past and we must make amends.
- Because we are committed to the principles of justice, human dignity, and righting wrongs.
- Because now that we know, we must not look away and do nothing.



## Staff and Contact Information

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## The Spire

Diane Shriver, Editor

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Submissions due by Sunday, March 26  
*Items may be edited for space and clarity.*

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If you do not have e-mail, contact the office.

*The Spire* generally deals with the big picture.  
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by Wednesday at noon.

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