

Next issue deadline  
Sunday, March 30

# The Spire

MARCH 2, 2025

THE FIRST SUNDAY RECORD

VOL. 67, No. 7

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

## Moving Forward Hand in Hand

What brought you to First Parish today? What sustains you and keeps you moving forward in this world of uncertainty?

Please take a moment to reflect on something — or someone — at First Parish that has recently given you comfort, encouragement, or hope. Perhaps it was a sermon, a smile or hug from a friend, or gathering together just days after the election. Maybe it was quiet reflection at Lectio Divina or being truly heard and sharing deeply at your Covenant Group. Perhaps you met someone new at the monthly potluck, experienced peace when you listened to the choir, or felt warmth from the laughter of a child.

How grateful we are for the grounding of our spiritual community during this year of political and ministerial transitions!

**Moving Forward Hand in Hand**, we weather the winds of change, finding strength in one another.

**Moving Forward Hand in Hand** we form deeper connections that sustain us.

**Moving Forward Hand in Hand** we collectively reflect on our values and commitment to First Parish.

First Parish is a voluntary community, fully dependent upon your financial contributions. To remain strong, it is paramount that we all contribute what we can. To help First Parish remain a guiding force of change in a world craving tenderness and connection, we ask you

to support the Stewardship campaign by pledging before March 31.

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. Nearly 70 percent of the funds required to run First Parish come from your contributions; the rest comes from renting our building, and a small amount from investment fund earnings. Your support of \$30, \$50, \$100 or even \$200 per month will make a difference. As a community, we are all responsible for giving what we can to sustain our spiritual home.

With courage and determination, we will be **Moving Forward Hand in Hand**.

The Stewardship Committee:  
Joel Carlton-Gysan, Jessica Farman,  
Amy Speare, Maryglenn Vincens

To be whisked, like magic, to our pledge page, scan this code on your favorite personal device. Shazam!



## Charting a Course Survey Results

Charting a Course is an ongoing conversation about envisioning the future of First Parish. Community discussions began in 2023, resulting in over 1,000 comments. In January the Parish Committee conducted a survey and received over 165 replies.

Results and comments have been shared with the relevant committees.

We learned that community and spiritual exploration are at our core.

- People come seeking community. They stay engaged because they find connections.
- People come to explore spirituality. They stay because their spirituality is nurtured and grows.
- People come to find religious education for their children. They stay because they find ways to volunteer and share their talents in areas including social justice and music.

Our future will be shaped by shared values and investment in our future. The survey asked about specific investments, and there was support for each of them, along with constructive feedback; these ideas include new staff roles and investments. Our community wants to invest based on our values to support access and equity, and to support each other even while we're working for social justice. We want to be a leader in environmental improvements (reducing emissions, for example), and in being welcoming to all (mindful of differences in hearing, vision, mobility, identities, and cultures).

Together, we are at the start of a momentous ministerial transition. In the coming year, as we welcome and work with an interim lead minister, we will have opportunities to reflect on our priorities and discern how we can make them real in our physical presence, our organizational structures, and our spiritual practices.

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## The Road Ahead

Our lead minister, Rev. Marta Morris Flanagan, will retire in June, so the Parish Committee (ParCom) and Interim Lead Minister Search Committee (ISC) are working together to hire an interim lead minister.

### What does an interim minister do?

An interim minister preaches, provides pastoral care, is head of staff, and does all the other things that any minister does. In addition, an interim minister has a special interest and expertise in helping congregations navigate change well.

Working closely with members of First Parish, the interim minister will have two overarching goals for the transition period.

## Transition Timeline

**Now to June** We celebrate Marta's ministry, enjoy Rev. Tricia Brennan's presence, and appreciate our life together as a community.

**April** The Interim Search Committee (ISC) finalizes First Parish's profile. Candidates read it and indicate if they are interested in our congregation.

**May** The ISC interviews, researches, and evaluates up to six candidates and recommends one to the Parish Committee (ParCom). They rank other candidates they believe would work out well if our first choice doesn't choose us.

**May 31** We hold our wonderful celebration of Marta's ministry.

**June** The interim minister is hired and announced. We welcome Rev. Erica back from leave and meet her baby. We send Marta off with lots of loving hope for a good next chapter of her life.

**August** The interim minister arrives, begins to settle in, and meets with lay leaders.

**September** The interim minister meets the congregation at the Ingathering service and starts to do the full work of interim ministry.

**2025-26 Program Year** The interim minister helps us take stock, explore and experiment, ask questions, learn about ourselves, examine possible structures for staffing and lay leadership, and envision our future. ParCom guides the process of creating a Settled Minister Search Committee. The congregation votes on Search Committee candidates at the Annual Meeting in May.

**2026-27 Program Year** The congregation continues to explore and learn. The Settled Minister Search Committee creates a congregational profile, interviews and evaluates candidates, and brings one candidate to First Parish for a week of preaching and meeting members. The congregation votes on whether to call this candidate.

**September 2027** If all goes to plan, we start getting to know our new settled minister and shaping our congregational life together.

The first goal is to help the congregation look, listen, and learn more about ourselves. Why do we do things the way we do? Which of our patterns serve us well? What tweaks or re-thinkings might serve us better? What experiments do we want to try? Change can be

unsettling, but it can also be an invitation to new insights and new growth.

The second goal is to help prepare fertile ground for a new settled ministry. Especially when a minister has been with a congregation for a long time, as Marta has, people need time to process the departure and the changes it creates, grieve this loss of relationship, and become ready for a fruitful relationship with a new settled lead minister. When congregations try to rush the transition process, they often have problems engaging with a new minister — and one of the few things we know about a future settled minister is that they will not be identical to Marta.

We expect the interim minister to be with us for two years, which is a good amount of time to allow for this process of learning, reflection, and exploration.

### **What is the search process?**

The Parish Committee created the Interim Search Committee (ISC) in January. The members are Elizabeth Hunter, Jim Ptacek, Lori Kenschaft, Marie Meteer (chair), and Marilyn Downs. Their tasks are to:

- collect input from the congregation and staff
- discern what the congregation wants and needs from an interim minister
- prepare a congregational profile to describe our congregation honestly and attract good candidates
- communicate with the congregation and ParCom along the way
- interview and research candidates
- recommend a candidate to ParCom
- introduce the interim minister to the congregation
- support the minister as they arrive at First Parish

The Parish Committee will hire the interim minister and finalize the contract, starting with a template contract provided by the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA).

If you have questions or want to give input on what qualities in an interim minister you think would be good for First Parish, contact the committee at [ISC@firstparish.info](mailto:ISC@firstparish.info) or come to one of our gatherings. Please feel free to talk with any of us informally. Look for our colorful nametags at coffee hour.

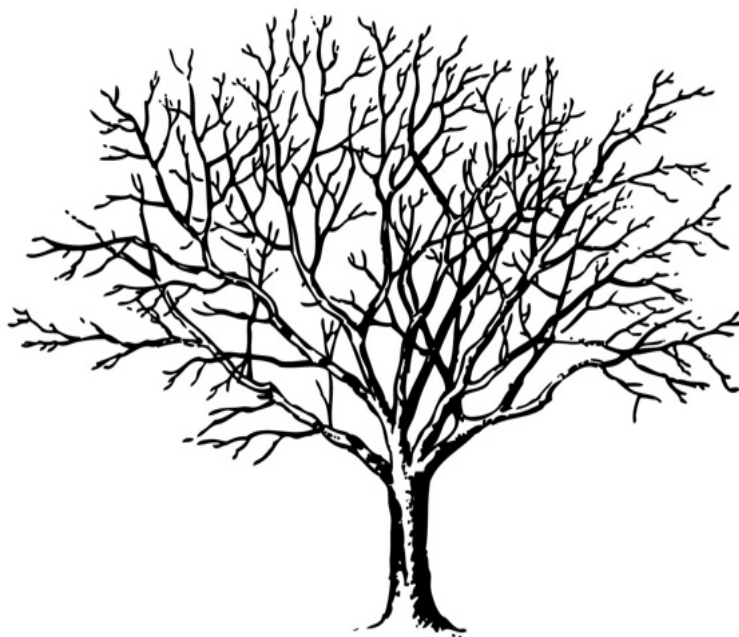
## **Blood Drive Decisions**

Thank you so much to the many volunteers who have made our blood drives such a success. The time has come to set the schedule for next year, and some decisions must be made.

For nearly 15 years we have run seven drives a year — four in the Sanctuary on the first Saturdays of the even months from October through April, and three in the Vestry on the first Wednesdays of the odd months from November through March. We don't have air conditioning in either space, so the American Red Cross (ARC) can't use them from May to September. This schedule fits the 8- and 16-week deferral periods for whole blood and Power Red donors, and brings in more than 300 units each year.

The challenges of this schedule include clearing, cleaning, and resetting the Sanctuary, which is a large task. The choir often helps stack chairs on Thursdays after rehearsal, but other users often need the Sanctuary on Fridays or Saturdays.

The biggest challenge is that the point person has to be in attendance on four weekends. With help, tasks go much faster and more joyfully. But sometimes the help is not there, making the point-person role very long and difficult. I am able to do it alone, and it's important enough to me to commit to doing it, even if alone. But the reality is that I'm now 66, I'm consistently out of the country through October, and locking down three other weekends is getting more complicated for me.



Carolyn White did wonderful work as the October point person for three years. I've done the rest, with help. Carolyn has moved on to other roles, so that's prompting the rethink. I see five options:

- 1. Keep the schedule the way it is and recruit another point person for October.** This does not address the workload of using the Sanctuary.
- 2. Drop the October drive but keep the schedule otherwise the same.** This loses over 50 units of donations and doesn't address the three other dates scheduled for the Sanctuary.
- 3. Stop using the Sanctuary and run drives only in the Vestry, keeping the schedule the same.** This loses about 100 units and doesn't free up the other weekends, but it does improve the likelihood of recruiting an October point person.
- 4. Stop using the Sanctuary and drop the Saturday drives.** We would run them on the first Wednesdays November through April. Maybe the October drive can happen. Maybe first and third Wednesdays? (Gain 60+ units?) Maybe hold drives even more often to gain more units?

I could handle drives solo November through April, and my schedule would probably allow me to do them all. If not, an ARC volunteer can cover the greeting area and the canteen. ARC staff can set up the tables, but are notoriously less consistent about resetting a space. Can we ask our staff to pick up any needed resetting if one or more of us isn't available?

- 5. Stop hosting blood drives.** We would lose over 300 units, and I'm not yet willing to consider this option.

I would love to hear ideas for other possibilities. We need to consider that the ARC prefers schedules to be confirmed six months or more in advance, and that donors need predictable schedules that fit their deferral periods.

Soon I must sit down with the church staff to set next year's schedule, and then try to get the ARC to accommodate any changes. Please let me know your thoughts as soon as possible. Thank you!

John Hodges

## Finding the Holy Through Art

As part of her farewell, Rev. Marta Flanagan has asked that our next congregational art show have the theme Finding the Holy Through Art. The deadline for submissions is March 30.

"Holy" can mean many things, including:

- How is your work inspired by something sacred or transcendent?
- Does it express sustenance or inspiration that you have known or longed for?
- Is your creative process nourished by spiritual experience?

We ask that all submissions include a description explaining how the work addresses the theme. These descriptions will be displayed and may be edited to fit into the available space. All works and descriptions will be photographed and included in Marta's memory book, one of our parting gifts to her.

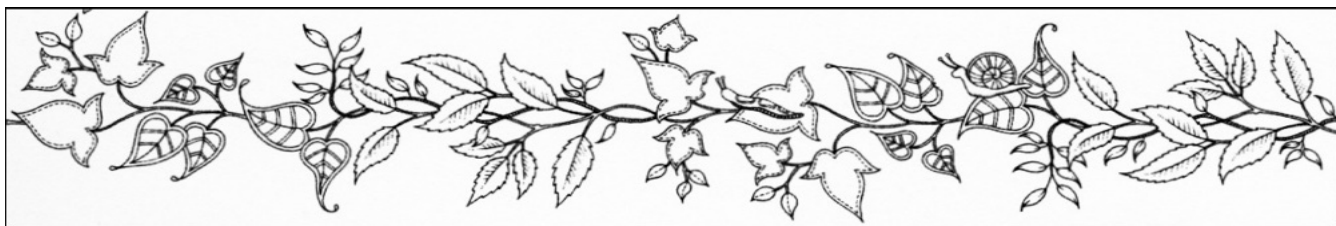
Depending on space, up to two pieces will be accepted from each artist. Please indicate on the back your order of preference for inclusion in the show, in case we can only include one.

We welcome work in any two-dimensional media, but no larger than 36 by 36 inches. Make sure your piece is ready to hang with a wire on the back. Please label it on the back with your name, first or second preference, and the title. Ceramics and other three-dimensional pieces may be displayed in the Narthex showcase, if size permits. Please note that, if your work is for sale, 10 percent will be donated to First Parish.

Drop off artwork in the Grady Room between March 30 and April 4. The opening reception will be April 6 in the Parlor from noon to 1:30 pm; please bring food to share.

If you have questions, or want a link to the submission form, contact us at [ArtTeam@firstparish.info](mailto:ArtTeam@firstparish.info).

Peggy Gardiner, Carol Chamberlain,  
Steph Miserlis, Jim Ptacek,  
Michaela Kirby, and Marilyn Downs



## Seeking Summer Worship Leaders

Take an active part in the spiritual formation of our shared community – lead a worship service at First Parish this summer!

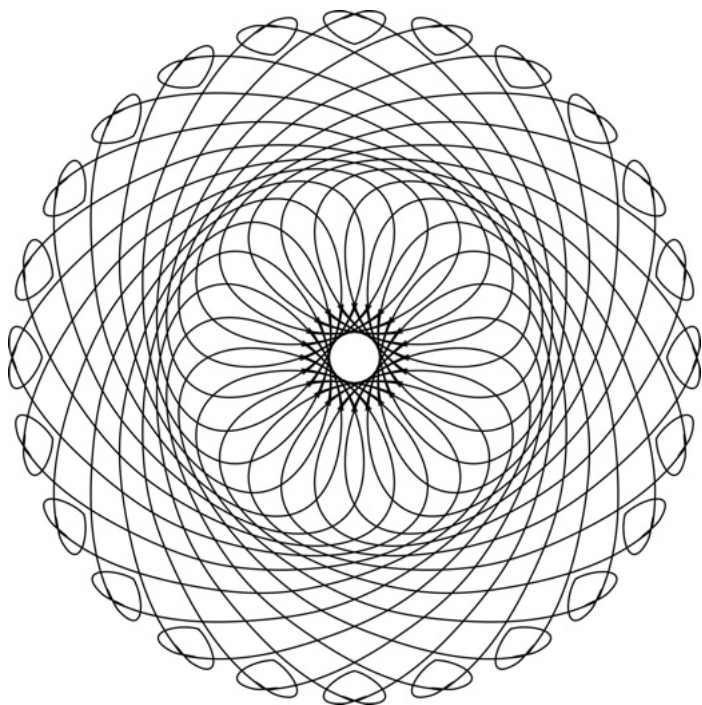
We want to hear your thoughts, your voice, and your stories. Do you have insights to offer others? Have you thought of a great topic you wish you could share with the community, but maybe you were too shy to volunteer? Would it help if someone asked you?

NOW's your chance! We are asking!

Every summer our congregation offers a handful of members the opportunity to lead a worship service. Summer services this year will again be virtual – 100% online. This means that if you fear speaking in front of a crowd, or you'll be out of town, you can take part from the comfort of your own chosen space, anywhere in the world as long as it has a good WiFi connection.

Leading summer worship is a gift!

- To our ministers, that they might return well-rested in the fall, restored in mind, body, and spirit.
- To your fellow parishioners, that they might be inspired by you to explore new paths to spiritual enrichment.
- To you, the worship leader, that by reflecting on your journey, organizing your thoughts, and sharing your insights with others, you might expand your own spiritual horizons while deepening your connection to others.



- And not least, to our Unitarian Universalist community and the wider world, that we might celebrate the inherent worth and dignity of every person, build relationships through compassion and acceptance, and strengthen our UU values in this time of need.

An application is online at [tinyurl.com/summer-form](https://tinyurl.com/summer-form) or you can speak with any Worship Associate about your ideas. The deadline for submitting your proposal is April 20.

### Practical Details

All summer services will be streamed live via Zoom.

Summer service leaders need to be available for training online with Marta and the Worship Associates on Sunday, May 4, from 1 to 3 pm.

In addition to individuals, First Parish members or groups can work together on a service. Groups need to identify one person to coordinate with the WAs.

Service themes and sermons/reflections must respect people regardless of our differences (income, race, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, class, political affiliation, ways of worshipping, beliefs, educational background, etc.) and offer a message that can speak to people across broad experiences and beliefs.

Submitting a proposal is not a guarantee that you will a service. The Worship Associates need to balance the variety of topics and range of voices from the applications submitted.

Those who lead summer services create the entire service and the sermon. Pre-recorded music can be provided. Speakers may also play instruments or arrange music on their own. Each summer service worship leader works with a designated Worship Associate to ensure that all the elements of the service fit well together.

If you have questions, please contact [WorshipAssociates@firstparish.info](mailto:WorshipAssociates@firstparish.info).

The Worship Associates



## Staff and Contact Information

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

**Rev. Marta Morris Flanagan** Lead Minister  
*leadminister@firstparish.info*

**Rev. Erica Richmond** Parish Minister  
*parishminister@firstparish.info*

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

**Hours** Monday to Friday, 10 am to 3 pm

**Ebiere Omoregie** Office Manager  
*officemanager@firstparish.info*

**Allison Sillers** Office & Communications  
Associate *office@firstparish.info*

**Jacqueline De Jesus** Sexton

### Religious Education

**Rev. Stevie Carmody**, Minister of Religious  
Education *mre@firstparish.info*

**Rose Sawyer Marsh** Youth Program Coordinator  
*youthadvisor@firstparish.info*

### Music

**Daniel Parsley** Director of Music  
*daniel.parsleyr@firstparish.info*

**Kenneth Seitz** Director of Music, Emeritus

**Parish Committee** *parishexec@firstparish.info*

Anne Quaadgras (Chair), John Anderson  
(Vice Chair), Carolyn Hodges (Treasurer),  
Joanna Pushee (Clerk), Jeff Keffer, Steve McMullin,  
Susan Moore, Allan Tosti, Kate Tranquada

**Finance Committee** *finance@firstparish.info*  
Lissa McBurney

**Human Resources** *humanresources@firstparish.info*  
Kay Snowden

**Lay Ministry** *layministry@firstparish.info*  
Carolyn Carlson

**Leadership Development**  
*leadership@firstparish.info* Kiki Giatis

## The Spire

Diane Shriver, Editor

Next issue: Sunday, April 6  
Submissions due by Sunday, March 30  
*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.

**Membership** *membership@firstparish.info*  
Amy Anderson

**Music** *music@firstparish.info*  
Robin Baker, Bob Rowlands

**Property** *property@firstparish.info*  
Greg Ruccio

**Religious Education** *re@firstparish.info*  
Betsy Carlton-Gyson

**Social Justice** *socialjustice@firstparish.info*  
Alan Linov

**STAR Adult Education**  
Lyn Fulton-John *star@firstparish.info*

**Stewardship** *stewardship@firstparish.info*  
Amy Speare

**The Alliance** *alliance@firstparish.info*  
Andrea Winslow

**Trustees of Trust Funds** *trustees@firstparish.info*  
Julie Dunn

**Worship Associates**  
*worshipassociates@firstparish.info*  
Loren Gomez