

Next issue deadline
Sunday, March 29

The Spire

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Upholding What Matters

As we launch our month-long Stewardship Campaign, we ask this grounding question: What truly matters, and how do we uphold it together?

Our theme, Upholding What Matters, reflects the many reasons people choose to belong to and support First Parish. What matters to each of us may be different, but together we are bound by the shared purpose and love at the center of our community.

Your annual gift sustains the work of First Parish. It is not a fee or obligation, but an expression of values, an act of solidarity, and a way of saying that this community, and its values, matter to me.

Members of the Stewardship Committee share what Upholding What Matters means to them:

Megan Rising “As we navigate this challenging and uncertain time in our country and world, I can't think of too many things more important to me than building intentional, diverse community around shared values, where we support one another in myriad ways and work toward a shared vision of a better world. I feel so grateful to have found that here.

“First Parish nurtures the parts of me that need to be whole in order to do the climate justice advocacy work that I spend my days on, and to be the partner, parent, and friend that I want to be. My family and kids are also central to what matters to me, and the ways First Parish celebrates who we are and nurtures our spiritual development and curiosity bring me tremendous joy and comfort. When I think about what matters and how to uphold it right now, First Parish is an essential pillar.”

Rev. Erica Federspiel Richmond “During times of uncertainty, people often do one of two things: lean toward one another or lean away. I am heartened that the members of First Parish are turning toward one another. We are upholding what matters. We are showing up for each other, tending to each other's joys and sorrows, and working together to resist the injustices of our time. As one of your ministers, I am incredibly proud of this spiritual community. Thank you for pledging so that First Parish might continue to do what it does best.”

Joel Carlton-Gysan “When my wife and I began raising our family, we searched for a spiritual home that would nurture both heart and mind – an open, welcoming community where our children could grow in their own spiritual understanding, where love and justice were not just ideals but lived commitments, and where we could build meaningful relationships with others who shared our values. That is what I have found here. Upholding What Matters means nurturing a community

where we care for one another, deepen our spiritual lives, and act together to make a difference in the world. It means sustaining a place where our values are practiced, our voices are heard, and our commitments are strengthened.”

Emily Balkam “Someone at Ferry Beach got me thinking about generosity with the phrase ‘time, talent, and treasure’ – the things we can give to our community. Since I was laid off in October, I've been thinking about how to spend my time and talent while my kids are at school, in a way I couldn't while working full-time. I wrote postcards in support of social justice and equity, volunteered at food drives, gave blood, and collected warm clothes for families in need. I'm now working on opening a community cafe in my neighborhood, hiring all local vendors and professional services. Just this week, I had the pleasure of stuffing/ mailing over 400 Stewardship letters with help from more than 10 volunteers. Together we



finished in record time while sharing stories, pizza, and song – a reminder that love is at the center of how we care for our communities, both at First Parish and in our neighborhoods.”

As you consider your annual pledge, we invite you to think about what matters most to you at First Parish, whether it's the music, worship service, activism, or something else. Your financial support makes all of these things possible.

To learn more about how your gifts support First Parish, and to see a guidance sheet to help in your decisions, please visit www.firstparish.info/connect/give/.

In the Midst of Transition

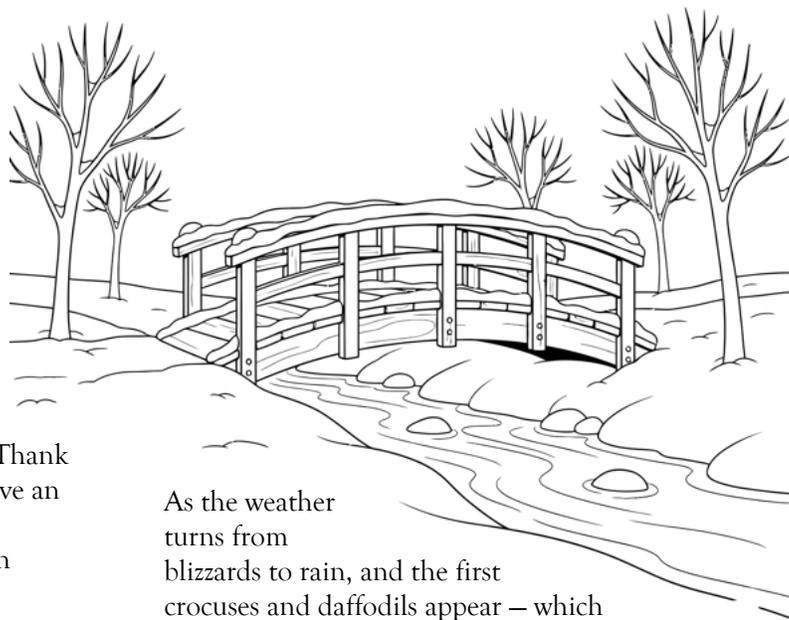
The monthly Parish Committee meeting was moved out a week to February 24, so there is nothing to report from the regular meetings just yet. However, the committee has been gathering informally with the Transition Team, and we continue to work together. At the six-month mark of our ministerial transition, February has seen a flurry of activity, especially around gathering nominations for the Minister Search Committee. The process of collecting nominations continues. Who will our next minister be? Who will decide this important next step? Watch for more information to come.

Great work and care went into the Connecting events in February. Much appreciation goes to the Transition Team for organizing “Common Ground: What Connects and Sustains Us.” For the in-person event, many thanks to the speakers, Kay Snowden and Julie Garry (the Transition Team co-chairs), and to Marie Meteer (our Parish Committee chair) for their clarity on the moment we find ourselves in as a congregation. Thank you to those who helped check people in, such as Marilyn Downs, and to those who arranged the delicious lunch, including Lida Junghans, Lois Fine, and others. Thank you to First Parish member Heidi Swarts, who gave an opening prayer, and to Rev. Jonipher for the closing blessing. First Parish welcomed back facilitator Hilary Allen from the Unitarian Universalist Association and her colleague Ginger Hanson from one of our neighboring congregations. As we lay the groundwork for our search process, we are reminded of all the things we do well, the areas of improvement that we can begin

to prioritize, and that every member's participation is not only welcome but vital.

Speaking of participation, Rev. Erica's February 22 sermon, *We Need One Another*” reminded us about the phrase “it takes a village.” This sentiment was lifted up within the theme of community care. But what about the times when individuals do not want to be villagers? Put in other terms by poet Adrienne Rich, “Responsibility to yourself means refusing to let others do your thinking, talking, and naming for you: it means learning to respect and use your own brains and instincts; hence grappling with hard work.” While many members and visitors at First Parish may feel at home with thinking for oneself, being a good villager adds more complexity. There is a natural friction in human connection, and reciprocity cannot always be expected.

As First Parish moves forward in our time of discernment, what are the values that resonate most, and what draws us together? What or who, specifically, keeps you coming back and helps you overcome any inklings of inconvenience, sacrifice of time or treasure, or the sweet temptation of going back to bed on Sunday morning, or at the end of a long, cold, snowy week? Is it the desserts at an Alliance event, or the familiar face of someone you met the first time you decided to dive into a spiritual practice at First Parish?



As the weather turns from blizzards to rain, and the first crocuses and daffodils appear – which they will, eventually – I am thinking of this phrase from Thich Nhat Hanh: “No mud, no lotus.” If things get a little muddy, that's a good sign, and at least means the snow is melting.

Joanna Pushee, Clerk

Reckoning and Repair

In February the Reckoning and Repair working group (R&R) delivered, on behalf of First Parish, a check for \$27,000 to the Roxbury Youth Programs (RYP), an afterschool program of the Unitarian Universalist Urban Ministry that provides leadership, educational, and enrichment opportunities for Boston students. How did we get to this momentous milestone in First Parish's journey of reconciliation and repair?



Let's start with our broader, national context. On June 19, 2019, Ta-Nehisi Coates delivered a powerful address to a House subcommittee regarding H.R. 40, legislation that would create a commission to study and address the effects of slavery. The day before, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell had argued that modern Americans should not be held to account for something that happened when none of us were alive. Coates challenged the logic of embracing only the legacy of the founders that ennobles us and not their legacy of sin or shame. He stated that "the real dilemma posed by reparations is just that: a dilemma of inheritance."

We at First Parish have wrestled with this very "dilemma of inheritance." We proudly claim our connection to the people of Menotomy who first broke off from Cambridge to gather here to worship in 1739, but it was only in 2022 after Rev. Erica Richmond shared her research into our congregation's founding that we began to ask, *What else did we inherit from our founders?* Given that half the men who funded the first meetinghouse were enslavers – their fortunes came in part from forced, uncompensated labor – how might we acknowledge the sins of the past and work toward making amends?

R&R convened in 2023 under the auspices of the Racial Justice Coordinating Committee. We led the congregation in study, discussion, and discernment over the next 18 months. In 2024, the congregation adopted an Affirmation of Reckoning and Repair that acknowledged our congregation's entanglement with slavery and committed to a process of reparations. Part of that commitment was "to [build] relationships with local, Black-led organizations to shape a framework for meaningful reparations."

As part of brainstorming and research to find organizations with whom to partner, the Outreach and Partnerships subcommittee of R&R turned to the Unitarian Universalist Urban Ministry. First Parish has long been a member congregation of the UUUM,

whose mission is to "work across race and place to dismantle racism and white supremacy culture and to advance racial, social, and economic justice."

Our UUUM delegates are Robin Baker, Marc Jacobson, and Maryglenn Vincens. Each work to keep our congregation apprised of events such as the Community Conversations series. For many years First Parish has donated all of our Christmas Eve offering to Renewal House, the domestic violence shelter run by UUUM. Through R&R's discussions with Robert Jones, UUUM's Congregational and Volunteer Coordinator, and Karsten Cash, Director of Programs for UUUM, we began to envision a collaboration between First Parish and Roxbury Youth Programs.

R&R toured RYP facilities and learned about programs, and attended the UUUM open house as well as its annual meeting. A group of congregants joined a Local Legacies tour, an RYP student-curated, student-led tour focusing on the history and culture of Roxbury. Every interaction with youth and staff from RYP felt inspired. The student empowerment model with adult guides, mentors, and workshop volunteers centers young people, prioritizing their development, interests, and needs. As we reckon with the crimes of the past, what is more hopeful than focusing on the young people who will shape our future? Upon review of proposals from Mr. Jones and Mr. Cash about how First Parish's commitment of financial and volunteer resources might support RYP programs, R&R members voted unanimously to partner with RYP.

This past November, R&R kicked off a month of fundraising with a presentation by Mr. Jones and Mr. Cash to an audience of 50 congregants. The enthusiasm to support RYP's work was palpable. Over the next month, 67 households responded to R&R's call to contribute to our reparations fund, raising \$32,000, a response that speaks to our congregation's dedication to living our values.

R&R has formalized a three-year commitment to RYP. The first installment of funds will enable the program to respond nimbly to their needs and establish priorities to support their mission. Bi-monthly meetings will help us plan, evaluate, and give and receive feedback. In addition to financial support, we are committed to facilitating opportunities for First Parish congregants to volunteer time and talent to suit the needs of RYP. Look for future announcements for how you can participate!

The next R&R meeting will be March 3 via Zoom. Please join us! Contact racialjustice@firstparish.info.



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and mission of First Parish.

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The Spire

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