

# The Spire

Next issue deadline  
Sunday, May 26

MAY 5, 2024

THE FIRST SUNDAY RECORD

VOL. 66, No. 9

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

## Crossing the Divide

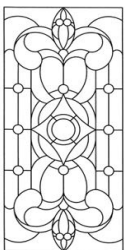
Our world is very polarized, with people of divergent views often unwilling to talk with each other, or even treat each other respectfully. This pattern is obvious in politics but also sometimes happens locally, even within the First Parish community, around issues like Israel and Gaza or how to respond to our history of enslavement. The STAR Committee has partnered with Braver Angels, a national organization that fosters communication across divisions, to offer us some workshops.

The first, Depolarizing Within, examines the assumptions we bring to thoughts about people with whom we disagree. We will identify stereotypes, explore phrases that help us engage and that create distance, and discuss how to engage with those who share our views when they express contempt for people with other views.

The second, Skills for Disagreeing Better, extends these insights to communicating with people with whom we have strong differences. We will practice listening and finding common ground.

The workshops will be on Sunday, June 2, from 1:30 to 4:30 pm, and Thursday, June 6, from 7 to 8:30 pm, both in the Vestry. The first one is a prerequisite for the second. Register through our church website, at [www.firstparish.info](http://www.firstparish.info).

## Honoring Ann Mathes



All are welcome to attend a Celebration of Life service for longtime First Parish member Ann G. Mathes. We will honor Ann's life, her commitment to justice, her family, and all those who will miss her. Saturday, May 18, from 4 to 5:30 pm.

## UU General Assembly

On June 20 to 23 the Unitarian Universalist General Assembly (known as GA) will be held virtually, so no travel is required to attend. The theme is "Love Unites, Stories Ignite." Participants will worship, witness, learn, connect, and make policy for our Association through the democratic process. Anyone may register to attend at [www.uua.org/ga](http://www.uua.org/ga). Participation means committing to being on Zoom for several hours a day for a few days.

If you are interested in becoming a voting delegate at GA to represent our congregation, please contact the Parish Executive Committee by May 16. Their e-mail is [parishexec@firstparish.info](mailto:parishexec@firstparish.info).



## First Parish Annual Meeting

Sunday, May 19

Noon to 2 pm

Childcare available

## Democracy Film

On Monday, May 13, from 7 to 8:30 pm in the Vestry, the Defending Democracy Group will show a 30-minute film of David Pepper discussing his book *Saving Democracy*, followed by a discussion and action plan. Please join us!

## Urban Ministry Meeting

The 189th Annual Meeting of the UU Urban Ministry will be Thursday, May 23, from 5:30 to 7 pm. The group's mission is to "work across race and place to dismantle racism and white supremacy culture and to advance racial, social, and economic justice."

As a member congregation, First Parish is entitled to have three voting delegates. We have two incumbent delegates, Maryglenn Vincens and Lois Fine – perhaps you would like to join them. Please contact the Social Justice Committee at [socialjustice@firstparish.info](mailto:socialjustice@firstparish.info) to apply to become a delegate.

## A Step on the Journey

The Parish Committee has unanimously endorsed this Affirmation, crafted by our Reckoning & Repair Working Group with much input from the congregation. At our Annual Meeting on May 19 we will vote on whether to adopt it. This will be only a first step on a longer journey to right past wrongs, but it is an important, symbolic step to inspire our congregation's racial justice work going forward.

The Affirmation does not seek to answer the big questions we will inevitably have to answer. Nor does the Affirmation empower any group to make decisions about those questions for the congregation.

What the Affirmation does seek to do, however, is to positively assert our commitment to joining a larger movement that is wrestling with these questions. Other Unitarian Universalist congregations in Massachusetts – in Boston, Needham, North Andover, Hingham, Brewster, and Gloucester – are ahead of us on this journey, as are UU congregations across the country.

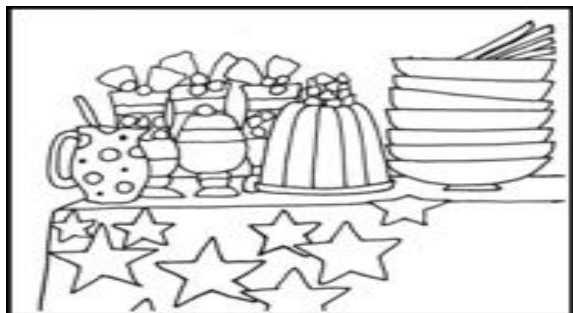
Sixty-one years ago this month, in his *Letter from the Birmingham Jail*, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. reminded us that “the time is always ripe to do right.” We hope that this Affirmation will inspire us to continue our journey toward justice.

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## Potluck Gatherings

This month's potluck gathering will be Wednesday, May 29, at 6 pm in the Vestry. During the summer our popular potlucks will happen every Wednesday evening, in the Courtyard. Bring the family, bring something to share, bring your own dinner, or just bring yourself. No signup is needed.

Each potluck is sponsored by a group or committee. First Parish provides compostable paper goods and lemonade. The sponsoring group handles set up and cleanup. We need volunteers to sponsor, so if your group is interested, please contact [star@firstparish.info](mailto:star@firstparish.info).



## Affirmation of Reckoning and Repair

### Acknowledgment

To create beloved community, rooted in justice and inspired by love, we break past silences and name our congregation's entanglement with the institution of slavery, which began with the founding of the congregation in 1739. At least eight of First Parish's sixteen original pew owners enslaved Black people, and our initial congregation was founded in part on the uncompensated labor, resources, skills, and talents of enslaved people.

### Commitment

First Parish Unitarian Universalist of Arlington is committed to building relationships with local, Black-led organizations to shape a framework for meaningful reparations. We commit to a process of reparations guided by people of African heritage and the broader reparations movement, and we will work within and beyond our congregation's walls to bring about holistic repair.

In tandem with seeking out and forming relationships with Black-led organizations, the Reckoning & Repair working group will continue gathering congregational feedback about a plan for reparations. All annual fiscal decisions will be made by the appropriate committees within the congregation, while all longer-term fiscal commitments will be made by congregational vote.

Reparations are central to the struggle to build a world based on justice, care, and uplift, and we commit ourselves to this work.  
Hand in hand we will find a way.

To enjoy some family game time before dinner, bring your kids at 5 pm to the park behind the library. This is not a kid's drop-off time, but rather a chance to play together. First Parish will supply some equipment, or bring your own.

To sign up to sponsor the potluck, or to be a Games Guide at 5 pm, please volunteer by filling out the form on our church website. David Whitford is organizing music to make these gatherings even more delightful, so let him know if you would like to play.

The Worship Associates

## Acknowledging This Land

At our Annual Meeting on May 19 we will vote on the statement below, which has been unanimously endorsed by our Parish Committee. This acknowledgment was crafted by our Indigenous Justice Working Group after engaging with the congregation, Indigenous consultants, our ministers, and others. Its aim is to provide witness, education, action, relationship, and support, responding to the 2020 call from the Unitarian Universalist Association to address 400 years of white supremacist colonialism. For more information about this process, please visit our church website at [www.firstparish.info/justice-inclusion/social-justice/indigenous-justice/](http://www.firstparish.info/justice-inclusion/social-justice/indigenous-justice/).

### First Parish Land Acknowledgment

The First Parish meetinghouse is located on the ancestral lands of the Massachusetts people, whose name was appropriated by this Commonwealth. The European colonists who took land from its inhabitants through coercion and violence also subjected Indigenous people to forced labor, relocation, and genocide. Our faith calls us to acknowledge the truth of our history, to name the ongoing harms of settler colonialism, and to work toward repair. We resolve to be in right relationship with the Massachusetts and other Indigenous peoples, particularly the federally recognized Wampanoag nations of Mashpee and Aquinnah. We commit to finding meaningful ways to offer our support as we work in solidarity to build a more sustainable future for us all.

## Join in the Pride Celebrations

The Welcoming Congregation Committee is organizing folks to walk in the Boston Pride Parade on Saturday, June 8. We invite members and friends of First Parish to make our welcoming presence known. June is Pride Month, and Boston Pride for the People (BP4TP) is sponsoring the parade and a festival. BP4TP builds community by celebrating the rich history of LGBTQ+ people, educating about the impact of discrimination and how to disrupt patterns of oppression, and commemorating the struggle for rights and protection. For more information, please visit [www.bostonprideforthepeople.org](http://www.bostonprideforthepeople.org). To help out with planning, contact [welcoming@firstparish.info](mailto:welcoming@firstparish.info).

## No Ferry Beach in 2024

This year our annual Ferry Beach retreat coincides with Arlington Town Day, an important fundraiser for our Social Justice Committee, so we will not gather in Maine in September. We plan to return next year from October 3 to 5, and are exploring alternative venues to increase our options for future retreats.

We hope to hold a fun-filled day this fall – an “UnFerry Beach,” if you will. To help plan this event or future retreats, contact [ferrybeach@firstparish.info](mailto:ferrybeach@firstparish.info).

The Ferry Beach Committee

## Highlights of Our Ministry Assessment

The Committee on Ministry recently completed its annual evaluation of ministry and congregational life at First Parish, through a survey and consultations with members and staff. The survey showed that our staff is serving our needs well.

Participants noted moving and thought-provoking sermons, attention to pastoral care, opportunities for spiritual development, engaging adult programming, and many social justice activities. Respondents are pleased with the abundance of programming and describe our congregation as thriving, growing, and vibrant, noting growth in service attendance and Religious Education. First Parish is seen as supportive, kind, thoughtful, joyful, and financially generous.

Improvements were suggested in three areas.

- Although many noted enhanced welcoming activities, some groups may need more focused efforts, in particular young single people, families, and LGBTQ+ individuals.
- With our expanded activities, finding volunteers continues to be a challenge. Participants suggest looking at different ways to reach out to volunteers as well as more communication about volunteer opportunities.
- As in past evaluations, some noted that we need to look for ways to increase the diversity of our congregation.

The Committee on Ministry greatly appreciates those who participated in this year's evaluation. The results underscore our sense of the vibrancy and health of our beloved spiritual home.

The Committee on Ministry



## Staff and Contact Information

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

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**Rev. Erica Richmond** Parish Minister  
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**Kenneth Seitz** Director of Music, Emeritus

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## The Spire

Diane Shriver, Editor

Next issue: Sunday, June 2  
Submissions due by Sunday, May 26  
*Items may be edited for space and clarity.*

E-mail to *spire@firstparish.info*.  
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Time-sensitive details belong in the Weekly E-mail  
Bulletin – send to *weekly@firstparish.info*  
by Wednesday at noon.

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