

Next issue deadline
Sunday, February 22

The Spire

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2026

THE FIRST SUNDAY RECORD

VOL. 68, Nos. 5 & 6

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

Taking Direct Action

Everyone I talk to is outraged and eager to figure out what to do to most effectively make a difference in the state of our country. Betsy Leondar-Wright has volunteered to lead a discussion about George Lakey's book *How We Win: A Guide to Nonviolent Direct Action Campaigning*. Over three sessions on Zoom we will discuss principles and strategies and apply them to our defense of democracy.

Three Monday evenings on Zoom, from 7 to 8 pm, on February 9, March 2, and March 16.

There is a 20-person limit, so please register on our church website, www.firstparish.info. The Zoom link and information about the reading assignments will be sent once you register. The sessions will not be recorded. The book can be purchased at the Book Rack on Medford Street in Arlington.

This event is co-sponsored by our Defending Democracy Working Group and STAR Adult Education Program.

Kate Lenox

Got Unfinished Projects?

Does the snow make you feel like pulling out that unfinished knitting or crocheting project? Join us on Sunday, February 1, for the next gathering of the Knitting Circle, a friendly group that meets in the

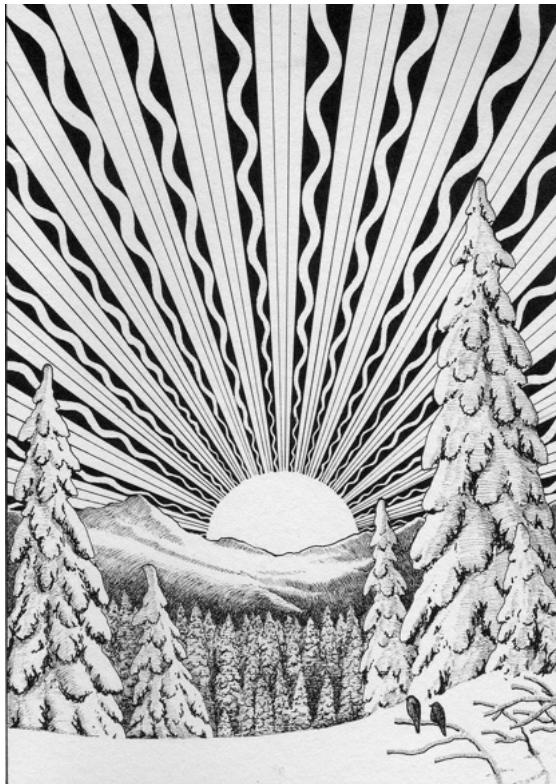
Damon Room after services on the first Sunday of each month. Experts and beginners are both welcome.

Parish Committee Notes

We start 2026 with hope for the future, and yet our country began the year with the deaths of Keith Porter Jr., Renee Nicole Good, Alex Pretti, and others. As we mourn their loss and stand together at vigils, in protests, and by supporting community building efforts, we are reminded by guest preacher Rev. Mary Margaret Earl from the UU Urban Ministry to "widen the circle" and to be grounded in "our heads, hearts, and gut." As our guts may be talking to us and whispering "what's to come?" with anxiety, we can reach out to each other and to our neighbors. We can look forward to new ideas and experiment with creative ways to engage and participate, to make ourselves available, and to be open to hearing different and differing voices. Rev. Erica Richmond, together with testimonials by Bill

Gardiner, Joanne Pohl, and Eric Segal lifted up the idea of non-cooperation. Given on January 18, the sermon "Unescapable Web" was much needed and well-timed. Talk about shining a light in the darkness of winter.

The lights still have to be lit, and the building has to be cleaned and maintained. With stewarding our physical space in mind, the Parish Committee thanks Greg Ruccio for serving as the chair of the Property Committee through December 2025. While Greg is not going anywhere and remains on the committee, we welcome Mark Wilke as chair beginning in January. Mark was elected by the congregation back onto the Property Committee at the Annual Meeting



last May. We rest easy knowing our campus is in experienced hands.

Another warm welcome to new members of the Stewardship Committee: Emily Balkam and Megan Rising. Emily and Megan join Joel Carlton-Gyson. The Parish Committee appointed Emily and Megan to Stewardship in January.

Other highlights of the December and January ParCom meetings included visits from the Defending Democracy Working Group, the Human Resources Committee, the Finance Committee, and the Transition Team.

- Defending Democracy, a working group of the Social Justice Committee, continues to take on and grapple with immigration issues. The Parish Committee heard a presentation and approved a motion to put up signs in the meetinghouse. See Joanne Pohl's article for more about this.
- The Human Resources Committee continues to work with First Parish staff. The committee suggested some upcoming updates to our employee handbook.
- First Parish welcomes our part-time A/V tech person, Lilith, who joined us in December. After six years of volunteer-led Zoom services, our Tech Team is taking a breather. A rotating group of seasoned volunteers worked in teams of three to conduct each Zoom service every Sunday. We are grateful that First Parish is in a favorable financial position and is able to alleviate the workload of our fabulous volunteers.
- The Finance Committee reviewed the budget and compiled wish lists from committees.
- The Transition Team and ParCom have been working closely with Rev. Jonipher and Rev. Erica. The Parish Committee is excited about the well-received Transition Team newsletter.

The Parish Committee held its winter retreat on January 31, part of that time hosting the Transition Team. As we turns towards our Stewardship campaign this spring, the Parish Committee supports Stewardship's efforts and reminds the congregation to pledge early and with a heart open to "what's to come" next. First Parish members give our time, talent, and treasure so that we can come together and be with each other on our spiritual journeys, centering love and honoring our past, present, and future.



Joanna Pushee, Clerk

New Signs at First Parish

In response to concerns about keeping our immigrant friends safe and living our UU values, the Defending Democracy Working Group hosted a Zoom workshop in November on "Knowing Your Rights if Confronted by ICE in a House of Worship." The Massachusetts Immigration and Refugee Advocacy Coalition (MIRA) led the session. Clear legal rights and other information designed specifically for communities of faith were presented.

About 80 people signed up for the presentation, with 53 attending on Zoom. It included examples of helpful signs that identify private areas that require a warrant signed by a judge for a specific person, should ICE enter our facility. After the workshop, representatives of the Defending Democracy group met with the Parish Committee and agreed to place such signs at First Parish.

We are aware that the current risk for ICE entering our building is low, yet we believe it is important to have basic protections in place. We see this as one step in creating a place of welcome, inclusion, and safety.

Beyond signs, we hope to train any public-facing congregational volunteers and staff on how to respond to ICE if they were to come to our building. Defending Democracy hosted a wonderful de-escalation training run by UUMass Action last June, and further training at First Parish is in the works.

In the minister's office area signs will look like this:

WELCOME!

All are welcome into our space for prayer, reflection, and community-building. We do not tolerate violence, discrimination, or harassment.

Weapons are not permitted on the property.

PRIVATE PROPERTY NOTICE

This room is private property. Unauthorized entry, including by immigration enforcement, without a judicial warrant, is not permitted.

In other areas such as the Parlor, Music Room, Green Room, and Custodians' area, signs will simply read PRIVATE. These signs are meant to help all of us feel safe and welcome. If you have questions, feel free to reach out to me or to Kate Tranquada, or e-mail DefendingDemocracy@firstparish.info.

Joanne Pohl

Peter Southwick's Photos

The next exhibit in the Parlor will feature work by longtime member Peter Southwick, who passed in September 2025. Entitled "Where I've Been, What I've Seen," it documents Peter's travels and will run from February 7 to the week of April 6.

Peter retired in 2017 as Associate Professor of Journalism in the College of Communication at Boston University, following a career that included ten years on the staff of the Associated Press and nine years as Director of Photography at the *Boston Globe*.

Peter moved to the Boston area to attend Harvard and earned his BA in Government, but much of his undergraduate life was spent taking photographs for *The Harvard Crimson*, the university's daily paper.

He entered professional journalism at *The Real Paper*, an alternative weekly in Cambridge. A freelance career followed that included work for *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *Parade*. He joined the photography staff of the *Boston Herald American* in 1978, and covered such stories as the visit of Pope John Paul II, the Tall Ships parade, and the 1980 presidential campaign.

In late 1980, Peter became a staff photographer in the Boston bureau of the Associated Press. He traveled extensively within the U.S., covering everything from the World Series and the Super Bowl to political conventions and presidential inaugurations. His photos earned awards from the National Press Photographers Association, the Boston Press Photographers Association, National Headliners Awards, and the Associated Press.

Peter returned to newspaper work in 1990 as photo editor of the *Boston Globe*, and after two years was promoted to Director of Photography. He left the *Globe* and joined Boston University faculty in 2002.

Peter moved to Arlington in 1977. He and his wife, Jean Rosenberg, have lived here since 1980. More of Peter's work can be seen on his website, petersouthwick.smugmug.com.

Bearing Witness

Every Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturday people bear witness to ongoing injustice at the ICE detention center in Burlington, from 11 am to 1 pm. The vigil convenes at Burlington Mall Road and District Avenue, and carpooling is available. For more information, contact socialjustice@firstparish.info.

Food and Fellowship

Our monthly potlucks continue, starting at 6 pm in the Vestry on the last Wednesday of each month. No sign-up needed. Bring a dish to share, but if you can't, come anyway — there's always plenty. If possible, bring your own dishes and utensils.

Each dinner is hosted by a different group or committee. If you are part of a group of at least five people (including Covenant groups, knitting groups, dog-walking groups, etc.), please consider signing up to host through the church website, www.firstparish.info.

For more details, contact star@firstparish.info.



Looking Ahead to Ferry Beach

Please save the date for First Parish's Ferry Beach Retreat, to be held next year from Friday, September 25 to Sunday, September 27 at the Ferry Beach Retreat and Conference Center in Saco, Maine. The retreat is our annual intergenerational gathering to help deepen connections between members of our community. All are welcome!

Registration will open soon so you can reserve your accommodations and join the fun. For more information or to join the committee that plans this popular event, talk to any Ferry Beach Committee member or contact ferrybeach@firstparish.info.

The Ferry Beach Committee:
Monique Chaplin (chair), John Chamberlain,
David D'Antonio, Mary McCartney, Mike Rie



Staff and Contact Information

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

Rev. Jonipher Kwong Interim 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*

K. Milano Youth Program Coordinator
youthadvisor@firstparish.info

Music

Daniel Parsley Director of Music
daniel.parsley@firstparish.info

Kenneth Seitz Director of Music, Emeritus

Parish Committee *parishexec@firstparish.info*
Marie Meteer (Chair), Kate Tranquada (Vice Chair), Carolyn Hodges (Treasurer), Joanna Pushee (Clerk), John Anderson, Jeff Keffer, Susan Moore, Amy Speare, Allan Tosti

Finance Committee *finance@firstparish.info*
Lissa McBurney

Human Resources *humanresources@firstparish.info*
Sara Galantowicz

Lay Ministry *layministry@firstparish.info*
Carolyn Carlson

Leadership Development
leadership@firstparish.info Kiki Giatis

The Spire

Diane Shriver, Editor

Next issue: Sunday, March 1
Submissions due by Sunday, February 22
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*
Melissa Berczuk

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

Stewardship *stewardship@firstparish.info*
Joel Carlton-Gysan

The Alliance *alliance@firstparish.info*
Andrea Winslow

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

Worship Associates
worshipassociates@firstparish.info
Loren Gomez