

Next issue deadline
Sunday, September 29

The Spire

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THE FIRST SUNDAY RECORD

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

New Faces in the Office

We welcome Ebiere Omoregie as our office manager. Her first name is pronounced “E-berry.” She grew up on the North Shore, closely connected to a diverse population, and she hopes to carry this experience to her role with us.

Ebiere enjoys meeting new people, spending time outdoors in nature, and exploring the cuisines of various cultures. She looks forward to collaborating with colleagues to meet First Parish’s mission.

Allison Sillers steps into the job of Office and Communications Associate, providing technical and administrative support for congregants and volunteers. She will update our website, the weekly e-Bulletin and the calendars; print out Orders of Service; and manage room reservations.

Allison is originally from Virginia and has lived in Reading, Mass., since 2015 with her husband, Ryan, and their sons, Ian and William. She is active in her Unitarian Universalist church in Reading and loves the intergenerational relationships she has made there.

Since 2014 Allison has volunteered with adults and youth with disabilities at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. She supports Zoom and YouTube events at her church, and teaches lessons about disabilities to elementary students with the Reading-based non-profit Understanding Disabilities, Inc.



Parish Committee News

As we begin our church year, the Parish Committee extends a warm welcome to all, whether you are coming back to the meetinghouse after the summer or after a longer time, or you are new or just visiting.

If you continue to join us for services online, welcome. If you never really left the meetinghouse, thank you. We are here to support one another and sustain what we have: a growing, talented, deeply connected mosaic of human beings.

We thank everyone who made the summer services happen and ran the potlucks, enjoyed by so many.

This summer First Parish received a gift of more than \$60,000 from a parishioner who would like to remain anonymous. What dreams might we fulfill with this amazingly generous donation? What actions might we take in the coming months and years? Where might our energies be best directed and collected?

At our annual fall retreat the Parish Committee discussed and selected themes on which to focus during this year. Last year centered on volunteer engagement and visioning for the future. We will share our decisions in upcoming issues of *The Spire*.

Congratulations to our Parish Minister, Rev. Erica Richmond, on her marriage and announcement of a baby on the way!

Wishing you peace, rejuvenation, and the ability to get down to work.

Joanna Pushee
Clerk

Missed a Service? Check the Website!

You can view past services on our church website, which also offers a wealth of information about how First Parish works and the many ways to connect with others. Visit it often at www.firstparish.info.

A Hotline for Israel/Palestine

The Alliance begins its series of programs on Sunday, September 15, at noon in the Sanctuary. Rev. Marta Flanagan will interview Shira Hoffer, a remarkable Harvard undergraduate who founded the Hotline for Israel/Palestine in response to the horrific attack on Israel last October.

Hoffer's text-based hotline provides a place to safely pose difficult questions without being labeled antisemitic or Islamophobic. It offers well-researched, curated resources about the historical, cultural, political, and religious views underlying the conflict.

In 2024 Hoffer founded the Institute for Multipartisan Education, a charitable organization dedicated to "increasing and improving [the] capacity for curious approaches to difference and disagreement in educational settings."

A rising senior studying Social Studies and Religion, Hoffer served on Harvard Dean Rakesh Khurana's Intellectual Vitality Committee for two years, working on strategies for promoting constructive disagreement. She is a former fellow and research assistant at the Edmond and Lily Safra Center for Ethics' Intercollegiate Civil Disagreement Program, and a practicing mediator in Massachusetts courts.

All are welcome to join the conversation in the Sanctuary. It will also be on Zoom – you can find the link on our church website, www.firstparish.info.

Sign Up for UnFerry Beach

Registration for our UnFerry Beach event closes on September 18, so visit Realm to sign up for a day of fun, varied activities on Saturday, September 28, from 10 am to 9 pm. Lunch, dinner, and snacks will be provided.

Participate as much or as little as you like. Explore museums, play at Spy Pond, relax in the Courtyard, and gab with your friends. Enjoy the famous Talent/No Talent Show. Bring instruments for a jam session, do some crafts, make puzzles, play games.

Details are at www.firstparish.info, or you can contact ferrybeach@firstparish.info.

Paintings in the Parlor

On Sunday, September 22, a reception after the service will celebrate the opening of "Passages," paintings by Marilyn Downs. The paintings will hang in the Parlor until November 15. Marilyn's oil paintings are primarily landscapes, drawn from places where she has spent time and felt inspired by what she saw or felt.

The theme reflects both the tangible and metaphorical experiences that can be found in nature: paths, gorges, mountains, or water that can symbolize movement, flow, transition, journey or transformation. Refreshments will be served.

Would You Like to Join the Choir?

The choir rehearses most Thursdays at 7 pm, and many Sundays throughout the church year. The Sunday warmup starts at 9 am. New members are welcome; stop by a rehearsal to check us out.

The group performs a variety of sacred and secular music by classical and contemporary composers, as well as folk tunes, spirituals, and music from diverse cultures. There are also opportunities to sing in an intergenerational choir, which involves a smaller amount of rehearsal time.

If interested, contact Music Director Daniel Parsley at daniel.parsley@firstparish.info.

The Pie Palace Needs You!



At Arlington Town Day on Saturday, September 21, we will once again offer the Pie Palace, a fundraiser for our Social Justice Committee. There's lots to do – we need volunteers to ensure the success of this deliciously fun effort, which supports one of our most vital standing committees. E-mail piepalace@firstparish.info to find out how to help.

Giving First

Each Sunday, half of our Offering goes to support First Parish and half is donated to an organization chosen by our Social Justice Committee. The September recipient is Gould Farm in Monterey, Mass. Founded in 1913, Gould is the first residential therapeutic community in the nation dedicated to helping adults with mental health and related challenges move toward recovery and independence through community living, meaningful work, and clinical care. Visit www.gouldfarm.org to learn more.

There were two recipients over the summer, the ArCS Cluster and the Immigrant Learning Center. ArCS has been mobilizing volunteers to support asylum-seekers and refugees in Arlington, Cambridge, and Somerville since 2016. The group helps new arrivals with shelter, stipends, and other needs. The Immigrant Learning Center helps newcomers learn English, the first step toward self-sufficiency. The center also provides training in computer skills, as well as citizenship classes.

In August we received this appreciation from a past Giving First recipient:

The Living Legacy Project wishes to send our deepest appreciation to First Parish, Arlington, for your support of our mission through your Giving

First collection. We are especially grateful that a congregation such as yours understands the important work we do to lift up the stories of the Civil Rights Movement to inspire today's work to create a just and equitable world free from racism and other systems of oppression. Your donation will go a long way in helping to spread the word and further our work. Thank you so much. We hope you'll join us on a future pilgrimage. You can find out more about our work at livinglegacypilgrimage.org. Thank you again.

Another past recipient, the Neighborhood Birth Center, in Roxbury, also expressed gratitude:

This contribution will help us realize the dream of non-hospital, individualized pregnancy care and delivery provided by trained midwives and doulas

for people who live in and around Boston. This positive and supportive approach to maternal health care will be truly beneficial for black and brown people who are experiencing higher rates of pregnancy-related complications and even death than their white counterparts, and will advance racial equity in our state.

Living Our Faith

Issues related to social justice and freedom of religion will be strongly affected by the outcome of the fall elections. The Social Justice Committee asked several people, "How are you living your faith with respect to the 2024 elections?"

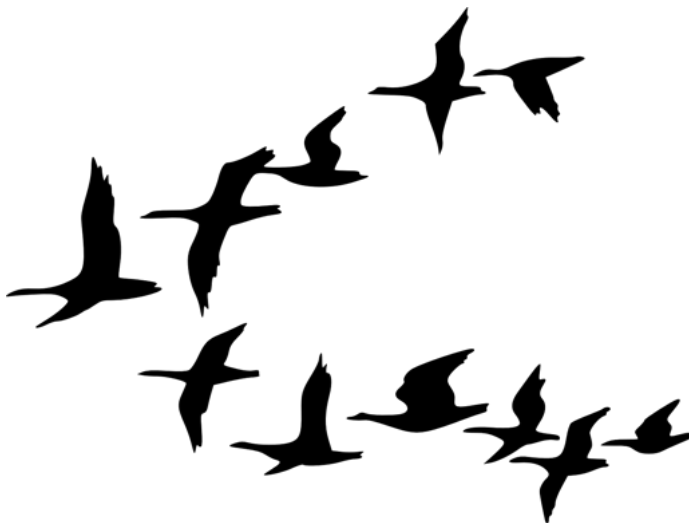
Tish Miller: I am a poll worker in Arlington, I'm writing "get out-the-vote" postcards, and I'm working for the Pennsylvania Voter Assistance Hotline.

Lori Kenschaft: I donated more than I ever have to a presidential campaign and a fund that supports grass-roots voter education and registration, focused on people of color and young people. I put my time into a campaign for the Massachusetts Governor's Council, which shapes our courts and state agencies.

Lois Fine: I am working for and donating to issues and candidates I believe in. I'm trying to stay positive, respectful, and humble. I want to be passionate, not fearful, angry, or mean.

Maggie Carey: I am in the Defending Democracy working group at First Parish. I participate in UUSJ Democracy Leaders meetings, work with Arlington 8th-graders who study civics and seniors turning 18, am a member of the MLK Jr. Birthday Observance Committee of Arlington, and am calling voters as part of a national campaign.

If you'd like to have your answer to our question included in a future issue of *The Spire*, please send it to the Social Justice Committee at socialjustice@firstparish.info.



The Road to Racial Justice

Last May our congregation voted to adopt an Affirmation of Reckoning & Repair, as well as an Indigenous Land Acknowledgement. The Affirmation passed with over 80 percent approval, and the Land Acknowledgement with more than 90 percent.

These measures would not have enjoyed such strong support had it not been for the commitment of many members and the endorsement of the Parish Committee. For years members of First Parish have studied the interrelated evils of systemic racism. The Racial Justice Coordinating Committee (RJCC) and our Reckoning & Repair working group acknowledge their immense contributions.

After our Parish Minister Erica Richmond's research helped us identify our congregation's early involvement with slavery, the Reckoning & Repair working group created programs to help us grapple with these difficult truths. We held listening sessions, engaged in conversations with members, gathered feedback, and shared findings with the congregation. We conferred with regional UUA staff, held workshops, led book groups, and hosted viewings of important films.

The Affirmation is a first small step on a longer journey. It acknowledges the harm done to enslaved people and also promises to take actions to mitigate the legacy of that harm as best we can.

Members of the RJCC and the Reckoning & Repair working group are eager to continue learning about reparations, hearing your thoughts, and sharing what we learn with you, in hopes that you, too, will actively embrace the congregation's commitment to racial

justice. The time is now for our community to turn understandings into actions.

Affirmation of Reckoning & Repair

Acknowledgement: 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.

Reflections

This Moment in Time

We may sometimes think of our history, both personal and institutional, as a sort of "test." We scour the records to see if our ancestors held people in bondage, and we feel better if we find no evidence of it. We discover that some of the founders of our church committed that sin, and we feel worse.

I would suggest that the details of exactly who was an enslaver are a side issue that can distract us from the need to focus on where we are now and what needs to be done today. After 250 years the effects of these wrongs are still apparent and cry out to be addressed.

Even if we have no personal history with enslavement, we live in a society that was created by the circumstances of the past. And whether or not a particular church has a history of enslavement has no bearing on whether it should work for justice today. This was the message of the Unitarian Universalist Association's call to focus on racial justice, which led to the affirmations adopted at our Annual Meeting.

Over the summer I updated our church timeline, which hangs in the hallway outside Marta's office. It arrived with wider margins than expected, so it will be reordered to use all the available space. It includes information from a 2011 book by Beverly Douhan,

Buried Secrets of Menotomy's Slaves, which can be found in the Arlington Historical Society bookshop and viewed as a .pdf file on their website.

All the details that Douhan uncovered cannot fit in the timeline, of course, so I thought it would be valuable to gather some of them here.

At least 30 people were held in bondage in this area in the 1700s. Many attended our church; our first minister, Samuel Cooke, and his successor, Thaddeus Fiske, both mentioned them. At a 1755 meeting the congregation voted "to make new seats over the gallery stairs for the Negroes to sit in."

According to a Colonial Census taken in 1765, some 1,500 people lived in Cambridge, including the section called Menotomy that eventually became Arlington. Among those people were 90 described as "Negroes, Indians, and Mulattos." Some of them were enslaved, but not all of them.

Two free Black men from Menotomy fought in the Revolutionary War – David Lamson and Cato Wood. Lamson paid taxes in 1781 and in the 1790 census he was listed as the head of his household. Cato Wood's name appears on every list of soldiers who fought on April 19, 1775. He was their fifer, a vital role in both communications and morale.

Others were enslaved from a very early age. In 1754 Rev. Cooke baptized a baby named Kate, just three months old. Cooke wrote that she was a "gift" to Jason Russell. We do not know where little Kate came from, or anything about her parents.

A woman named Rose was the "maidservant" of innkeeper William Cutler, who kept a tavern. In 1754 Rose married a man named Punch, who was enslaved by Samuel Brooks of Medford. Rev. Cooke officiated at their wedding.

Their first child lived only four days, but their daughter, Venus, born in 1759, was baptized by Cooke. Punch died in 1767, identified as "the Negro servant of Widow Brooks." Rose married Scipio Pool of Medford in 1768 and died a year later, at age 48.

Rose's daughter Venus was 10 when her mother died, and 16 on the eve of the Revolution. Her brother, Prince, was six, and just a few years later he became a very young soldier. By the time of the first U.S. Census of 1790, he was the head of his household, which included four other free people.

A man named Ishmael was also enslaved by William Cutler. Ishmael married Nancy, who was enslaved by

Elisabeth Nutting, in 1778. He paid taxes in 1781, indicating that by then he was a free man.

William Cutler also enslaved Dinah, whom Cooke baptized at age two in 1756. She was not a daughter of Rose and Punch, so Cutler either brought her to his household from somewhere, or there was another enslaved woman in his household who was not mentioned in any record that we can find.

In a tiny community in the 1700s everyone knew their neighbors, and people depended on one another for survival. Enslaved people mingled with those living in other households and formed relationships that often led to marriage. Those marriages were sanctified in the meetinghouse. Despite being married, couples lived in separate houses, even after they had children. The children became part of their mother's household, born into bondage.

These facts ground us in the reality of the early days of what became our church. The involvement of Rev. Cooke shows the contradictions and complications of that time. He baptized and married enslaved people, showing that he recognized their humanity. In 1770 he spoke out against enslavement in a talk before the governor and other officials. But he also believed that Indigenous people all worshipped the devil.

The timeline shows that these early facts are part of a longer story that includes many actions taken to counteract the effects of injustice.

The congregation vigorously supported abolition. One of our ministers worked in the South helping newly freed people and contacted a fatal illness there. Our Women's Alliance made a donation to help educate freed people and received a letter of thanks from Booker T. Washington that hangs in our library. Unitarian Universalist minister James Reeb was killed while working for voting rights in the 1950s.

More recently, through our Giving First program, we have supported the Neighborhood Birth Center in Roxbury and the Living Legacy Project.

These efforts certainly do not "balance the scale," if we are adding up centuries of suffering. But they show that the congregation has been aware of its obligations for a long time, and has been willing to take meaningful action.

As our Affirmation says, "Hand in hand we will find a way." May we be fully aware of the past, join hands to face the present, and make the future better.

Diane Taraz Shriver, *Spire* Editor



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The Spire

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