

The Spire

NOVEMBER 1, 2020

THE FIRST SUNDAY RECORD

VOL. 63, No. 3

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

Let's Gather!

We cannot be together physically, but First Parish offers many ways to help us meet in spirit via Zoom. Here are some ongoing events; details are on our church website at www.firstparish.info. New events pop up all the time, so visit the website regularly to find something to brighten your life.

Lectio Divina

Offered at times for both
early birds and later risers.

Tuesdays at 7 am

Wednesdays at 9 am

Thursdays at 8 am

Toddler Sing-alongs

Suitable for kiddos from
newborn to about age 4.

Tuesdays at 9:30 am

Spirit Talks

Go deeper with others in
facilitated one-hour
conversations.

Tuesdays at 4 pm

Thursdays at 3 pm

Older Men's Group

Thursdays at noon

Women's Book Group

first Thursdays at 7:15 pm

Rakin' and Trimmin'

Join the Property Committee for a day-long cleanup of our grounds on Saturday, November 14. We have to scale back some work this year, but still need help with hedge trimming and such. If you have a trimmer (or not, we have a couple) and can lend a hand, please send a note to property@firstparish.info. To be safe, let us know when you can come so we can stagger shifts. Ideally, bring a member of your "quarantine pod."

— Property Committee

Music to Spark the Soul

Our Music Committee offers a variety of programs on Thursday and Saturday evenings. You can get the Zoom links through our church website at www.firstparish.info or contact music@firstparish.info.

Fabiola Mendez Thursday, November 5, 7 pm
Guest musician Fabiola Mendez presents Puerto Rican folk songs, plus Cuban and other Latin jazz, on vocals and cuatro.

Thankfulness Saturday, November 7, 7:30 pm
Sing along with Diane Taraz to classic expressions of gratitude, including *In My Life*, *Every Day*, *Gathered Safely In*, *Amazing Grace*, *You Make Me Feel Like a Natural Woman*, *La vie en rose*, *Chelsea Morning*, *Let It Be Me*, *Wonderful World*, *Home Sweet Home*, *Our House*, *With a Little Help From My Friends*, and *Let It Be*.

Jim Scott Thursday, November 19, 7 pm
Guest Musician Jim Scott leads a reflective evening of songs about racial, social, and environmental justice.

Teresa Neff Thursday, December 3, 7 pm
Musicologist Teresa Neff shares her insights into the world of Ludwig van Beethoven on the 250th anniversary of his birth.

Carols by Candlelight Saturday, December 19, 7:30
Diane Taraz's annual celebration of carols will wrap you in a warm shawl of sound. Light your own candle and bask in the glow of ancient fires.

— Robin Baker, Chair
Music Committee



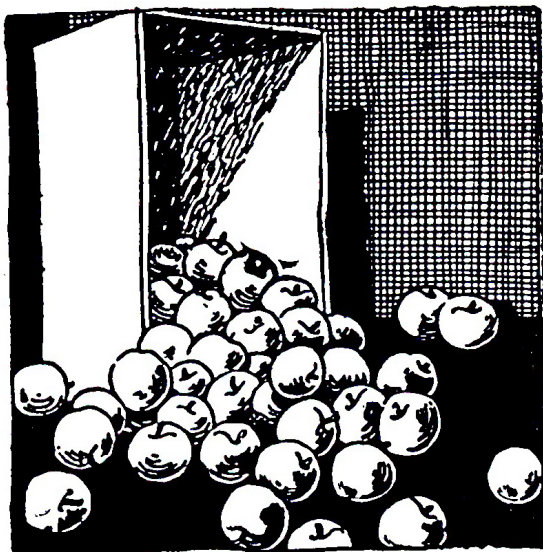
Celebrating Our Teachers

At last month's Shinn Service, we welcomed Rev. Stephen Shick to our pulpit, who helped us explore spiritual practices that help us thrive in difficult times. This annual service honors Barbara Shinn (1912-1976) and her commitment to justice. For over 30 years, at her Florence Ave. home in Arlington, Barbara lived her passion teaching children with disabilities, in the face of her own debilitating arthritis. A Lesley University classmate said, "Barbara's dedication and determination to the field of education leaves us a challenge to carry forward."

Rev. Shick's stories recalling Barbara's life made me think of playwright and activist Becci Ingram. Her portrait in the main entrance of our meetinghouse was created by artist Robert Shetterly as part of his series Americans Who Tell the Truth. It celebrates Becci's amazing life, which ended in 2000 after just 26 years.

Becci was a playwright and activist for disability rights. She wrote over 80 plays and battled prejudice and bullying in many forms. Children and adults were often cruel to her, but she was able to overcome her fears and sadness by recognizing the ignorance of others and helping them be more open-minded.

When Becci was born in London, a well-meaning doctor told her parents, "Your daughter has Down Syndrome. She will probably never be able to develop physically or mentally." Every stage of her development was delayed, but eventually Becci was able to attend school. At age 10 her family moved to the U.S. where her actor parents, Lizzy and Malcolm Ingram, worked with a Shakespeare company in Lenox, Massachusetts. Becci fell in love with theatre.



In 1991, she was the driving force behind the creation of All-Star C.A.S.T. (Community Actors & Students' Theater), then called the Young Actor's Workshop, at Syracuse University's Department of Drama. In the program students and people from the community who have special needs come together to create theater and find their creative voice. It started with five actors and six volunteers. Today All-Star C.A.S.T. has more than 50 actors and 40 undergraduate volunteers.

Becci wrote this poem, called "People Like Me."

*I dream of a world where all people can be free,
Overweight people, and gay people, and
people like me.
If you have people picking on you
Oh, what can you do?
So what if you're overweight or if you are gay,
Just turn away. Just turn away.
If they start to call you names
You will not play their silly games.
We are the people of a different kind.
We learn to let those other people unwind.
It doesn't matter if you're white or black,
Teach those people to change, or they need
never come back.
But say that you will be their friend
And that this friendship won't never end.*

In 2010, an award-winning documentary called "People Like Me" featured Becci and chronicled the theatre program she created. It received national publicity and helped people see new possibilities for those with special needs and recognize the importance of creative work in education.

Becci's talents as a writer and actress, and as an extraordinarily personality, have helped encourage thousands of people to see beyond the label of "disability," appreciate the value of every individual, and recognize everyone's need for a creative voice.

I believe Barbara Shinn would be extremely proud of Becci Ingram's lifetime achievements. Their stories align so well with our first UU principle, the inherent worth and dignity of every person.

For more information, please visit <https://www.americanswhotellthetruth.org/portraits/becci-ingram>.

— Clarissa Rodriguez
Racial Justice Coordinating Committee

Speaking Justice Workshop

Register at our church website (www.firstparish.info) to attend a justice workshop via Zoom on November 8 from noon to 2 pm. "Speaking Justice in the Language of our Faith" invites Unitarian Universalists to deepen their understanding of our Seven Principles in connection with their personal beliefs and ideals, then practice speaking about justice work in a way that is deeply rooted in UU values.

Regardless of election outcomes, there will be great injustices to be righted and injuries to be healed, requiring efforts of many compassionate and effective

agents of social change. When First Parish congregants organize for social justice, we have the potential to speak with the power of our moral convictions. How can our shared UU faith enrich and distinguish our voices from the voices of organizations not based in religious communities? How can we work and speak individually and collectively in a more powerful way?

The workshop will be led by staff of the UU College of Social Justice and is sponsored by the Social Justice Committee. Feel free to ask questions at socialjustice@firstparish.info.

ParSnips

The Parish Committee (ParCom) held several retreats to identify priorities for the church year, informed by the pandemic. We decided to focus on four key areas and divided up into working groups to explore and address them:

Worship. What should our services be like when we return to our building? (In-person worship is suspended until at least February 1, 2021). Should we create a hybrid service model, both in-person and on

Zoom? What seating arrangements will make people feel safe? When will children return to their RE classes in the building? Which rituals should continue?

Technology. Will we need new technology to offer hybrid forms of service? What would that be, what would it cost, and what can our amazing volunteer community realistically support?

Communication. We are planning to gather information from the congregation on how we learn



about First Parish news. Do the weekly E-bulletin, monthly *Spire*, and website tell you enough? Are there gaps in how we reach out to you? Do you prefer one method or another?

Finances. In these uncertain times we will closely monitor our finances, including identifying and tracking key performance indicators, to make sure that our financial health stays strong and our budget remains balanced. We are also exploring how best to

share financial information more widely – for example, in a high-level dashboard.

If you have ideas you wish to pass on to ParCom, please respond to surveys we send you, or contact us at parcom@firtparish.info.

Stay safe, stay well, and vote as if our lives depend on it.

— Celia Wcislo, Clerk

Reflections

So Many Memories

I arrived at First Parish just about 30 years ago, and as I spend the first long stretch in decades never crossing any threshold of the fifth meetinghouse, I find myself sorting through a lot of memories.

My husband and I met at coffee hour, back when the crowd was small enough to allow quiet conversation. First Parish was reaching the end of the long ministry of Rev. Charles Grady and had not yet become a bustling place. We were married in the Sanctuary in the first year of the ministry of Rev. Barbara Whittaker-Johns.

After a bit of difficulty, we produced a surprisingly red-haired daughter, who generally enjoyed church school. I vividly recall her first role in a play. As a preschooler she was cast as a clump of grass in the then-annual Christmas Pageant, wearing a paper hat with green stalks. Thankfully she and her fellow clumps of grass did not have any lines to memorize. Even so, Laura could not make up her mind whether or not she wanted to participate.

“Yes, I want to!” she cried before we left for church. “No, I don’t wanna,” she muttered when we arrived. “Fine,” I said, “you don’t have to.” A few minutes later she wanted to. A few minutes after that she didn’t, and so on, throughout the morning. It took great restraint to keep assuring her that it was up to her. Finally, at the last possible second, it was a go, and she and her fellow clumps did a wonderful job. How could they not, with such brilliant casting?

Her role the next year was that of a lamb, utterly adorable. Then came a glorious stint as an angel, with halo and wings, and she had tremendous fun flying around the Vestry with her fellow angels before and after the play.

She relished *Our Whole Lives* after a reluctant start, then rebelled against *Coming of Age*. By the time of high-school Youth Group she was ready to let her peers and mentors ease some pretty severe anguish. She was very active, gained leadership skills, and grew into happiness, something she acknowledged in a wonderful talk she gave in a service. John and I will cherish that memory always.

John taught kindergarten for a couple of years and found it a tall order to herd those energetic little cats. I also did my part as an RE teacher, taking on fourth grade and the Old Testament. What a rich source of discussion that is! The violence, the slavery, the genocide, the vengeful God slaying children left and right. We came up with our own set of commandments, and the first, “Thou shalt make no graven image,” became, “No pictures, please.”

A couple of years ago I took my Toddler Sing-along into the Pre-K class and kept them amused all morning. The teachers were grateful and I enjoyed those little people immensely. I brought my dancing doll, Lucinda “Twinkletoes” MacGilllicuddy, and each kiddo got to make her dance, some with great vigor. Luckily she is made of sturdy wood.

Now I lead a sing-along via Zoom every Tuesday morning at 9:30 am. Some out-of-state grandparents relish the chance to watch their grandkids sing and dance, and everyone enjoys a half-hour respite from more serious issues. Who can feel bad warbling “On Top of Spaghetti” and “I’ve Been Workin’ on the Railroad?” We always do “The Hokey-Pokey,” ‘cause that’s what it’s all about.

As wise folks remind us, all pandemics end. Here’s to crossing the threshold again to make more memories.

— Diane Taraz Shriver, *Spire* Editor



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The Spire

Diane Shriver, Editor

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 Submissions due by Sunday, November 29
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 If you do not have e-mail, contact the office.

The Spire generally deals with the big picture.
 Time-sensitive details belong in the Weekly E-mail
 Bulletin – send to *weekly@firstparish.info*
 by Wednesday at noon.

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