

Next issue deadline
Sunday, November 30

The Spire

NOVEMBER 2, 2025

THE FIRST SUNDAY RECORD

VOL. 68, No. 3

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

Sign up for Our Blood Drive

Our next blood drive will be on Wednesday, November 5, from 10 am to 3 pm. Please make an appointment to donate at redcrossblood.org. You can also sign up through the ARC Blood Donor app, or by calling 1-800-RED-CROSS. Walk-in donors may fit into the next available appointment, if there are any.

Our fearless leader, John Hodges, will be there all day and joyfully welcomes helpers who are needed to set up, break down, and greet donors.

It's Fair Time!

Once again our Harvest Moon Fair will unfold under the extremely good-natured direction of Aaron Kitzmiller. This is our 164th go-round, so we have a long line of ancestors to make proud! As always, it's on the Saturday before Thanksgiving, which this year is November 22, from 10 to 3.

All the details are on our church website, at www.firstparish.info. Signups to work at a booth or in the café, or to help with setup or cleanup, are open online. You can also sign up the old-fashioned way during coffee hour.

Start dropping off stuff at church on the Sunday before the fair (November 16) after coffee hour (starting at 1 pm). No sooner than that, please, to avoid gridlock. Questions? Contact Aaron at fair@firstparish.info.

What Makes You Come Alive?

The First Parish Engage Initiative, recently launched by the Parish Committee, invites each of us to connect more deeply by matching our gifts and passions with opportunities. Our spiritual home thrives



because we engage. Together we create the energy that keeps this place alive.

What does it mean to engage? For some, it's about sparking interest and keeping ideas vibrant. For others, it means coming together and taking part in something meaningful. First Parish engagement means building community around what makes us feel alive.

When are you most alive? Maybe it's when you share a book that inspired you, find quiet time for spiritual reflection, rally with friends for a cause, or celebrate a shared accomplishment. Whatever it is, Engage can help you find those moments.

All you need to do is create an Engage Skills & Interests profile in Realm Connect. In your profile, you share your skills — the things you're good at or enjoy doing — and your interests — areas that spark your curiosity or enthusiasm. You don't have to be an expert; all it takes is willingness. Based on what you share, Engage will offer opportunities as they arise, from behind-the-scenes help to group activities or long-term projects. Creating a profile doesn't commit you to anything — it simply helps us connect you with meaningful ways to participate when the time feels right for you.



Why join in? Maybe you're new and want to build deeper friendships. Maybe you've been part of First Parish for years and want to try something new. Or maybe you once needed help with a project and wished you knew who in the congregation could lend a hand. Engage helps us bridge those gaps and strengthen our community.



To create your profile, visit e.onrealm.org/serving or click on this icon.

For questions or technical help, contact engage@firstparish.info.

The Engage Team:
Amy Speare, Susan Moore, Kiki Giatis,
Steve McMullin

STAR Programs Abounding!

Adult-education programs at First Parish go by the name of STAR, which stands for Spirit, Transformation, Adventure, and Reflection. At a recent committee meeting, four of us couldn't remember what the acronym stood for, so we looked it up on the website! After a good laugh, we decided it would be a good idea to let others know what STAR stands for and what we do.

Our mission is to promote and support adult programs to encourage spiritual exploration, cultural understanding, and vibrant community connections. Programming comes in three types:

- Experiences that encourage us to turn inward and engage in deep reflection and sharing – a prayer workshop, discussing a book about loneliness or aging, or exploring spiritual practices.
- “Side by side” offerings that are more about community-weaving – potlucks, game nights, crafting circles, or a walk in the woods.
- Turning outward to the wider community, which may involve social justice work or building understanding of issues and needs outside our congregation. We have offered workshops on political activism and deepening our understanding of Muslim and Civil Rights history.

STAR programs are created in several ways. First, our ministers suggest them. Rev. Erica just offered a film screening and conversation about the movie *Your Fat Friend*, and Rev. Stevie is planning a program later this fall on unpacking our religious pasts.

Second, members of the STAR Committee pursue experiences that they think the congregation needs. Last year when our congregation was grieving the loss of several members, Marta's retirement, and the state of our country, we offered a workshop about grief.

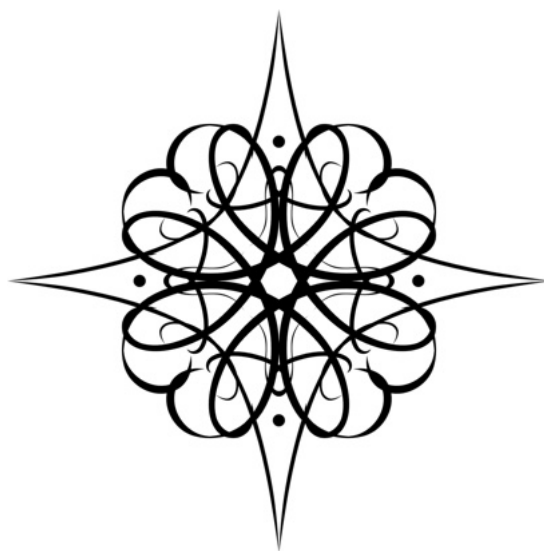
We also collaborate with other committees. Last spring, after being approached by Anne Wright and Betsy Leondar-Wright, the STAR Committee and the Defending Democracy group co-sponsored a workshop called *Activism that Works*. In another initiative, Brian Dooley and Jessica Farman partnered with STAR and Social Justice to offer a screening and discussion of the film *Join or Die*.

The largest number of programs come from First Parish members who see a need or have a special interest they want to share with the community. This past May, Eric Segal led a walk in Boston to explore the city's rich Unitarian Universalist history.

Upcoming on November 8, Anne Goodwin will lead a workshop called *Finding Your Place in These Times*,

for sharing ideas on how to nurture ourselves during this difficult time for our country. Eric and Anne approached the committee with these ideas, and a STAR member helped them plan and organize them.

Since the majority of STAR programs emerge from our community, we want to hear from you. If you have an idea for an adult program, please contact STAR@firstparish.info. One of us will reach out to discuss your idea and how to make it happen.



Talk by Patricia Crotty

On Thursday, November 6, you can hear Patricia Crotty talk about what inspires her gestural paintings and collages, and how she approaches her work, some of which is currently on display in the Parlor. The talk starts at 7 pm and runs until 8:30, in the Parlor.

Our Congregational Art Show

Each year First Parish invites artists and others who paint, make pottery, take photographs, etc., to share their work with the congregation. Families, kids, and

teens are especially invited to participate. For this show there is no specific theme or topic and you are welcome to write a short description of your work. Pieces should not be larger than 30 by 30 inches and they should be ready to hang in the Parlor or displayed in the showcase in the Narthex. Each person may submit two pieces.

November 23 is the last day to submit the participation form. On December 6 we will hang the show. On December 7 we will hold a reception to celebrate the opening. If you have any questions, please contact artteam@firstparish.info.

From the Parish Committee

At our annual fall retreat, the Parish Committee (ParCom) chose some themes under the lenses of change and transition:

- Inclusion and accessibility in worship
- Communication and marketing
- Engaging volunteers



We are experimenting with having working groups made up not only of ParCom members but also other leaders at First Parish to broaden the scope of the work and include more voices. We are grateful for the hard work of Susan Moore, Amy Speare, and the other members of the Engage group.

As Rev. Jonipher mentioned in his sermon on October 19, we are all encouraged to make a friend and find a job. Please use the Engage program to discover what makes you come alive, and to share your strengths and talents.

Here are some highlights from the September and October ParCom meetings:

- The Reckoning and Repair Working Group presented a proposal to fundraise, which we unanimously approved. More details soon.
- The Defending Democracy Working Group highlighted concerns for immigrants in our community.
- The Transition Team provides us with monthly updates and welcomes comments and ideas via e-mail, one-on-one, and in group Listening Sessions.
- The Welcoming Congregation Committee presented a proposal for renewal, taking a new name: the LGBTQIA+ Affirming Committee. The group received a unanimous vote of approval.

As First Parish dives deeper into the transition time and rolls up its many sleeves with Rev. Jonipher, Rev. Erica, and Rev. Stevie, we commit to listening to each other. As we try out new ways of doing things, I am reminded of the process of learning how to paint with watercolors. You only have a short time to work as the water dries.

Another way of thinking about this transition time is what Rev. Marta said about having a certain number of chips (think poker chips, not potato chips, as I did). You can only use so many chips at the beginning of a new term when you are a minister.

First Parish congregants and members may get a bit splattered with paint, but we are learning. From initial Listening Sessions hosted by the Transition Team and held in person and online in October, the congregation has made it clear that more communication, especially around process, is needed. In the coming weeks, watch for more information on these processes as we navigate together.

Joanna Pushee, Clerk

Raising Funds for Roxbury Youth

At our Annual Meeting last May, members of First Parish voted to acknowledge the involvement of the founders of our congregation in the institution of slavery. Since that time, the members of the Reckoning & Repair Working Group have been focusing on repair.

One of our working groups, Outreach and Partnership, has built on our historic relationship with the Unitarian Universalist Urban Ministry and its programs for teenage youth called the Roxbury Youth Program. We have discussed with the leaders of that program ways to provide financial support for their afterschool programs, and how p First Parish members might engage with the youth.

We have launched a fundraising drive to generate funds for a reparative process with the Roxbury Youth Program. Our annual budget included \$5,000, and \$1,500 has come in from the Racial Justice Coordinating Committee. These funds represent First Parish's institutional support for such an endeavor.

In addition, members of the Reckoning & Repair Working Group have personally donated \$12,500, giving us a total amount of \$19,000 as we bring this campaign to the congregation. After the worship service on November 9, we invite members of First Parish to contribute.

The members of the Reckoning & Repair Working Group are excited that we can do this reparative work with the Roxbury Youth Program. We are mindful that it was primarily young people who were enslaved by our religious ancestors.

Please don't miss this opportunity to engage with leaders from the Roxbury Youth Program.

Bill Gardiner
Reckoning and Repair Working Group

New Name, Fresh Mission

[Note: This article was not available for most of October, because *The Spire* was late getting into print and onto the website. Here it is again.]

The LGBTQIA+ Affirming Committee (formerly the Welcoming Congregation Committee) is pleased to provide an update on our activities and recent name change. Our new name better reflects our commitment to communicating our intentionally welcoming space for everyone of all sexual and gender identities at First Parish.



The Welcoming Congregation Committee was established by the Parish Committee in January 2023 for a three-year term. Its initial charge was to reinvigorate and maintain First Parish's Welcoming Congregation designation with the UUA and to collaborate with leadership to guide the congregation in completing the Five Practices of Welcome Renewal annually. We approach this mission through collaboration with other First Parish committees, individuals, groups, and leaders, including our clergy, religious education, Lay Ministers, Worship Associates, Social Justice, and the Alliance.

We are delighted to announce that First Parish Arlington has

renewed our designation as a Welcoming Congregation for the second year, and with the support of the LGBTQIA+ Affirming Committee we are on track for renewal in 2026. This annual commitment to renewal means we, as a community, agree to be proactive and intentional about fully welcoming and including LGBTQIA+ people, concerns, and lives in our congregational life.

Some of the ways we have been more intentional about increasing and strengthening our inclusion of LGBTQIA+ people and families over the past two years have included multiple worship services centering LGBTQIA+ concerns and lives, recognizing many special days of observance of milestones and events in the larger LGBTQIA+ communities locally and nationally throughout the year with an event and with a special second chalice on the chancel table. We

have collaborated with other committees and church groups and offered educational films and discussions, book discussions, special art exhibits, and seminars. In addition, we have made recommendations and helped First Parish offer space and financial support for LGBTQIA+ non-profit and local groups to support their efforts in providing safe spaces, peer groups, economic assistance, and social justice advocacy for those in need in the LGBTQIA+ communities.

A core and continuing goal of the LGBTQIA+ Affirming Committee is to integrate LGBTQIA+ issues and events more fully and holistically into the wider congregation. We recognize and celebrate that we are all part of a Welcoming Congregation. The role of the LGBTQIA+ Affirming Committee within our Welcoming Congregation is to encourage a deepening of our inclusion and integration of all LGBTQIA+ people in our practices of welcome.

Our practices include inward facing and outward facing activities. We help create and coordinate events and actions each year. We help find resources and offer insights and guidance on activities. We take part in large public events, such as Boston Pride 4 the People parades, and direct actions like sending hundreds of postcards of appreciation to healthcare workers who offer gender-affirming care practices. We host events such as the Transgender Day of Remembrance & Resilience on our front lawn, and we demonstrate our commitment to full LGBTQIA+ inclusion with our newly refurbished flagpole and the displaying of a Progress Pride flag on our grounds. In the last year, the Committee collaborated with the Arlington Rainbow Commission including one First Parish member joining as a commissioner. We worked with Mystic Valley Action for Reproductive Justice, the Social Justice Committee and Alliance, and supported community partners such as The Boston Alliance of LGBTQ+ Youth (BAGLY), the Resilient Sisterhood Project, and the Transforming Hearts Collective. And please admire the new Pride Quilt made by Wendy Page and donated to the amazing First Parish rotating quilt display!

We are excited to be part of strengthening our church's commitment to the full welcome and

participation of LGBTQIA+ communities and people as members of First Parish. Please talk to any of us about your ideas, suggestions, and questions as to how you can participate in activities as we all move forward together. You can contact the committee at welcoming@firstparish.info if you want to know more, want to join the committee, and to share your thoughts.

The LGBTQIA+ Affirming Committee:

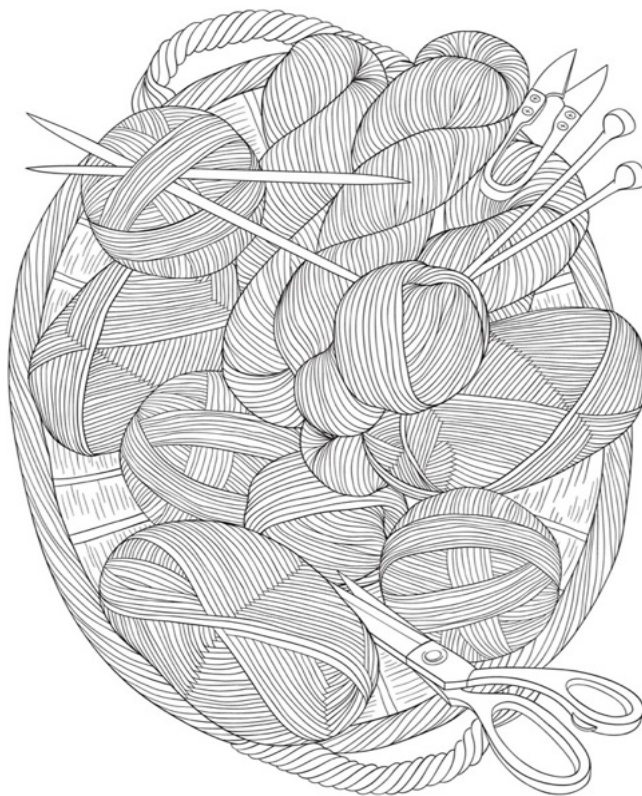
Zoe Stewart (Chair), Lisa Davis, Loren Gomez,
Ruben Hopwood, Wendy Page, Carolyn White, and
Rev. Erica Richmond (Ministerial Advisor)

The Monthly Potlucks Continue . . .

On the last Wednesday of each month the STAR Committee sponsors a community potluck dinner in the Vestry. It starts at 6 pm and runs until 7:30. Bring something to share, or just bring yourself – there's always enough. It is good to be together, and full!

. . . as do the Knitting Circles!

Drop in to knit with other friendly folks who knit or craft. All skill levels and media are welcome. No registration is needed. Come on the first Sunday of each month, from 11:30 am to 1 pm.





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and mission of First Parish.

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The Spire

Diane Shriver, Editor

Next issue: Sunday, December 7
Submissions due by Sunday, November 30
Items may be edited for space and clarity.

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