

Next issue deadline
Sunday, October 25

The Spire

OCTOBER 4, 2026

THE FIRST SUNDAY RECORD

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Break Barriers, Build Beliefs

Save the date for B4 – the Break Barriers, Build Beliefs workshop – on Saturday, October 17, from 10 am to 3 pm. It rests upon the legacy of Beyond Categorical Thinking, which many will remember from the 2018-19 search that brought us Rev. Erica. The objectives are much the same: to prepare us for a faithful, equitable ministerial search by building shared language and practice for recognizing and reducing bias, surfacing perceptions and unconscious bias, strengthening skills for noticing and responding to subtle acts of exclusion, and equipping the Search Committee to incorporate insights from the workshop into the next steps.

We'll gather in person at First Parish and virtually on Zoom with Rev. Micah Ma, our facilitator from the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA). Together we'll consider the hopes, expectations, and concerns we have for a new minister, learn more about the search process, and explore how creating categories and putting people in them interferes with choosing the best candidate. All committee chairs, congregational leaders, members, and friends are invited to take part. Lunch will be served and childcare will be provided. Please register on Realm, or with this link.



If you haven't completed the congregational survey, not to worry – the deadline has been extended to today, October 4. Don't miss this important opportunity to make your voice heard! Use this link to get to the survey.



The Settled Minister Search Committee:
Amy Anderson, Genevieve Baldwin, Betsy Carlton-Gysan (co-chair), Katherine Fleming (co-chair), Sanjay Newton, Anne Quadragas, David Whitford



Postcards and Pizza

Join the Defending Democracy Working Group on Tuesday, October 6, to write postcards to encourage early voting for the upcoming elections. Scripts for the cards will be provided, along with pizza. This is a family event and all are welcome. Gather in the Vestry at 6 pm.

Discussion Groups

As part of the minister search process, two types of group discussions are planned. The first are Open Small Groups, where people across our congregation's wide spectrum of held identities and ways of engaging with First Parish can talk about our community, what it needs, and who we are. The second are Focus Groups, where those with a particular shared identity or way of engaging with First Parish can talk about the same topics.

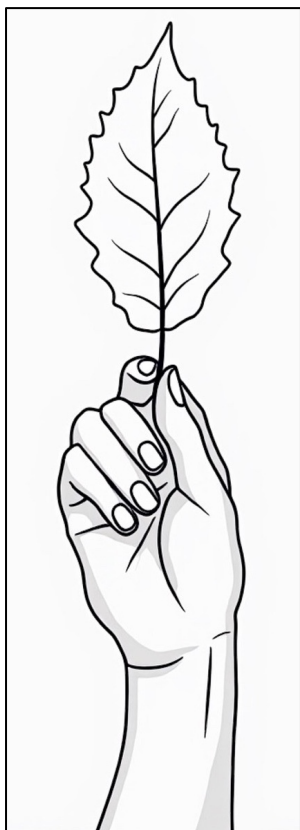
These groups address the problem of "inclusivity" often being defined as everyone in one big room, all treated the same. The problem is that the voices of minority populations in the community are always

forced to compete to be heard among a larger number of majority voices. We are a mostly white, highly educated, aging denomination, and our institutional structures can serve to silence minorities and, with this silencing, protect a status quo that reflects flows of power we have declared ourselves against as UUs.

Our goal is to use as many methods as we can to gather information about our congregation, and to include as many unique voices as possible. Inclusion and transparency are among the Search Committee's top priorities.

If you have any questions, or if your group or committee would like to talk about using time during one of your meetings to have a discussion facilitated by a member of the Search Committee sometime in October, please reach out to us at settled-search@firstparish.info.

Genevieve Baldwin
Settled Minister Search Committee



Around the World

At the monthly meeting of the Women's Alliance on October 9, Elizabeth Hunter will share pictures and stories from six months of travel with her family around the world. She will explore planning and pitfalls, advice and adventures, lessons and lived experience as she lays out the dreams and realities of stepping away from familiar routines and completely outside your comfort zone. We will gather at 6 pm.

The Alliance serves First Parish by supporting women in our congregation, as well as advancing the interests

and efforts of our entire church. With its own endowment and investments, the Alliance is a financially independent group within First Parish. The majority of our expenditures support a giving plan that focuses on organizations that serve women and families in transition.

Meditation on Mondays

On Mondays join others in a half-hour of silent meditation in the Parlor, starting at 6 pm. Both beginners and experienced meditators are welcome, and you can drop in whenever you like. No ongoing commitment is required. For more information, contact meditation@firstparish.info.

Arlington Indigenous Peoples Day

On Saturday, October 10, gather at the Masonic Temple at 19 Academy Street to join in a town-wide recognition of Indigenous people with a program presented by the Red Hawk Singers and Dancers. Through song, dance, and teachings, the group promotes traditional Wampanoag values, such as humility and respect, to create true connections among diverse cultures and communities. This free event for all ages starts at 11 am.

The program is sponsored by the Cyrus Dallin Art Museum, the Arlington Historical Society, the Arlington Human Rights Commission, the Old Schwamb Mill, Robbins Library, and our own First Parish Arlington Indigenous Justice Working Group.

How to Get Involved This Fall

In the coming months, three leadership groups – the Settled Minister Search Committee, the Parish Committee, and the Covenant Task Force – are seeking your input to help steer the future of our ministry, staffing, and culture. The Transition Team exists to collaborate with these groups and encourage clear communication to make sure that everyone in the congregation has a voice.

Here is a quick breakdown of what's on the horizon, how it all connects, and where you come in.

Fill Out the Survey The Search Committee is assembling our congregational packet, the document that introduces First Parish to candidates. The committee needs input from the entire congregation to provide an accurate picture of who we are.

Join a Discussion Group Sign up for a small group discussion to share your hopes for our next settled minister. The sessions will run from October 13 to November 6.

Sign up for the B4 Workshop. Please join us for the Break Barriers, Build Beliefs Workshop on October 17. It will unpack the search process and help us challenge assumptions so we can choose the best possible candidate.

Attend “Future Staffing at First Parish” We offer two sessions to discuss the way we organize our staff – the people who lead worship, provide pastoral care, support social justice efforts, guide our religious education program, offer music, and handle complex operations behind the scenes. Please come to one of these sessions:

- Sunday, October 4, from 11:45 am to 1 pm
- Wednesday, October 7, from 8 to 9:15 pm on Zoom

To keep our staffing model effective and financially sustainable for the long haul, we need to make smart, deliberate choices about how our team is structured. The sessions will explain our current financial realities, discuss needs and priorities, and consider potential staffing models that will provide a strong foundation for our community in the future.

Join the Conversation About Living Our Values

The Covenant Task Force is hard at work developing a congregational covenant. This isn't just words on a page, but a guiding framework about how we commit to treat one another, navigate differences, and handle disagreement in healthy ways.

Prospective ministers look for congregations with a clear covenant, because it signals that they have a strong, mature community culture. Adopting a provisional covenant this spring gives us a chance to test it out, refine it together, and eventually invite our next settled minister to help shape its final form. Please plan to:

- read and review drafts of the proposed covenant.
- attend a Listening Circle on November 8 after the service to share your feedback.
- participate in opportunities for discussion and discernment in January.
- vote on the provisional covenant on February 7.

It can feel like a lot of moving parts, but these efforts are all tackling different sides of the same core

question: Who do we want to be as a community? Together, these initiatives lay the groundwork for First Parish's next chapter. Thank you for all the ways you show up for our community!

Please reach out to us with comments, concerns, or questions at transitionteam@firstparish.info.

The Transition Team:
Marilyn Downs, Tom Estabrook, Lois Fine,
Elizabeth Hunter, Marc Jacobson, Kay Snowden

Diversity Book Club

The Diversity Book Club generally meets on the third Tuesday of every other month from 7 to 8:30 pm, on Zoom. This month's meeting is on October 20, when we will discuss *Djinn Patrol on the Purple Line* by Deepa Anappara. To get the Zoom link, contact diversitybookclub@firstparish.info.

Rose of Recognition

A Rose of Recognition goes to Kate Lenox for her work as coordinator of our Covenant Groups. Kate has stepped down, and Monique Chapman and Anna McMaken-Marsh are the new co-coordinators.

Kate led with warmth and an open heart, always willing to meet to help conveners through challenges. Her flexibility was crucial to successfully navigating the groups through transitions, especially during the pandemic. Thank you, Kate, for your hard work, creativity, and leadership!

Covenant Groups, one of the small-group ministries at First Parish, meet monthly from September to June.

Group members stay together for at least one program year and discuss a monthly theme by reading quotations and answering questions. Past themes have included community, play and spirituality, the music within, and stories.

Not to be confused with the current congregation-wide covenanting process in which First Parish members will vote on a covenant, Covenant Groups are a longstanding spiritual practice. About 20 percent of our congregation participates in such a group each year.





Staff and Contact Information

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and mission of First Parish.

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The Spire

Diane Shriver, Editor

Next issue: Sunday, November 1
Submissions due by Sunday, October 25
Items may be edited for space and clarity.

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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.

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