

Next issue deadline
Sunday, September 27

The Spire

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THE FIRST SUNDAY RECORD

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Seeking Our Next Settled Minister

A new church year begins. It will be transformative – a time for self-examination, collective discernment, and rigorous application of all our best efforts toward selecting a settled minister.

The Settled Minister Search Committee had a busy summer. We elected Betsy Carlton-Gysan and Katherine Fleming co-chairs, assigned individual roles, drafted a covenant, built spreadsheets, succeeded at implementing the RACI method for managing work flow (who's responsible, who's accountable, who's consulted, and who's informed; thank you, Rev. Jonipher) and failed, alas, at adapting to Slack (we will stick with e-mail).

We've had ten scheduled meetings since May. Among the highlights: a joyful potluck supper in June and a two-night, six-hour virtual retreat in July with Rev. Liz Weber of the UUA's Congregational Life staff. Day one with Rev. Liz was mostly about team-building and refining our covenant. We also learned about the current market for UU ministers and what might make First Parish attractive – our 18th-century roots, our proximity to Boston, our 400-plus-member congregation, our passionate engagement with social justice, our thriving religious education program, and so much more. We have a lot to offer!

Two key documents – the covenant and timeline – are nearing completion. We'll share them soon, along with regular updates on our progress, through *The Spire*, the eBulletin, the Sunday Teaser, the First Parish website, the First Parish Facebook page, and the Settled Minister Search Committee bulletin board.

Look for us in the Vestry every Sunday at coffee hour, or e-mail us at settled-search@firstparish.info.

Now, for our first big ask:

Complete the congregational survey! We will introduce it at Ingathering and accept responses through September 30, both on-line and on paper.

The survey results will inform the critical next step – a series of focus groups after the annual Ferry Beach retreat in early October. Be warned: the survey is not short. It has written as well as multiple-choice parts. It begs your thoughtful, sustained attention.

To be sure, you will have other opportunities to participate in choosing our next settled minister. In addition to focus groups there will be talkbacks, deep

dives with various committees and interest groups, and plenty of one-on-one conversations – all aimed at capturing the full range of needs, wants, identities, and beliefs that define First Parish. But the survey is the foundation. Please give it your all. Your voice and your vision matter.

Together we stand at the start of a thrilling journey. We can't wait to see where it takes us!

The Settled Minister Search Committee:

Amy Anderson
Genevieve Baldwin
Betsy Carlton-Gysan (co-chair)
Katherine Fleming (co-chair)
Sanjay Newton
Anne Quaadgras
David Whitford



How We Share News and Community

Keeping up during a bustling ministerial transition is no small task, which is why our new Communications Committee is streamlining how we share news and information. Based on your feedback this spring, we are cutting the clutter and making it easier than ever to stay connected.

Find your news where you want it:



The Weekly eBulletin Your ultimate go-to for updates and links, landing in inboxes every Thursday. Print copies are available at the church entrances.



The Sunday Teaser Your quick-read insert in the Sunday morning Order of Service.



The FPConnectionBoard Your community hub to connect with other parishioners and request help. You need access to Realm/Connect.



Realm/Connect Directory Our secure database for managing your giving, and for browsing the photo directory. You need a staff invitation for initial access.



Transition Calendar A one-page calendar that keeps track of key dates, gatherings, and decision-making moments. Refer to it as we move through the process of finding our next

settled minister, including congregational votes on our new covenant and by-law changes, electing officers and committee members, and passing budgets.



The Spire Our monthly newsletter covers the big picture – a place to discuss plans, processes, hopes, dreams, and the issues we face as a community.

Ideas? Questions? Reach out to Elizabeth Hunter (Transition Team) or Kate Tranquada (Parish Committee) at communications@firstparish.info.

An Update from Our Treasurer

First Parish ended its fiscal year in June in a better position than expected. At our last Annual Meeting, we saw a need to use some \$40,000 of our surplus reserve to get through the year, but we only needed \$18,000. This is because expenses remained under budget, and pledge payments exceeded our

expectations. *Thank you* to all those who were able to honor their full year pledges. We are so very grateful! This allows First Parish to hold more in surplus reserve as we begin this year.

The Parish Committee met in August to review the budget and incorporate final Stewardship pledges. At the time of the Annual Meeting, we had not reached our goal, but by the end of the summer pledges rose to \$788,000, slightly below our \$800,000 target.

A careful review of minister-search costs discovered about \$3,000 in additional expenses. Some of this was offset by a recalculation that lowered our annual program payment to the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA). First Parish is proud to pay its full share of program funds, and has remained an honor congregation for decades. The UUA agreed to review our calculation and identified additional deductions that First Parish had not been aware of, providing a slight offset to the increased expenses.

The updated First Parish budget now reflects that we plan to use surplus reserves of about \$90,000, up slightly from the \$77,000 figure presented at the Annual Meeting.

Financial reports are available for your review. If you'd like to look at them, or have any questions, please contact me at treasurer@firstparish.info.

Carolyn Hodges, Treasurer

Music Beckons

If you love to sing, consider joining our adult choir, which is open to teens, as well. Rehearsals are Thursdays from 7 to 8 pm., and our warmup on the Sundays when we sing begins at 9 am. We will perform works by Barber, Elgar, Esmail, Hogan, Miller, Nunes-Garcia, Thompson, and Whitacre, along with spirituals, folk songs, and pieces in other styles.



For more information, contact our music director, Daniel Parsley, at daniel@firstparish.info. If you're a vocalist or instrumentalist, either solo or in a small ensemble, and would like to perform for a service, please contact Daniel, or say "hello" after a service.

Learn About the Ballot Questions

On Monday, September 14, at 7 pm, discover the details of this year's record number of ballot questions, nine of them! This free event is co-sponsored by our Defending Democracy Working Group in partnership with UU Mass Action. Jonathan Cohn, policy director from Progressive Massachusetts, will speak.

"Spaghetting to Know" RE

Children, youth, and families, whether new or returning, are invited to a spaghetti dinner on Wednesday, September 16, from 5 to 7 pm. Hear about what's coming up in our religious education program and get to know other families. RSVP at www.firstparish.info so we know how much to cook.

Pies! Pies! Pies!

At Town Day, on Saturday, September 19, we continue a long tradition of raising funds for our Social Justice Committee by selling pies in the Vestry. We need bakers, booth workers, and help with setup and cleanup. If you're new to First Parish, pitching in at the Pie Place is a great way to meet folks. Please bring pies, either homemade or high-quality ones from a bakery, to the Vestry on Friday, September 18, between 5:30 and 7 pm, or any time on Saturday morning before 11 am.

Visit www.firstparish.info to sign up.
Contact piepalace@firstparish.info with any questions.



Reflections

Courage, Compassion, and Creativity

*This sermon was offered by Maggie Carey on
Sunday, September 6, 2026.*

In 1967 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered a rousing and controversial address, known variously as "Beyond Vietnam" and "A Time to Break Silence," to

Art Show in the Parlor

Carol Wintle, a mixed-media artist, will share her collages with us this fall. Her work has been exhibited in Belmont, Watertown, and Newburyport. An opening reception on Sunday, September 20, will include light refreshments, starting at 11:45 am.

Staffing Structure Discussion

As we examine the way we operate here at First Parish, we invite everyone to attend a discussion about how we organize our staff. Mark your calendar for next month, October 4, when lay leaders will gather in the Parlor after the service to solicit ideas and feedback.

Rose of Recognition

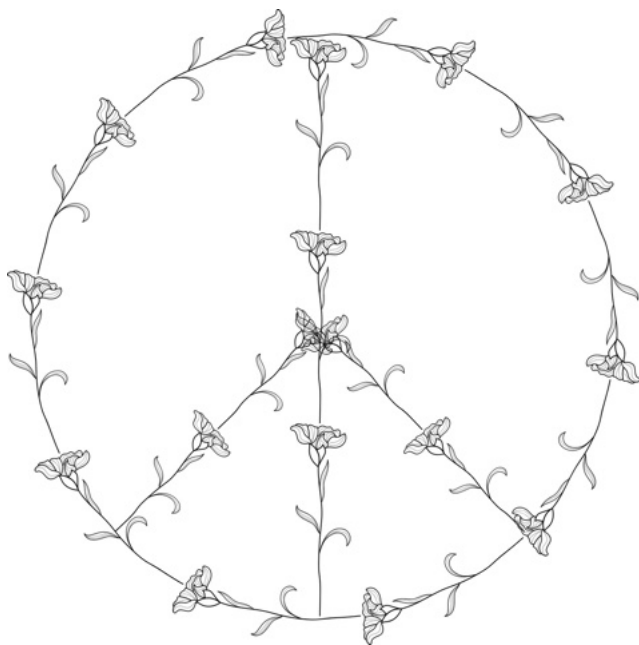
The Parish Committee sends a Rose of Recognition to Annie Hewett, our assistant treasurer. During May and June, Annie did a wonderful job of checking in with folks, gently reminding them of their pledges for the program year. Knowing that living our faith requires our gifts of time, talent, and treasure, she reached out with the understanding that for some, a change in situation required an adjustment to their pledge. Thanks to Annie's extra efforts, financial gifts to First Parish in the form of pledges for the year ending June 30, 2026, slightly exceeded expectations, allowing us to meet our financial commitments.
Thank you, Annie!



Iran (which feels horribly similar to Vietnam) and in our work to eradicate racism.

Dr. King said, “A time comes when silence is betrayal, and that time has come for us in relation to Vietnam.”

He continued, “... it became clear to me that the war was doing far more than devastating the hopes of the poor at home. It was sending their sons and their brothers and their husbands to fight and to die in extraordinarily high proportions relative to the rest of the population. We were taking the black young men who had been crippled by our society and sending them eight thousand miles away to guarantee liberties in Southeast Asia which they had not found in southwest Georgia. ... We have been repeatedly faced with the cruel irony of watching Negro and white boys on TV screens as they kill and die together for a nation that has been unable to seat them together in the same schools.”



Dr. King had been very conflicted about the war before this 1967 speech and had floated his ideas around protesting it in 1965, calling for a halt to the bombing in North Vietnam and urging the United Nations to broker a mediation in the war. He faced significant strategic challenges around expressing his true feelings more forcefully, including the possibility of damaging the unique alliance he had built with President Johnson and his efforts around the Great Society (the 1964 War on Poverty, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965). Dr. King knew that severing this relationship with President Johnson would cause enormous harm to the causes that he felt so strongly about. Throughout this time, Dr. King’s colleagues, both Black and white, were

advising him to stay silent, saying that he was a civil rights leader and not a foreign policy expert. Dr. King dismissed their warnings.

The speech was wildly unpopular and it touched off a firestorm; the mainstream media reaction was severe. Over 160 major American newspapers condemned the address, accusing him of overstepping his role as a civil rights leader and damaging both the peace movement and the fight for racial equality.

But Dr. King defended his anti-war stance in subsequent speeches. In a famous one in February 1968 he said, “there comes a time when we must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but one must take it because it is right.”

And in his last Sunday sermon, just five days before he was assassinated, Dr. King said that he was “convinced that [Vietnam] is one of the most unjust wars that has ever been fought in the history of the world.”

I feel that his speech in Manhattan in 1967 exemplified his brilliance; he had adroitly integrated compassion and creativity into courageous political advocacy. Regarding compassion, Dr. King humanized the enemy, calling the Vietnamese people ordinary citizens who have been living under the curse of war. On the creative front, Dr. King publicly re-stated his anti-war argument, linking racism, materialism, and militarism together as a “disease within the American spirit.” His courageousness was undeniable when he broke the silence, despite it destroying his hard-earned political alliances.

I wonder, how can I harness my sometimes insufficient compassion and my still-nascent creative instincts into courage? How can my activism include the right amount of courageousness to be both effective and sustainable?

I take cues from poet and writer Maya Angelou, who advised crafting courage in small ways. She felt courage is the most important of all the virtues and advised practicing courage in small ways, starting incrementally with 5 pounds, and then 10 pounds, and practicing to get to the 100-pound thing that requires so much courage. And then, a story she told repeatedly — imagining her magnificent voice — “... you will have the ability to tell a guest in your own home, after hearing from across the room them telling a racial and homophobic quote/unquote joke, that they must leave my house.”

Author Michelle Alexander advises that we first need to determine our own capabilities. She says you may

not be able to dive into the river, but she too says that taking smaller steps is fine. So maybe you wouldn't have been able to be a freedom rider, but maybe you could have managed other parts of that effort. She says that we must be honest with ourselves. She asks herself, can I be a bit more courageous today than I was yesterday?

Personally, I see advantages in taking smaller, incremental steps that

- o seem more do-able.
- o can be time limited, which is important if I am pressed for time.
- o can be fixed if (or when) I make an error.
- o helps with recruiting others.
- o feel good as I check something off my To Do list!

I need to trust that small efforts do add up, and that they can make a difference.

Since I likely will not be turning into a once-in-a-lifetime leader, are my efforts, as a 60-something, privileged white retiree, making a big enough impact? Is the work I am involved with courageous enough?

When I retired a few years ago, I needed a break from my public health career. The political atmosphere of healthcare, even here in progressive Massachusetts, was tough. I knew I wanted to contribute something in my retirement years, and I felt lucky that diversity work, including work I had done at UMass Medical School, spoke deeply to my soul. I decided that helping to eradicate racism had to be part of my plans.

Racial justice efforts have been a prominent part of social justice work here at First Parish for quite a while; in the last 3.5 years have focused more on reparations. Dubbing ourselves Reckoning & Repair, a dedicated group of us has been educating ourselves and others. We have shown films, sponsored book groups, engaged with our youth to build a commemorative bench and pew, held information sessions, worked with the Town of Arlington to honor the unmarked graves of Black slaves in the old burying ground, and have had many one-on-one discussions. And, as you recall, at our May 2024 annual meeting we overwhelmingly passed our Affirmation, which was our acknowledgement of our true history (that half of our 18th-century founders were enslavers) as well as a commitment to offering some sort of reparations.

So in 2025, we partnered with a Black-led organization, the Roxbury Youth Programs at the UU Urban Ministry. Through the generosity of this

congregation, we have donated money to the Roxbury Youth Programs and also have offered several workshops for their after-school program. These donations of our treasure and time have been very well received, and we have committed to working with them for at least two more years.

I know that this work, and the work I do for the NAACP (the 117-year-old National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) and the Reparations Interfaith Coalition, are incremental steps in a long struggle that started many, many years ago and will continue for a long time. And I know I will not see a comprehensive and systemic reparations package in my lifetime. I understand that it will take many decades to turn our culture around to honor and offer significant compensation for what we did (and continue to do) to people of color in this country. Like the scientist in a lab working on cancer research, my efforts feed into the collective; the success of those in the future will be, in part, due to my help – even if it was just a little bit. I wonder what acts of courage each of us might be considering?

As a privileged white person, I know the best use of my time and talents is to continue to examine myself for vestiges of racism and educate my white friends about the need to eliminate, once and for all, the systemic racism that continues to lurk in our society. Each of us has been raised in this racist society, which means that each of us has some amount of racism in us. Denying this fact only leads to shaming ourselves and others.

I cannot say this strongly enough – if I focus on how someone else is not “up to snuff” on their racial awareness journey, I am perpetuating shame, which only delays progress. My hope is to have a big enough tent for all of us, and to learn together so we have the courage we need to do this crucial work.

So I want to repeat: Each of us has been raised in this racist society and each of us has some amount of racism still in us. I am committed to continue my journey, as courageously as possible, to work on my racism. I am happy to help others do so, as well.

Thank you for your courage, Dr. King. You are deeply missed in today's harsh world.

Maggie Carey

Chair, Racial Justice Coordinating Committee
and its Reckoning & Repair Working Group



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and mission of First Parish.

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The Spire

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Items may be edited for space and clarity.

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