

Next issue deadline  
Sunday, September 28

# The Spire

SEPTEMBER 7, 2025

THE FIRST SUNDAY RECORD

VOL. 68, No. 1

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

## A New Chapter

Whether you are new to First Parish, have been coming for a long time, or are rejoining after some time away, welcome! We begin our program year with a new interim lead minister, Rev. Dr. Jonipher Kwong.

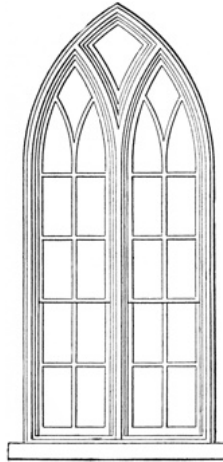
Thank you to all the groups who hosted the weekly potlucks over the summer. It is next to impossible to name each person whose contributions are essential to making this community strong and engaging, but the Parish Committee (ParCom) would like to highlight the team of party planners for Rev. Marta Flanagan's retirement celebration: Tina Silberman, Andrea Winslow, Ebonié Smith-Cooper, Jim Ptacek, Julius Pereli, and Marc Jacobson. Along with dozens of volunteers and helpers – and artists, singers, musicians, decorators, pizza-makers, and more – the team created a wonderful send-off for Marta. Thank you all for making it such a special evening.

Thank you to the Interim Search Committee (ISC) for their dedication and collaboration: Marilyn Downs, Elizabeth Hunter, Lori Kenschaft, Marie Meteer, and Jim Ptacek. We appreciate the intense process and their many hours spent filling out forms, interviewing, and working with the Unitarian Universalist Association. The ISC, convened for the purpose of finding an interim minister, made the process seem effortless when it was quite effortful.

First Parish is in a strong financial position, and we celebrate the abundance and generosity of our spiritual community. Details are in a report from our treasurer on the next page.

A de-escalation workshop this summer demonstrated how to respond to a threat or disruption by diffusing a situation. This training was practical and timely.

ParCom will hold in its annual fall retreat later this month. Look for details about themes and working



groups soon. We approach this new chapter in our congregational life with openness, good energy, and a commitment to our shared values. We are an active congregation of many skills in art, music, care, community building, event planning, tech, teaching, celebrating, and spiritual exploration. We find meaningful ways to actively engage in community, passionately defend social justice, and thoughtfully welcome newcomers.

Finally, we extend deep gratitude to our Parish Minister, Rev. Erica, for taking on an increase in pastoral care over the summer, and to our Minister of Religious Education, Rev. Stevie, for providing opportunities for our youth to learn and grow. Along with a hiring committee that included First Parish youth, Rev. Stevie shepherded in our new Youth Program Coordinator, K. Milano.

Welcome again, Rev. Jonipher! Welcome, K.!  
Welcome back, all!

Joanna Pushee, Clerk

## Ferry Beach Registration Ends Soon

Sign up by September 19 to attend our Annual First Parish Ferry Beach Retreat. Please visit the Ferry Beach page on the church website at [www.firstparish.info](http://www.firstparish.info) for more information and the link to register. Questions? Contact [ferrybeach@firstparish.info](mailto:ferrybeach@firstparish.info).

## Keeping Up

There are many ways to find out what's going on at First Parish. The best source is our church website, [www.firstparish.info](http://www.firstparish.info). It includes a link to our *Workings* booklet, with lots of great details.

Once a week an e-mail lands in your inbox if you are signed up with the church office. It highlights important things to know and focuses on time-sensitive details. In contrast, *The Spire* appears monthly and is generally a place for longer articles about larger

issues. Whenever anyone asks about the word limit for a submission, I reply, "Just say what you want to say." There is room here for extended discussion. There's even a section called "Reflections," which is open to anyone who feels compelled to share something about our beloved community.

On the last page of every issue of *The Spire* is a list of people in charge of things, along with the church office hours. The deadline for each issue appears right at the top of the first page.

Diane Shriver, *Spire* Editor

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## All-Church Picnic

On Sunday, September 14, enjoy a picnic after the service in the Courtyard, or in the Vestry if it's raining. The Parish Committee is the sponsor and will provide sandwiches, salad, and drinks. Please bring a dessert to share.

We need volunteers that morning to help prepare food and clean up afterward. There's a signup sheet on the kitchen door, or you can sign up at [www.firstparish.info](http://www.firstparish.info).

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## Town Day Chili and Pies

At Arlington's annual Town Day, on Saturday, September 20, our traditional offerings of pies and chili will raise funds for our Social Justice Committee. Both will take place in the Vestry. You can find forms to sign up for either one at [www.firstparish.info](http://www.firstparish.info).

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## Carpools to the Burlington ICE Facility

Each week, hundreds of people gather outside the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) offices in Burlington to express our shame at the actions of ICE, bear witness to the cruel and unconstitutional actions of our government, and show love and support for immigrants. If you would like to carpool to the facility to stand in solidarity with other First Parish folks, please sign up at [www.firstparish.info](http://www.firstparish.info). Carpools begin on Wednesday, September 10.

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## Ongoing Generosity

As your church treasurer I am delighted to share good news regarding our finances. Despite uncertain

economic conditions, pledges were only slightly below budget (1.1 percent) and, in general, our expenses remained below budget in most categories. First Parish finished its fiscal year on June 30 using much less of the allocated contingency than planned – only \$12,000 instead of \$63,000.

The congregation's generosity during an eventful program year was remarkable! Our special collection back in October 2024 for UUA hurricane disaster relief came to \$2,800. Giving First contributions exceeded expectations for the year, raising 4 percent more than projected, and in December our annual holiday collection for Renewal House came to \$4,700.

We raised \$50,600 for Marta's retirement gift, and also made generous donations toward a baby shower and gift to welcome Rev. Erica and Daniel's child.

*Thank you* to everyone for a most meaningful and generous year.

Carolyn Hodges  
Treasurer

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## A New Curriculum

We offer new courses in our Religious Education program all the time, but I'm especially excited about this one because it has been such a long time coming, and because I wrote most of it!

Back in 2021, Ellen Leigh invited me to join the Indigenous Justice Working Group (IJWG), an offshoot of First Parish's Social Justice Committee. As we brainstormed what this group might do, I suggested an RE curriculum to educate our children about issues and injustices experienced by the Indigenous people of Massachusetts – not just in the past but also today. My friend (and IJWG member) Annie Homza, a professor at Boston College, offered to work with me, and we began researching and writing, complicated by COVID and my demanding new job. It is now completed and is called:

### An "Is," Not a "Was" – Native Americans in the 21st Century

1. Stereotypes
2. Native Americans and the Natural World
3. Native Americans as School and Sports Mascots
4. Celebrating Indigenous Peoples Day
- 5 & 6. Native American Stereotypes in Art and Media
7. Indian Boarding Schools

8. Indigenous Languages
9. Thanksgiving and the National Day of Mourning
10. Native Americans and Reciprocal Relationships
11. Reckoning and Reparations

The lessons were reviewed by Dr. Nitana Hicks Greendeer, a member of the Mashpee Wampanoag tribe of Massachusetts and a Curriculum Specialist at the Wôpanâak Language Reclamation Project, whose fee was jointly covered by the IJWG and the Social Justice Committee. In her final report, Nitana wrote:

Overall I find this curriculum to be extremely thorough and well-researched. The reference list is excellent and highlights Native voices to tell their own stories. Each lesson is supported with resources and activities that make the curriculum relatable for anyone, even those who are unfamiliar with their personal connections to Native people, lands, histories, etc.

This curriculum is also factual and appropriate for students. The content does not shy away from hard topics but rather presents them in age-appropriate ways so that learners can build their knowledge on facts, rather than unlearning wrong information later because they learned a sugar-coated history.

We wrote An “Is,” Not a “Was” with two purposes:

- To introduce the children in our RE program to Indigenous experiences in the world today.
- To guide them in their spiritual growth and capacity to work for justice in the world.

It is also one significant way that First Parish can live our faith and further the resolutions in the Land Acknowledgment we adopted in May 2024.

In addition to ensuring alignment with our UU values, Annie and I sought to ensure that the lessons would further the learning goals outlined by local Indigenous peoples in promoting the development of cultural competency overall; understanding aspects of Native American history and the ongoing impacts of colonialism; exploring and developing respect for Native cultures; learning about current issues of Indigenous justice; and taking action.

Many First Parish members were instrumental in bringing this curriculum to fruition. Carolyn Carlson



(RE teacher), Elizabeth Hunter (IJWG), and Samantha Rauh (RE teacher) read drafts of each lesson and offered invaluable feedback. Conversations with Betsy Carlton-Gysan (RE Committee Chair), Wendy Fields (RE and elementary school teacher), and Sara Whitford (Reckoning and Repair Working Group) were extremely helpful in shaping lessons. As child psychologists and RE teachers, Mary Breen and Barbara Grimm were key resources for the *Before You Teach This Curriculum* guide for our RE teachers.

Four lessons will be piloted this fall (two in October and two in November) with our Grade 6–7 class. Our Minister of Religious Education Stevie Carmody is lining up teachers for the four sessions. We are eager to hear the results of this pilot!

Down the road, we hope to adapt some of the lessons as a STAR program for adults and to work with the UUA to offer the curriculum to other congregations and RE programs.

On a personal note, my great-grandmother Alice Brown Davis was the first (and so far only) female chief of the Great Seminole Nation of Oklahoma. I think my family would be very proud of the work Annie and I have done to share Native stories, raise awareness of issues that continue to affect Indigenous nations, and engage the open minds, loving hearts, and helping hands of our amazing First Parish youth.

Jennifer Davis-Kay

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## Giving First for September

We share half of our Offering with an organization that supports our values, chosen by our Social Justice Committee. The September recipient is the Sexual Violence Prevention Association (SVPA).

SVPA is the first – and the only – organization dedicated to preventing sexual violence systemically. As a national nonprofit, the group works to prevent sexual violence *before* it happens by addressing root causes such as rape culture and systemic oppression. The work spans policy advocacy, research, institutional reform, and community education to create lasting, structural change. SVPA is proudly led by marginalized survivors, including BIPOC, LGBTQ+ individuals, and disabled people. This ensures that its work is informed by the lived experiences of those who are most affected.



## Staff and Contact Information

Staff serve the members, leaders,  
and mission of First Parish.

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## The Spire

Diane Shriver, Editor

Next issue: Sunday, October 5  
Submissions due by Sunday, September 28  
*Items may be edited for space and clarity.*

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