

Next issue deadline
Sunday, October 29

The Spire

OCTOBER 1, 2023

THE FIRST SUNDAY RECORD

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

Parish Committee Notes

The Parish Committee, the governing board of First Parish, met on August 29 via Zoom. We welcomed our new Minister of Religious Education Stevie Carmody and expressed gratitude for the Worship Associates and their work coordinating the Summer Potluck series. The next-to-last potluck, hosted by the Ferry Beach Committee, had 90 attendees!

We also thanked the lay ministers who led summer worship services. Special appreciation goes to Amy Anderson's "Reckoning When Redemption is Impossible," Diane Taraz's "Echoes of the Past," and Lori Kenshaft's "Abolition and the Big Problems of Our Time," all services about racial justice.

We continue our positive relationship with First Parish tenant the Montessori Arlington Children's House. Members of their board of directors will attend our next meeting.

In other business, we appointed Adrian Trilling and Lori Kenshaft to the Property Committee with the special task of monitoring First Parish's energy use.

Several of our staff members are leaving. Many thanks to outgoing Religious Education staff member Rowan Wheeler, who is off to graduate school.

Music Director Jonathan Colby is also moving on after a decade of blessing us with his many gifts. We asked Music Committee chair Alice (Austin) Panniello to form a search committee to find an interim director.

Our next meeting will be in person in the Parlor on September 19 from 7 to 9 pm. All are welcome.

Detailed monthly meeting minutes are public and can be found on the church website at www.firstparish.info.

Joanna Pushee, Clerk

Explore Our Racial Justice Library

Among the educational and inspirational resources available to us at First Parish is our Racial Justice Library, a collection of over 300 books. You can find history, analysis, memoirs, music, and fiction for all ages. You can explore the catalog online at librarycat.org/lib/FPUUA.

The library is located just under the stairs to the Sanctuary balcony. Please feel free to browse, and if you find something you'd like to take home, sign it out on the book cart. Bring it back in a month, and mark it returned. Read and repeat!

At least two titles are by First Parish members:

- *Candace: Imagining the Life of a Woman Enslaved in 18th-Century New England*
by Diane Taraz
- *A Decisive Decade: An Insider's View of the Chicago Civil Rights Movement during the 1960s*
by Bob McKersie

Book donations and suggestions are welcome! Contact the library caretakers at RJLibrary@firstparish.info.

Kate Tranquada

Clean It / Fix It Day

On Saturday, October 7, come help us spiff up our buildings and grounds. We will garden, clean, and tend to our spiritual home from 9 am to noon.

This is a great way to meet new people and make a difference. We hope you will join in!

Enjoying Sacred Song Together

Hymn sings are held Wednesday afternoons from 2 to 3 pm in the Parlor. Mark your calendar for October 4, November 8, and December 6. Everyone is welcome! E-mail STAR@firstparish.info with any questions.

Good Ministry

The Committee on Ministry helps foster good ministry on behalf of the congregation. Its members serve as a liaison between the congregation and the ministers, keeping them advised of conditions in the congregation and working to strengthen relationships.

We do not accept anonymous feedback, but we are committed to holding your words confidentially. We consider it essential to the congregation's health and well-being to be open and transparent in communicating both successes and concerns.

This year's members are Marc Jacobson, Julius Pereli, Jim Ptacek, Ebonié Smith-Cooper, Andrea Winslow, and myself, acting as chair. Please look for us around First Parish and feel free to reach out to any of us individually, or at com@firstparish.info.

Tina Silberman, Chair
Committee on Ministry

A Conversation with the Minister

Are you new to First Parish, or just feeling new? You are invited to meet with our Lead Minister, Rev. Marta Flanagan, on Sunday, October 15 after the service in the Parlor for an informal chat ~ no agenda, just conversation about whatever you'd like to know. We'll be there from 11:45 until about 1 pm. Light refreshments will be served. Ask questions at TellMeMore@firstparish.info.



A Tale of Partridge Peas

It started with a Seed Swap last November. People from the Mystic Charles Pollinator Pathways came to the Bailey Room for a program about collecting, cleaning, and swapping the seeds of native plants. (Native plants are ones indigenous to our region that

support native wildlife, vs. introduced species like most garden-center plants.)

Clearly, many of the gardeners who came were impressive Type As, arriving with personal portable vacuums to suck up any stray potting-soil crumbs or chaff, and with zillions of tiny manila envelopes neatly labeled with the Latin and common names of the zillion more native-plant seeds inside.

Peggy Gardiner and I ended up with a mini-stack of envelopes, and a month later we were back in the Bailey Room with the RE kids one Sunday morning, trying out a project we'd learned at the Seed Swap, planting plastic milk jugs from our envelopes of native seeds. We cut the jugs in half, filled the bottom with seed-starter mix, added seeds, and taped the jugs back together with colorful tape. We set the jugs outside the Vestry windows, with the caps removed to allow rain or snow to water the seeds.

I can't tell you how long the seeds slept or when their seed casings split open, pushed apart by white embryos smaller than peppercorns. But while we were all chatting in the Vestry last winter, green threads began to poke up in the jugs.

Not all the jugs had sprouts, but half a dozen did, and on our last spring clean-up day, two small sisters who had helped plant the jugs (and here we dearly miss Tina Schultz, who knew every child by name and disposition) transplanted some seedlings into a new area in what we call the mini-meadow between Pleasant Street and the courtyard.

New to all of us was a plant called Partridge Pea, *Chamaecrisia fasciculata*, also called sensitive plant or sleeping plant because its delicate, ferny leaves curl up when you touch it. An annual from the pea family, it's since grown more than a foot high with sunny yellow flowers marked deep red at the base. Our Partridge Peas fix nitrogen, which means they are improving the soil. They brighten the garden and gladden our spirits.

This summer, for the second year in a row, teenagers came to tend them and our other pollinator plants with a grant-funded group called Biodiversity Builders. Fifteen young people from Cambridge, Belmont, and Arlington high schools weeded, watered, and labeled the plants and drew color-coded maps of them. They enjoyed the Partridge Peas and also spotted our first monarch butterfly caterpillar and took note of the goldfinches feeding on the coneflowers.

By the time you read this, the gorgeous Partridge Pea flowers may have begun to turn into long thin studded

seedpods. That's our best guess, since we've never seen them do this before. But since they are annuals that will be gone in the year they bloom, we'd better figure out how to save the seeds if we want to see them again. Maybe we'll put the seeds in little manila envelopes and label them. Let us know if you'd like some.

Cathie Desjardins and Peggy Gardiner
gardens@firstparish.info

New UU Class

The next New UU Class will run for two sessions, on October 28 and November 4, from 9 to noon. If you are curious about Unitarian Universalism and First Parish, please join us in the Parlor. To sign up, contact Amy Anderson at *NewUU@firstparish.info*.

The Spire Tower Sings a New Song

The soaring tower that holds our bell and clock looks wonderful, thanks to coordinator David Dreyfus and the Property Committee. Back in 2020 they started working on getting it repainted. Our wonderful long-term painter could not work so high up in the air. In 2021 another vendor quoted \$11,000, but in 2022 they added scaffolding and the cost soared to \$40,000.

After a tremendous amount of calling and e-mailing, much of it unrequited, one company proposed using lifts on the brickwork to reach the top. The price was good and work was scheduled for 2022. Then their lift vendor pulled out at the last minute.

Dreyfus and company mused about maybe putting hinges on the base to lower it, paint, and raise it – or perhaps using drones on a very, very, very calm day. They went back to the short list of vendors who had returned their calls. RESTCO visited and gave them a quote. Now they had to decide what kind of paint to use, how to prep the tower, etc. Research ensued. They got help from many First Parishioners.

Getting closer to actual work, our intrepid committee realized that our insanely busy corner probably called for a police detail. They discovered they had to ask for a detail the day before each work day, and that a detail might or might not appear. We could do the work without a detail if we did it safely. But of course!

In September, after examination by drone, a lift carried brave steeplejacks aloft to scrape, prime, and paint. They used a brand of primer called Mad Dog (go ahead, google it). Then it rained, and rained, and

rained again. The final cost was \$33,000. PropCom chair John Galantowicz highly recommends RESTCO for all your home steeple projects.

When your editor asked PropCom to discuss the spire in *The Spire*, this is what David Dreyfus sent. Enjoy.

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Riding that wild road of times long past, the whispers of repaint echoed in the alleyways of our souls. A few sunsets ago, might've been years or the blink of a dream, the journey took a serious turn.

We knew a cat, right? Done gigs with him before. Pure jazz, his work. But he talked of 30 grand just to set up the stage. Felt like one could craft a pad in the heart of the city for that much bread, and it'd hold longer than a saxophone note in the dead of night.

"Why not riff with other tunes?" we thought. Man, the scene was loaded with them vendors.

Few vibed back, fingers dancing on the ivory keys of phones and mail. Others, lost in the cosmic dance, forgot the melody. Then there was this one cat, had a killer groove: machines climbing walls like the notes of a Coltrane solo. Name the year: 2022. It was a date.

2022 dawned, man, just as the universe had scripted. This vendor was ready to wail. But when the rhythm was about to kick, the lift dude dropped the beat. "Maybe give that spire some swing?" they mused, talking of making it dance up and down. The drone idea? Like trying to light a cig in a hurricane.

Digging through the old records, we looked for those painters still in tune. The list? A one-hit wonder.

RESTCO blew in, all smooth and cool, laying down their plan and hitting the notes. Then, the eternal jam: the right color, the prep, the soul of the paint. Conversations with paint dealers, midnight scrolls on the neon-lit web. The First Parish folks and others vibing, we were almost onto something.

The cop scene? Mass Ave had that buzz, man. You needed that blue to watch over. Each sunrise, you'd ask. Maybe they groove along, maybe they don't. But the show must roll, as long as it swings safe.

September played its mellow tune, and Mad Dog primer (ain't jiving you) cloaked the spire. The rain played its drum solo, and by Town Day, the masterpiece was done. Somewhere, the angels broke into a chorus, bebopping to the celestial rhythm. Amen to that, brother.



# Staff and Contact Information

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

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## The Spire

Diane Shriver, Editor

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E-mail to *spire@firstparish.info*.  
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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