

STONE SOUP NEWSLETTER

Summer 2018

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Letter from the Minister

Rev. Christina Sillari

Dear Members and Friends of First Parish,

Happy Summer! I feel good about First Parish. We had a successful year of shared ministry with great leaders. We have a great staff team who support one another and are dedicated to the success of First Parish. Through the work of standing committees we are in a solid place financially and structurally, and are becoming more organized. Our congregation is bustling with new people, energy, passion and creativity. We are looking back into our history and unpacking it as we move forward reflecting on our whiteness and our privilege. We are partnering with other faith traditions and organizations that are committed to creating love and justice in the world. Our congregation is truly multi-generational with people from diverse economic and class backgrounds. We are working towards becoming accessible for all bodies.

I am proud of us. I love us!

As we move forward, I am wondering about who is not with us, who are we leaving out of our powerful faith. Who are we not reaching? Who will benefit from Unitarian Universalism? How can we create a worship service that meets the needs of more people? How, as a congregation, will we continue to respond to the injustice and suffering occurring in the world? What tools and practices do we need to care for ourselves and connect with energies that will guide and sustain us? These are the questions I will be reflecting on this summer. I invite you to reflect on them too and send me an email with your thoughts (minister@firstparishportland.org).

As stated in my letter of agreement and recommended by the UUA, I will be taking study leave and vacation time for the month of July. My plans are to spend time in nature,

hone in on my shamanic skills, participate in a contemplative dance workshop, read some books, and hang out with my family. I will lead worship on August 5th and hope to see you there.

During the month of July I will not be answering emails or returning phone calls. If you need anything please call the Office (773-5747) and Sheila Sullivan will direct you. If you have a pastoral care emergency please contact Judy Micoleau at judymicoleau299@gmail.com or 207-773-5475 through July 25th, and Jen Caswell at hfcjdc@gmail.com or 207-274-0952 through August 1st.

Gratitude & Blessings,
Christina

Policy Governance 101

Janet Robinson, President of the Governing Board

This year the Governing Board plunged head-first into completing the conversion of our governance structure to Policy governance, a process initiated by congregational vote in 2014. In this governance model, the Board writes policies that guide and bound the work of the Minister and the operational side of the church (collectively referred to as “Ministry”), and then monitors closely performance in accord with these policies. Authority to make decisions that formerly were made the Board is transferred to Ministry, through the office of the Minister, and choices are acceptable so long as they are in accord with these over-arching policies. This year we developed the bulk of the policies that support this effort, and these policies will be rolled out in draft form to leadership in the fall.

Why are we doing this? As a growing church, First Parish is in a moment of transition, where the systems and practices that worked when we were a 250-member church are now struggling to keep up with our programs and needs. Policy governance is one answer, because it removes the bottleneck of Board approvals and frees the Board for the important work of visioning and long-range planning. This year we’ll be focusing on what else we need to do to ensure that our organizational structure supports our growth in a way that most effectively uses our volunteers’ time, respects the boundaries of our staff, and ensures that our Minister has enough creative space and time to lead and inspire us in fulfilling the call of our mission statement. It’s an exciting time for each of us and First Parish as whole, and we on the Governing Board are looking forward to being part of it. In the meantime, we wish everyone a relaxing and enjoyable summer!

Peonies, by Mary Oliver

chosen by Sheila Sullivan, Congregational Administrator

This morning the green fists of the peonies are getting ready
to break my heart
as the sun rises,
as the sun strokes them with his old, buttery fingers

and they open —
pools of lace,
white and pink —
and all day the black ants climb over them,

boring their deep and mysterious holes
into the curls,
craving the sweet sap,
taking it away

to their dark, underground cities —
and all day
under the shifty wind,
as in a dance to the great wedding,

the flowers bend their bright bodies,
and tip their fragrance to the air,
and rise,
their red stems holding

all that dampness and recklessness
gladly and lightly,
and there it is again —
beauty the brave, the exemplary,

blazing open.
Do you love this world?
Do you cherish your humble and silky life?
Do you adore the green grass, with its terror beneath?

Do you also hurry, half-dressed and barefoot, into the garden,
and softly,
and exclaiming of their dearness,
fill your arms with the white and pink flowers,

with their honeyed heaviness, their lush trembling,
their eagerness
to be wild and perfect for a moment, before they are
nothing, forever?

After 10 years of encouraging this one peony plant along in my garden, it is a riot of delicious deep pink blooms this year. Only this morning I rushed out in the light rain to soak in their beauty. My garden is trying to teach me to be present for life's surprises when they arrive, and to have patience when the surprises are more challenging. Sometimes I remember this lesson. Whether in my work or family life, Oliver's invitation helps keep me grounded, "Do you love this world? Do you cherish your humble and silky life? Do you adore the green grass, with its terror beneath?"