

*An ancient folktale tells of the power of gathering our individual gifts to create community...*



# STONE SOUP NEWSLETTER

Winter 2018

First Parish in Portland  
A Unitarian Universalist Congregation

## December Worship Services

- 12/2 | 10 am | **Cultivating Healing** | Rev. Christina Sillari
- 12/9 | 10 am | **Parenting & Family** | Dan Hughes
- 12/16 | 10 am | **Hymn Sing** | Rev. Christina Sillari
- 12/16 | 5 pm | **First Parish Pageant of the Nativity** | Rev. Christina Sillari
- 12/21 | 5:30 pm | **Winter Solstice Service** | Rev. Christina Sillari
- 12/23 | 10 am | **Is Jesus a UU?** | Rev. Christina Sillari
- 12/24 | 4:30 pm | **Christmas Eve Candlelight Service**

## Special Events at First Parish in December

- 12/6 | 12:15 pm | **Noonday Concert: Choral Art “Holiday Sing Along”**
- 12/7&8 | 7:30 pm | **Maine Gay Men's Chorus Holiday Concert**
- 12/9 | 2:30 pm | **Maine Gay Men's Chorus Holiday Concert**
- 12/12 | 7 pm | **Christmas Bells: A Holiday Handbell Concert**
- 12/16 | 10 am | **RE Gingerbread House Making**

*Please check the [First Parish Calendar](#) or call the Office (773-5747) for more information on these events.*

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## Shared Ministry and Our Mission

*Reverend Christina Sillari, Minister*

When I reflect upon our mission to nurture the spirit, grow in community, and help heal the world, I see us in shared ministry. Ministry is the participation in the ongoing, creative repairing of the world. Ministry is not just an act provided by those who are ordained or called to serve. Ministry happens wherever individuals embrace the belief that their good works, their volunteerism, their acts, can help serve the mission and vision of their congregation.



I am grateful for our shared ministry at First Parish. Although I am an ordained clergy person and your minister, my ministry is made real and effective by the staff and

volunteers in our congregation. We are all working together to make First Parish a vibrant spiritual community for all people.

This makes me happy because my ministry becomes more joyful and sustainable when so many of you engage in ministry. When you share your gifts with others within our congregation and when together we bring those gifts to the greater community we are engaging in shared ministry. I am so grateful for the many gifts you are sharing. Our ministry is making our mission real.

These are some of the highlights of our shared ministry:

**Accessibility:** this ministry is preparing to facilitate a feasibility study to raise the funds we need for an elevator.

**Chalice Groups:** this ministry is organizing and facilitating small groups to become socially and spiritually connected.

**Community Dinner:** this ministry is creating a warm and welcoming place for food and fellowship with our local community.

**Finance:** this ministry is helping us stay financially sound through budgeting, stewardship and fundraising.

**Membership:** this ministry, filled with new young energy, is working with our membership coordinator to welcome and support new seekers and create community events for us all.

**Music:** this ministry shared by our music director, choir and music committee is blessing us with diverse and meaningful music as well as raising money with Concerts for a Cause.

**Pastoral Care:** this ministry is caring for our members in many powerful ways, from counseling to rides, from meals to visits.

**Racial Justice and Rally for Justice:** these ministries are helping us look at our whiteness, supporting rallies and vigils, and educating us about the history of native peoples in Maine.

**Religious Exploration:** this ministry is supporting our children and youth to live out our values and become responsible stewards of the interconnected web of existence.

**Safe Harbor:** this ministry is keeping us engaged with our immigrant friends and neighbors.

**Worship:** this ministry, shared by our staff and worship committee, worked with The Rev. Dr. Thandeka in October to transform our worship services so they are more emotionally engaging and culturally relevant.

Even if you are not on one these teams (and you can be), you are still part of our shared ministry. Every time you chat with someone you do not know at coffee hour or contact someone in our community in need or donate flowers for worship or usher on Sunday morning you are engaging in shared ministry.

Whenever we share our gifts, help out, or reach out we are participating in the ministry of First Parish. The gifts I am called to share this church year are shamanism and breath work. What gifts do you have? Are you able to share them with our community? Gifts are given to us both as individuals and as a people, and the complementary nature of our gifts is essential for ministering.

Like the Jewish prophets and Jesus himself, we are called to bring good news to each other and our greater community and to bring freedom to the oppressed. Like the Buddha we are called to be present to the world and help awaken people to deeper, more authentic possibilities. As Unitarian Universalists we are called to share our gifts creatively repairing one another and the world by making love and justice real.

I love our congregation and I love each and every one of you!

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## **Governing Board Update**

*Janet Robinson, President, First Parish Governing Board*

Since our last update in the June annual report, the Governing Board has been fully engaged in the most exciting part of our job under the Policy Governance, and that is the process of discerning and creating the vision for First Parish. As described previously, under the Policy Governance model the Board does not adjudicate or manage routine issues arising from day-to-day church operations; rather we confer those authorities to the operating side of the church (collectively called Ministry) and focus instead on creating overarching church policies, monitoring Ministry performance against those policies, ensuring that resources are safeguarded, and, most importantly, setting vision for First Parish for the next few years. The policies are done in draft form and we are already monitoring Ministry against those policies; now we are working on the Vision.

And how do we do this? We draw information from three sources: the wishes of our congregants, as expressed in the several visioning workshops conducted in 2017, as well as in innumerable private conversations; the voices of our leaders, as obtained during the 2017 Leadership Retreat; and our own critical examination of how well our church is functioning to meet those wishes and fulfill our mission statement. Our goal is to be a life church, a place where we all feel welcomed, loved, and inspired to go out and change the world, and we are currently working on a vision statement that speaks to this ambition and need. When we're done, we'll start rolling this out to all our leaders and members for discussion and review. Like all good visions, it will require the best from each one of us, not just our leaders or our Minister. We together are First Parish, each one a part.

So stay tuned. This is an extraordinarily exciting time for First Parish, and look forward to sharing our work with you soon.

## 2018 Auction Summary

*Bill Adams, Auction Co-Chair*

On Saturday November 4<sup>th</sup> about 60 members and friends of First Parish braved the elements and joined us for the 2018 Auction at the Woodford's Club in Portland. For those of you who were unable to attend – you missed a fun-filled evening highlighted by our very own auctioneer, Bruce Carver. We had 223 items available for bids – 179 items in the silent auction and 44 in the live auction – so many we can't mention them all – gift certificates, camps, dishes, jewelry, hand-made crafts, paintings, kayak, exotic vacation in Mexico, lots of professional services, sailing trips and, of course, dinner with the minister. 40 people volunteered their time to set up displays, sell tickets, serve wine, prepare food and clean-up – a perfect example of First Parish teamwork!!! We are still selling items after church in the Parish Hall – to date we have exceeded \$9,000. A good night's work!

Thank you to all those who contributed their donations and time to make this year's auction a huge success – your efforts are much appreciated.

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### **First Parish Pageant of the Nativity, Cecily Merrill, Director**

On Sunday, December 16 at 5 pm, please join us at First Parish as we celebrate the 92nd annual Candlelight Vespers Service and Pageant of the Nativity. The Pageant is a tradition in my family. My great aunt directed it for years, and my mother played the Virgin Mary. I started as a Heavenly Host and changed roles as I

aged, from Junior Disciple to Disciple to Attending Angel. I participated every year until I moved to New Mexico in 2008. Then, in 2017 when my husband and two-year-old daughter and I moved back to Maine, I naturally welcomed a new position as a pageant committee member and director.

Planning and rehearsing the pageant is a major logistical challenge- it's a serious commitment at the time of the year when every weekend is filled with office parties, gift wrapping and time dedicated to friends and family.

As a UU, navigating the spiritual implications of Christmas can also prove challenging- in a religion such as ours, where we believe in the importance and validity of all belief systems, the idea of celebrating a single religious holiday over others is a complicated affair.

Yet, when the lights glow through the December darkness in our storied parish and the organ heralds the procession of our dedicated cast with the opening chords of "Oh, Come All Ye Faithful," the message of love and unity shines through in a way that resonates as a loving ode to tradition and a universal call to hope.

And I hope that when the final notes of “Joy to the World” fade over the glory of this year’s closing tableau, all the members of our community and perhaps even beyond, can feel the same electricity singing up and down their spines that I’ve felt ever since I was a little girl kneeling at the lower bannister in my gold ribboned halo.

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## **Costume Prep Schedule for the Pageant**

*Bette Brunswick, Costume Mistress*

It is pageant time again! I am reaching out for your help with costume prep which is always a great way to build our community bonds. The 2018 Pageant of the Nativity is on December 16th! Help is needed a full week before rehearsal and during cast participation...Whatever time you can spare is greatly appreciated. As always we need people to unpack, mend, iron, re-pack and this year the Christmas Spirit wings will be remade!

The costume prep schedule is as follows:



**Monday, December 10th- 10-1:** Unpack and inventory

**Tuesday, December 11th- 10-2:** Mending, Ironing and Wing making

**Wednesday, December 12th- 10-2:** Mending, Ironing and Wing making

**Thursday, December 13th- 10-12:** Ironing and Wing making if needed

**Friday, December 14th- 2:30-3:30:** Moving costumes to Church Balcony

**Monday, December 18th- 9:30-1:** Repacking

Let me know if you are able to help this year. Also, please know that angel and disciple dressers will be needed at Saturday morning rehearsal at 8:30am and before showtime on Sunday 3:00pm. Many hands make light work!

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## **Work of the Program Council Liaison Team,**

*Robert Moldaver, PCLT Chair*

Do you wonder what the Program Council Liaison Team (PCLT or Liaison Team, for short) is all about?

Here is a brief overview. As the name implies, members of the PCLT work to ensure that there are connections and communication across the many committees and teams that undertake all of the programming at First Parish. All of these committees and teams have chairpersons who attend Program Council meetings on 3 Sundays during the church year to share reports on progress, highlight accomplishments, and troubleshoot.

The Liaison Team is currently made up of 4 First Parish members, each of whom has liaison responsibilities to a bunch of committees and teams. For example, the Music Committee, the Worship Committee, and more, share the same Liaison Team member, Sheila Cook. Sheila gets reports from these committees, talks to the chairs and other members, and may also attend a committee meeting once in a while. Sheila might be asked to support her liaison committees by communicating special events to other parts of leadership, especially if there are competing interests for time, space, and volunteer activities. Considering how much good work is going on at First Parish, and the growth we have been experiencing, communication across the many ministries is important so we can efficiently maximize our energies as we all support the overarching mission of First Parish to: Nurture the Spirit, Grow in Community, and Help Heal the World!

If you have questions about our work, would like to get involved, or would like a copy of our charter, please contact me by email at [moldaver.robert@gmail.com](mailto:moldaver.robert@gmail.com). Thanks for all of your dedicated and important work at First Parish!

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## ***Staff Reflections on Self-Care & Spiritual Growth***



### **By Heart**

*Toben Cooney-Callnan, DRE*

As much as the trees serve as tangible proof that the forest exists, there are tiny universes of particles and energies in wild conversation, making strange agreements to hold space and shape in every object. Even that which appears so tangible to the eye speaks in a language too old and too enormous for my mind to ever comprehend. So, for me, spiritual seeking has very much been about getting out of my mind and

getting down into my heart. That's not always an easy task for me. My head works really hard to keep the rest of me from ever feeling vulnerable and my heart is a squishy, unguarded, tender little thing (or so my mind would have me think). Yet, it is only when I risk vulnerability, when I give up the isolation of self-reliance, when I invite other hearts into conversation with my own, that I feel my spirit waking up. So, for me, "spiritual self-care" is twofold.

Firstly, I need to be in regular and deliberate contact with Nature. This means that at least once a week I need to turn off my phone, head to somewhere with trees, force myself to sit for at least five minutes and attempt to take in the beautiful way in which the Natural World lives with an unmistakable and seemingly effortless commitment to authenticity. I need this because, even though mind will likely never fully witness or understand the wild conversations and strange agreements that shape Universal Truths

into trees that grow into homes and buffets for birds and squirrels, my heart always seems to recognize that there is an undeniable Magic at work in the forest.

Secondly, my heart requires me to brave my way into human connection. My ancient aversion to vulnerability makes admitting that I am scared, that I am lonely, that I am in pain, or, simply that I need other people is very difficult but, every single time that I admit those vulnerable truths and am met with a “me too,” my heart feels less heavy and my spirit feels more awake. So, the second part of my spiritual self-care requires me to have people around that I can be my most authentic and vulnerable self with. I am very lucky to have many such people in my life and I do my best when I have regular check-ins with them. I don’t know how the Universe works, but, to me, the realness of the Interdependent Web feels like an intentional act on the Universe’s part and it is only by attempting conscious contact with that Web of Existence that my spirit feels cared for and healthy.

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## **The Times of Your Life**

*Scott Wheatley, Music Director*

Music opens the floodgates of our memories.  
The Joy ... The Pain ... The Past ... The Future.

“The Times of Your Life”  
by Bill Lane and Roger Nichols

Good morning, yesterday  
You wake up and time has slipped away  
And suddenly it's hard to find  
The memories you left behind  
Remember, do you remember?  
The laughter and the tears  
The shadows of misty yesteryears  
The good times and the bad you've seen  
And all the others in between  
Remember, do you remember  
The times of your life?  
Reach out for the joy and the sorrow  
Put them away in your mind  
The memories are time that you borrow  
To spend when you get to tomorrow  
Here comes the setting sun  
The seasons are passing one by one  
So gather moments while you may  
Collect the dreams you dream today  
Remember, will you remember  
The times of your life?





## **Sacred Pause**

*Sheila Sullivan, Congregational Administrator*

I wear many different hats in my job as Congregational Administrator at First Parish, and need to be responsive to a variety of needs over the course of a day. Add the normal stresses of parenting & home life, and the scales start to tip toward an ongoing sense of *never enough*-- never enough time, money, creativity, exercise, etc.

Self-care is an essential part to staying grounded and happy in my work & life as a whole. One important element of my self-care toolkit includes listening to [Tara Brach's podcasts](#). One of Tara's teachings that resonates deeply with me is the art of the *Sacred Pause*. She writes,

“What would it be like if, right in the midst of this busyness, we were to... intentionally stop our mental computations and our rushing around and, for a minute or two, simply pause and notice our inner experience?”

Whether during a very busy day at work or a difficult conversation, if I can remember to pause and notice, room is created for a non-habitual, less emotionally charged response. “We begin to trust in our natural intelligence, in our naturally wise heart, in our capacity to open to whatever arises.” ([T. Brach](#)) The trick, of course, is remembering to practice this Sacred Pause during challenging moments. Luckily, there are plenty of opportunities to practice!



## **Listening to A Visit**

*Dee Pecoraro, Membership Coordinator*

some such as us were told to be wary of those without the promises found in sweetwater foam.

they laughed gently when I told them how sad today had seemed.

in size, they were larger than we but much softer in scope with edges gone smooth.

their dimensions could not be nailed like the pegs of tents into the winter ground by time and space.

adept at change, they took raindrops, dew, frost and snow for nourishment.

then they posed as a group of Birch Elders holding sacred space for the white tailed deer.

I awakened to their moving through wildness like a red Kodiak's mealtime fishing in reaching for recesses where fish often hide.

they held me.

they cradled my mortal wounds and juniper brought its breath for healing.

those water related swam closer to the edges sensing a difference in frequency;

those above stood still in dutiful respect.

those who know of the power of flight changed direction.

when they left I danced in a circle around the moon (like Grandmother had shown us long before sound).

tears came.

I remembered what had been taught when the Earth birthed peonies.

a reminder of rotating axis spinning freely.

then, a weaving took place as Spider found the inner circle of my moon.

she called for me to Dream in honor of their visit.