

BRIDGING

Newsletter of the First Parish Church, Bridgewater, MA, Unitarian Universalist

December 2016

From the Minister...

What does it mean to be "A Community of Presence"

Spiritually, presence can mean two radically different things. On the one hand, contemplatives talk of "being present." Presence from this perspective is all about awareness and remembering to "live in the moment." On the other hand, theologians tend to come at presence from the perspective of "otherness." Their concern is not just that we pay attention to the present moment, but that we notice a transcendent Presence that is woven through all moments.

- SoulMatters

In some ways it is a commonplace that we humans get distracted easily, more especially in these modern times. Life in our society has grown a lot more complicated and there are far more "things" to distract us – not to mention the pervasive electronics, television channels, 24-hour news and politics and on and on. Really paying attention to any one thing is getting harder and harder; the mental demands of contemporary life are taxing and distracting.

I once did an exercise in being present in one place for a brief period of time. We were told to find a three square foot spot outside where we could spend 20 minutes just looking, concentrating on what we found in that tiny stretch of the vast earth. The first thing I found were dead leaves, and I got to thinking that after all this was a stupid place for me to have chosen to sit – lovely material for composting and enabling the development of life later, but hardly an ideal spot for watching life at present. Then, as I simply concentrated my attention, my three square feet began to come alive. There were, of course, the ants, scurrying about on their urgent business. Then there appeared – or rather, I finally noticed – a tiny green caterpillar, slowly, so slowly inching her way up a leaf. I watched closely but only noticed that she had moved when I looked away and then back again. There were mosquitoes, but they proved to be quite easy to shoo away. There were also, of course, all of the sounds of the woods on whose edge I sat. Suddenly this seemingly dead spot was alive with life and sound from all around me.

That little practice of being present awoke in me that fleeting sense of wonder in the Presence of all of this life around me; not the divine, exactly, but the awesomeness of being part of this extraordinary amplitude of life and being and all that was around me. It was at least a momentary awakening to how small a part I am – and how embedded I am – in this "Interdependent Web of all Existence of which we are a (small) part," as our Seventh Principle puts it.

Being present to another person has some of the same qualities. When we are really present to another person there comes to be a shared Presence between us, something more than each of us separately, a sacred presence, if you will. I was having dinner recently with a friend whose husband died about six months ago. Both of us told stories about regrets we had over not being quite fully present to ourselves and to our partners as they neared the end of their lives. We found ourselves distracted by little things – the momentum of the medical system, the need to arrange something for other friends, or just being ever so tired after months and even years of caring for our partners. Those lapses of attention were among the things we most regretted; not because we felt guilty, exactly, but because we could have been more whole if we had been more attentive. But we all fall short; we are, after all, only human. And we can all be more attentive to being present now.

As Mary Oliver puts it, "This is the first, the wildest and the wisest thing I know: that the soul exists and is built entirely out of attentiveness."

In Faith,

Rev. Paul

Minister

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Worship Services in December

The theme of the month is Presence.

December 4: Worship with Rev. Paul Sprecher: "Paying Attention" - In the stories of the birth of Jesus, we find that various participants in the story we tell at our Christmas Eve service notice the presence of something out of the ordinary, and they pay attention. The shepherds notice the angels, the wise men notice the star, and both Mary and Joseph listen to an angel. In our more skeptical age, these "signs" would probably be ignored or taken as signs of mental instability. Are there still places to pay attention to the sacred in our own lives?

December 11: Worship with Rev. Paul Sprecher: "Real Presents" - It's a commonplace that we go overboard in giving gifts and that we are encouraged to do so by many pressures from our culture. But who wants to be a Scrooge? Or is there another way?

December 18: Worship with Worship & Religious Education Committees: "Solstice: Growing Our Light" - An intergenerational service to honor the return of the Sun - one of many Festivals of Light during this season (including Hanukkah) - and celebrate coming out of darkness into the light. We will explore how we can use this time to grow the light in our personal and spiritual lives, as well as the united life of our nation.

December 23: Worship with Rev. Paul Sprecher on Christmas Eve (7:30 pm) - Our traditional service of stories and carols -- on the occasion of our First Parish 300th birthday.

The Worship Committee decided not to hold a service on Sunday, Christmas morning. However, we will be holding a service on New Year's Day, which also falls on a Sunday.

The next **Worship Committee Meeting** is Tuesday, December 6 at 7:30 p.m. This will be preceded by a meeting at 7:00 p.m. to plan the Winter Solstice service on December 18.

Committee members: Rev. Rachel Tedesco, Chair; Denise Haskins, McKayla Hoffman, Stefan Michaud, Tom St. Thomas, Tony Winters and Rev. Paul Sprecher.

Thank you to an anonymous donor and to Frank Yeatman who provided us with the beautiful new Wayside Pulpit. The generous First Parish donor paid for the materials and Frank constructed it. Frank and Quentin Jarvis installed it. Your generosity and time are both GREATLY APPRECIATED!

Sincerely, The Parish Committee and entire First Parish Bridgewater community.





LET'S *Grow* TOGETHER

PRESENCE

Learning how to be fully present in the moment means using your senses to focus on where you are right now.

Giving now your full attention.

Learning how to be present can help us become the people we want to be. Learning to be present can help us work through strong feelings. When things happen that might make us feel scared, angry or sad, knowing how to be present to work through your emotions can help you from feeling overwhelmed or lost in those feelings. Taking deep breaths to calm yourself is one way you might have already used in your life to be present.

IMPORTANT DATES

December 4 One Room Schoolhouse

December 11 RE Classes

December 18 Intergenerational Service

December 25 NO Church

Hello All,

The classes in Elementary and Middle School grades explored the topic of story — exploring their own story and sharing it with others.

The Youth Group continued with their Coming of Age journey.

Check out some photos!

Sara



In December we will explore these types of presence:

- Being present with meditation
- Presence with music



HOLIDAY CAROL-O-GRAMS

Spread holiday cheer through the gift of music.

Members of the choir will sing carols for your loved ones, over the phone or in person!

All proceeds go to the church.



Door Carols: Sunday, December 11th 4-7 PM~ \$25

Phone Carols: Friday, December 16th 6:30-9 PM ~\$10

Sign up at church or via email.

Thank you for your support of the music program at First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church!

'TIS THE SEASON TO GIVE...

For the 2016 holiday season, First Parish will be working with The Matthew Mission of the First Parish Church of Taunton. The Matthew Mission is the only organization that specifically serves teens over the age of 13 (up to 22). Each teen is referred to the Matthew Mission by a non-profit agency. Most are homeless, live in residential homes, or are in DCF custody.

The Adopt-a-Teen Gift Program is typically a gift card drive. First Parish of Taunton will provide us with a list of teenagers, their age, gender, and to what business they would like a gift card. As soon as I receive that list I will make it available to all of you.

Be on the look-out for a special email with more details. Thank you in advance for your generosity.



~AN ANNOUNCEMENT~
FIRST PARISH - BSU/Maxwell Library ARCHIVAL PROJECT
And AN INVITATION:

Please Attend a Reception at the Maxwell Library
Bridgewater State University
March 15, 2017, at 6:00 pm

To celebrate the collaboration with BSU to preserve First Parish history

As our 300th Anniversary approached attention was drawn to First Parish records that have been retained over the years. It soon became apparent, that except for a few items stored in a safe deposit box, most of what we had was stored under totally inadequate conditions. Worse still, while a lot of material survived, much more had been lost over the years.

Something had to be done to preserve our history for posterity. At first simple improvement in storage was considered, but we lacked the necessary space and funds to deal with temperature, humidity and safety concerns. Nor did we have a way to allow access to the materials for research.

We became aware that the Maxwell Library at Bridgewater State University had significant archival storage capability that might be available to us. A number of exploratory meetings were held with the library and a plan emerged.

In October 2016, the Parish Committee signed an agreement with the Maxwell Library to place our archival material on long term loan to their Archives and Special Collections. The library has agreed to store our material in a secure climate controlled environment, to catalogue the content, to cover the cost of any supplies needed for proper storage, and to allow access for research purposes. Most of our archival records have already been moved to Maxwell Library and the remainder will be by the end of the year. (Contact David Tedesco if you would like a copy of the loan agreement between First Parish and Maxwell Library.)

To celebrate the First Parish - BSU Archival Project, BSU will host a reception at the Maxwell Library on March 15th, starting at 6 PM. **All members and friends of First Parish are invited to attend this event which will be an important part of our 300th Anniversary celebration.**



It's almost here...

The Holly Day Artisan Faire!!!!

Friday, December 9, 6-8p
Saturday, December 10, 10a-2p



Needed: Soups, cookies, rummage (**no clothes**), books, greens, vendors (or handmade items to sell at the First Parish table)

Volunteers: to set up on Friday morn, clean up on Saturday afternoon, help with lunch on Saturday, or serve desserts on Friday eve, sell rummage or books both days. **Lots of help needed.**

Decorators: to help decorate the church - we'll be decorating after services Sunday, November 27 and Sunday December 4. Please plan to join us!

BOOKS: Please bring your copy paper boxes in - we still need a bunch more for storing the books!

RUMMAGE: We need LOTS of rummage this year! Please look around your house - closets, garages, basements, play rooms, etc. I challenge **everyone** to find **FIVE** items to donate to the rummage sale!

VOLUNTEERS - please contact Kat Gillespie @ flopsykitty@gmail.com to sign up!



GREEN SANCTUARY COMMITTEE's Green Tip of the Month

WANT YOUR HOME TO BECOME GREEN AND SAVE MONEY?

10 Ideas to Turn a Home into a Green Machine

1. Get a high-efficiency showerhead – saves up to 3,000 gallons per person, per year.
2. Recycle water in your bathroom – use devices that allow you to reuse sink water for flushing your toilet.
3. Compost – reduces trash production and provides rich compost for spring planting.
4. Buy green power from your utility – this shows utility executives and government officials we need more investment in renewable-energy projects.
5. Improve the efficiency of your existing hot-water heater – reduce the temperature of your water heater to 120 degrees and wrap it in a water-heater blanket.
6. Use high-efficiency outdoor lighting – replace floodlights with CFL or LED versions and install motion sensors.
7. Replace high-use indoor lights with compact fluorescents or LED's.
8. Run washing machines and dishwashers only when full (or adjusting the water setting) whenever possible.
9. Drive smarter – keep tires inflated, drive the speed limit, make sure filters are clean, step on gas & brakes carefully.
10. Avoid waste of fast food and shopping - bring your own plastic or metal boxes to your favorite take-out joint; use reusable shopping bags & reusable cups for coffee & soda.



Off the Common Coffeehouse

*Located in the Upper Parish Hall at First Parish Church
50 School Street, Bridgewater*



Saturday, December 3, 2016 at 7:30pm

Potluck dinner at 6:30pm

featuring

Atwater-Donnelly with The Vox Hunters

Coming Attractions

January 7 - The Kennedys with Quentin Callewaert

February 4 - Don White

March 4 - The Boxcar Lilies with Sparrow Blue

April 1 - Bill Staines

May 6 - The Heather Pierson Acoustic Trio with Emily Mure

Admission: \$15

*Enjoy our homemade
Refreshments*

Sign up for open mike!

SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE NEWS – Ideas and Actions from UU Mass Action

by Rev. Rachel Tedesco

The Safety Pin Movement:

The Safety Pin Movement began in the UK as a way for people to demonstrate solidarity with those in the immigrant community. It's a way to signal to anyone being threatened or who might feel threatened that you are a person they can turn to for support. The symbol has gained popularity in the U.S. in the days since Trump's election. We will have a small basket of safety pins available during coffee hour for volunteers to take to wear on their clothing.

We need to be prepared to protect those who are vulnerable among us, particularly someone being harassed in a public setting. The process is called de-escalation. There are two main strategies: (a) Sitting or standing alongside the person being harassed, talking to calm and comfort them – ignoring the harasser; or (b) talking directly to the harasser and defusing the situation. I would recommend the first as easier for beginners, requiring little training or practice.

Alternative (a): Sit or stand by the victim of harassment, start talking to them about a safe subject ("What movie have you seen lately?") and ignore the harasser. Ideally, the harasser will back off. If not, help the victim move away to a safer location and stay with them until it's okay to move on. The second alternative – confronting the harasser directly – is trickier. To get a better understanding of this strategy, I recommend seeing an on-line video by **Standing on the Side of Love** director Caitlin Breedlove. This 21 minute video gives a good introduction on the technique of de-escalation. Here's the link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hwVN1Qw2wZA>

Criminal Justice Reform:

Rally & Press Conference: Jobs Not Jails

When: Tuesday, Dec. 13 at 10 a.m.

Where: 140 Bowdoin St, Church of the New Jerusalem

(across from the State House, on the side)

The Governor, Speaker, Senate President, and Chief Justice will JOINTLY file a bill in mid-January on criminal justice reform. It will include all of the recommendations of a report the Council of State Governments (CSG) will publish on the criminal justice system in Massachusetts that will be released when their bill is filed.

- A. Good News – This elevates criminal justice reform to being a "must pass" bill situation given the 4 major state leaders are behind it... the Governor, Senate President, House Speaker and Chief Justice.
- B. BUT THE CHALLENGE: The bill they file will very likely NOT be comprehensive enough and will likely focus on the "back end" of the system on probation, parole, and some aspects of recidivism, but NOT on the "front end" of the system like repealing long mandatory minimum sentences on non-violent drug offenders, etc.

Read more about the Jobs Not Jails Priorities here:

<http://www.uumassaction.org/uuma/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/JNJ-Agenda-2017-2018.pdf>

To meet this challenge of getting a stronger bill passed than the one the 4 State Leaders will likely file, we are taking these actions that you can help with...

1. Attend the Rally/Press Conference on December 13 at 10 a.m. Jobs Not Jails will have a rally/press conference to call on the 4 state leaders to include the 6 proposals of the JNJ Coalition.
2. Contact your legislators and/or come to the JNJ Lobby Day in January – ask that they co-sponsor the omnibus criminal justice reform bill, The Justice Reinvestment Act, which will include the JNJ Priorities. (more details to come on this – the filing deadline is Jan. 20th).
3. In March 2017, the coalition will be organizing 6 or more major public action meetings in Boston, Brockton, New Bedford, Worcester, Springfield, Lynn and Lowell to show large scale public support for criminal justice reform and to engage legislators, mayors, sheriffs, police chiefs in standing with us.

The First Parish Social Justice Committee will keep you informed about future developments, particularly what's happening in Brockton and Boston.

SHARE THE PLATE FOR DECEMBER

For the month of December the Share the Plate charity is Matthew 24:50 the Homeless Support organization housed at the Taunton UU Church. This was first suggested by our Youth Group and we have been supporting it for two years. If you would also like to donate adult winter clothing for the clients, that would be appreciated as well. Watch for a special collection box.

MAINSRING HOUSE LUNCHES

Monday, December 5 at 8:45am, 50 MainSpring House lunches will be prepared in the LPH. Volunteers and donations are always welcome. Speak with Betty Gilson to offer help.

SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE (SJC) GIFT CARDS

Is there someone on your Christmas list to whom you would like to give a special gift, but you're not quite sure what is appropriate? At the Church Faire December 9 & 10 and the following Sundays up to Christmas the SJC will be selling gift cards to support the cost of MainSpring lunches. They may be purchased for a donation of \$10 or more. For total donations of \$50 and up there will be a small gift (while the supply lasts).

T"UU"RNING LEAVES BOOK CLUB

There is no book club meeting in December. The January 2017 selection is *MacBeth* by William Shakespeare. The meeting to discuss this will be Friday, January 27, location TBD.

CARING COMMITTEE MESSAGE

As the season of colds and other such ailments approach, please consider others before coming to church. If you have had a GI bug or cold with a fever less than 24 hours ago, please stay home and take care of yourself. There may be some people at First Parish with autoimmune diseases and we don't want to spread the problems.



GUEST AT YOUR TABLE

Every November First Parish participates in a Guest at Your Table program in conjunction with the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC). Guest at Your Table (GAYT) is UUSC's annual intergenerational program to raise support for and awareness about the work of the UUSC to advance human rights. This year's program theme is Defying Hate, based on the recent release of the Ken Burns documentary about UUSC founders Martha and Waitstill Sharp, *Defying the Nazis: The Sharps' War* (on PBS). The Sharps defied hate by helping Jews and dissidents escape Nazi Germany using brave, creative methods, many of which could have caused them to be imprisoned, tortured, or worse.

Join UUSC to protect human rights and promote social justice. For more than 70 years, UUSC has grown through the generosity of thousands of members who share our vision of a world free from oppression and injustice, where all can realize their full human rights. Membership benefits begin at the \$40 level, but we welcome gifts of any amount.

We will be passing out GAYT boxes and *Stories of Hope* at a service this month. Please take the box home, place it on your kitchen or dining room table, and put in offerings at mealtime. You can share the stories then as well. On the first Sunday of January, please return your donations, preferably as a check made out to First Parish with GAYT in the memo line.

GAYT boxes and *Stories of Hope* were passed out Nov. 20, but we were a few short. Any family units (of one or more) that did not receive then then, please pick one up on a future Sunday. Check with Betty Gilson if necessary.

Minister's Discretionary Fund -

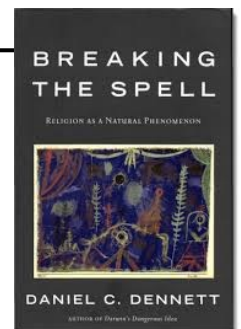
I just want to remind everyone that the offering at our Christmas Eve service on December 23rd will be received for the Minister's Discretionary Fund, which is available to help members of the congregation (and occasionally others) in times of financial need. Thanks to your generosity each year, it has been possible to meet needs as they have arisen.

I'm providing this reminder as well to anyone in the congregation who might be experiencing financial difficulties. Help is available. It's completely confidential. We maintain this fund so that, as we say in our covenant, we can "help one another." Whether you can offer help or you need help, this fund supports that mutual commitment.

- Rev. Paul

SCIENCE AND RELIGION

Please consider joining the Science & Religion Discussion Group. The next meeting is on Wednesday, December 21st in the First Parish office. The text that will be discussed is "Breaking the Spell" by Daniel Dennett. All are welcome.



HELPING THE HUNGRY

Our **SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE** COLLECTS NON-PERISHABLE FOOD ITEMS FOR THE LOCAL FOOD PANTRY. WE INVITE YOU TO HELP THE HUNGRY IN OUR LOCAL AREA BY BRINGING CANNED AND PACKAGED FOODS ON THE FIRST SUNDAY OF EACH MONTH. A BOX IS PLACED AT THE FRONT OF THE SANCTUARY, NEAR THE PIANO, TO RECEIVE THE ITEMS, WHICH THE SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE MEMBERS GATHER AND BRING TO OUR LOCAL FOOD PANTRY.



FEEDING THE HOMELESS



OUR CHURCH VOLUNTEERS PROVIDE LUNCHES FOR MAINSPRING HOUSE SHELTER FOR THE HOMELESS IN BROCKTON. WE GATHER ON THE **FIRST MONDAY*** OF EACH MONTH AT 9 A.M. IN THE LOWER PARISH HALL TO PREPARE AND WRAP 100 BAG LUNCHES, WHICH ARE THEN BROUGHT TO THE SHELTER BY ONE OR TWO OF OUR VOLUNTEERS.

YOU CAN HELP IN MANY WAYS, INCLUDING JOINING US AT THE ABOVE GATHERINGS, DONATING BAKED GOODS, OTHER FOOD ITEMS, AND PAPER GOODS AS NEEDED, TAKING HOME SOME OF THE FIXINGS AND PREPARING PARTS OF THE LUNCHES (SUCH AS TUNA OR EGG SALAD) AT HOME FOR THE VOLUNTEERS TO ASSEMBLE AT THE CHURCH, OR SIMPLY DONATING MONEY TOWARD THE COST OF THE LUNCHES, WHICH IS ABOUT \$100

PER MONTH FOR 100 LUNCHES.

PLEASE CONTACT BETTY GILSON (774-226-0942) FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, OR JUST DROP BY THAT MORNING TO HELP.

**THE LUNCHES ARE PREPARED ON MONDAYS TO BE EATEN ON THE FIRST TUESDAY OF EACH MONTH. IF THE FIRST TUESDAY FALLS ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE MONTH, THE LUNCHES ARE MADE ON THE FINAL MONDAY OF THE PREVIOUS MONTH.*

December 2016 CALENDAR

Thursday, December 1

7pm Social Justice Committee Meeting

Saturday, December 3

7:30pm Off the Common Coffeehouse Atwater-Donnelly with The Vox Hunters

Sunday, December 4

9am Choir Practice

10:30am Worship with Rev. Paul Sprecher, "Paying Attention"

11:45am Special Congregational Meeting, First Parish Sanctuary

Monday, December 5

8:45am MainSpring House lunches prep at FP

1pm Green Sanctuary Committee meeting at Janet Dye's

7:30pm Facilities Committee meeting

Tuesday, December 6

7:30pm Worship Committee Meeting

Wednesday, December 7

7pm Meditation Group, UPH

Thursday, December 8

7pm Growth Committee Meeting

Friday, December 9

6-8pm Holly Day Artisan Faire

Saturday, December 10

10am-2pm Holly Day Artisan Faire

Sunday, December 11

9am Choir rehearsal

10:30am Worship with Rev. Paul Sprecher, "Real Presents"

4-7pm Carol-grams

Tuesday, December 13

7pm RE Committee Meeting

Thursday, December 15

7:30pm Finance Committee Meeting

Friday, December 16

6:30-9pm Carol-grams

Sunday, December 18

9am Choir rehearsal

10:30am Worship with Worship & Religious Education Committees: "Solstice: Growing Our Light"

Wednesday, December 21

6:30pm Meditation Group, UPH

7pm Science and Religion Discussion Group at FP, office

Thursday, December 22

7pm Parish Committee meeting

Friday, December 23

7:30pm Christmas Eve Eve Candlelight Service with Rev. Paul Sprecher

Sunday, December 25

No worship this morning. Merry Christmas!

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