

*December
Worship
Theme:
Presence*



Sunday, December 4, 2016

Worship at 10:30am in the Meetinghouse

WAKE UP AND STAY WOKE

Rev. Catie Scudera, preaching

In early December each year, Buddhists across the world celebrate the enlightenment of their founding teacher. One of the Buddha's core messages was for his followers to "wake up" to the reality of cyclical suffering. How does Buddhist teaching intersect with the racial justice call to "stay woke" today? We'll also celebrate our newest First Parishioners during our New Member Recognition Ceremony.

Children attend first 15 minutes of service followed by preparation for Festival of Lights.

Junior Youth Group meets at 5 in the Parlor.

Senior Youth Group meets at 7 in the Parlor.

Sunday, December 11, 2016

Worship at 10:30am in the Meetinghouse

TOMORROW WILL WORRY ABOUT ITSELF

Rev. Catie Scudera preaching

During the season of Advent, Christians are asked to wait in anticipation for the birth of Jesus. For many of us, "waiting" causes anxiety and drags us out of the present moment. In times of transition, change, and expectation, how do we stay present and enjoy the blessings of our everyday living?

Children attend first 15 minutes of service followed by preparation for Festival of Lights.

No youth groups. (Senior Youth Group lock-in Friday, December 9.)

Sunday, December 18, 2016

Worship at 10:30am in the Meetinghouse

FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

The Children of First Parish

Celebrating its 21st year at First Parish, the annual Festival of Lights service takes a journey around the world, exploring fall and winter traditions centered on the theme of light and its power in a sometimes dark world. The service is presented by children from the nursery through 8th grade, and features traditions from Diwali, Los Posados, Loi Krathong, Santa Lucia Day, Hanukkah, Christmas and Kwanzaa with many updated costumes, some joyful singing by the Chil-

A Green Sanctuary and a Welcoming Congregation

dren's Choir and others, and a shared sense of a singular world full of love and promise. Participants are asked to arrive no later than 9:30. Worship begins at 10:30. Childcare is available for infants and toddlers.

**Annual Holiday Sing-a-long
4-5:30pm in Parish Hall**

Celebrate the season with an all-ages sing-along in Parish Hall. The event is hosted by the Music Committee. Kate Loftus-Campe will lead the songs with accompaniment by Jim Sargent. We'll provide lyrics and take requests. There will be hot tea & cocoa as well as cookies to enjoy as we sing our favorite carols. Take a break from the hustle and bustle to enjoy cheery songs with family and friends.

Junior Youth Group meets at 5pm in the Parlor.

Senior Youth Group meets at 7pm in the Parlor.

**Christmas Eve Services
Saturday, December 24, 2016**

**5:30pm and 7:30pm in the Meetinghouse
PRESENT MOMENT, WONDERFUL MOMENT
Rev. Catie Scudera, presiding**

Come to First Parish to celebrate Christmas Eve! We'll continue to consider our monthly theme of "presence" as part of our reflection on the Christmas story. The 5:30 service will feature our young people's musical groups, the UU Ringers and SongSquad, and at the 7:30 service our First Parish Choir and Eliot Jekowsky will perform. Both services will conclude with the traditional candlelit singing of *Silent Night*.

Sunday, December 25, 2016

**Worship at 10:30am in the Meetinghouse
LESSONS AND CAROLS
Led by lay leaders**

Celebrate Christmas morning with your First Parish family! Lay leaders will lead the gathered congregation in story and song. If you have a favorite Christmas tale or "lesson" that you'd like to share, please be in touch with Rev. Catie or any member of the Worship Committee to get "signed up" to be one of our storytellers.

No childcare.

No youth groups.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Reminder about Theme-Based Ministry Trial

2016-17 is the second year of a 2-year trial of "themed ministry". The approach weaves together worship, education, small group ministry, spiritual practices and other aspects of community life around common monthly themes. Themed church, we hope, will deepen our experience together and will illuminate the shared values in our faith tradition. Themes for the year include:

- December's theme will be *Presence*
- January's theme will be *Spiritual Growth & Lifelong Learning*

More information about theme-based ministry can be found at <http://www.uua.org/ga/past/2014/worship>, <http://themedbasedministry.org>, and <http://uuneedham.org/theme-based-ministry/>. If you have questions or feedback on this approach, please don't hesitate to share them with Reverend Catie or a member of the Worship Committee.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

**Rev. Catie's Column
Simple Gifts**

As we approach the winter holidays, there are a lot of classic songs we expect to hear and sing — and likely will! — to celebrate the season: *Silent Night*, *Auld Lang Syne*, *Joy to the World*, *I Have A Little Dreidel*, and more. We hope to hear our favorites on the radio, during December worship services, and especially at Festival of Lights. But, there's one song I rarely here during the holidays: *the old Shaker tune, Simple Gifts*.



*'Tis a gift to be simple, 'tis a gift to be free
'Tis a gift to come down where we ought to be,
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,
'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.*

I love the phrasing of these lyrics — simplicity is not a demand or pronouncement, but it's a gift in and of itself. In simplicity, we find freedom and "the place just right." I'm sure I'm not the only person who feels unburdened after a good spring-cleaning of clothes and other material goods that just aren't needed around the house anymore — and perhaps, I realize in retrospect, they never were. But, replacing *Santa Claus is Coming to Town* with *Simple Gifts* might not be so easy. Gift-exchanging at the holidays is one of the most common ways people express and receive care and affection for one another. What does "the gift of simplicity" mean for us in the holiday season, when there's so much cultural — and, sometimes, familial — pressure to spend big money on many, many presents? How instead could we show our loved ones how much we love them this season?

If we see that we're already burdened with too much stuff, we can always give the gift of a donation to a cause we know is special to our loved one's heart. I remember some years ago, a friend of ours had a running joke of having a pet bat he could keep in his pocket (in case he needed to make a quick getaway from an unpleasant situation — *bat-pet, deploy!*). So, for his birthday that year, we donated in his name to a bat sanctuary (and he even got a pocket-sized bat stuffed animal as a "thank you"). He loved it! There are many worthy non-profit organizations that rely on holiday donations to keep their good work going. We know our loved ones well, so we can find organizations that speak to their interests and values. Could we make donations to a Unitarian Universalist organization in a family member's name? Fulfill some "wish list" items at the local shelter for the animal-lover in our life? Support an eco-justice organization for our anti-pipeline friend?

Another option is that instead of spending money on material gifts, we can offer our loved ones our presence — and perhaps a special experience. For example, in my little family, it might mean that instead of getting our dog a \$100+ orthopedic bed that our one-year-old-puppy definitely doesn't need, we fill her Christmas day with what she really wants: attention and playtime from her "parents"! We've been buying "experiential gifts" for my parents for years, funding family trips to the movies or favorite museums down in D.C. And, this year, there's the rare op-

portunity to spend Christmas morning with the First Parish community when one of our talented musicians, Gail Lehman, and other lay members of the congregation will be opening our doors for a Lessons & Carols worship service. Perhaps your gift will be a story you know your church family will love!

I hope all the folks affiliated with First Parish will take "simple gifts" under consideration this holiday season, and share on our online blog or with friends in person their ideas for remembering the "reason for the season": sacred stories of families and communities gathering together to celebrate special moments and the hope for a better tomorrow. Through simplicity, I pray that indeed we each find ourselves "in the valley of love and delight" this December.

• *Rev. Catie*

To My Beloved Congregation

As we celebrated in worship on Sunday, November 6th, we promote and vote for our Unitarian Universalist values: respecting the inherent worth and dig-



nity of every person; striving for personal and communal spiritual growth; acknowledging the interdependent web of all existence; heeding the words and deeds of prophets who challenge us to confront evil; and, responding to Divine love by loving our neighbors as ourselves. Last month, we awoke in a country that has elected a man to the presidency who does not embody these ideals. Perhaps like me, many of you are confused, heartbroken, and angry at the results of the election.

As I wrote on my [Facebook page](#) that morning,

"I want you to know that I love you — I know you love each other — and the Spirit of Life and Love remains with us, always. I encourage all of you to take care of yourselves this week: engaging with your spiritual practices, eating right and getting exercise, spending time with family and friends. Please be in touch with me or any member of our Pastoral Care team if you want to talk or to just share a caring quiet moment."

No matter what is coming next, as a faith commu-

nity, we will uphold our covenant with one another and out in the world. We will protect ourselves, our children and youth, and our neighbors from bigotry and violence while purging discrimination from our country; we will refuse to lower our principles of what is politically and theologically just and compassionate; we will act in faith that climate justice can be achieved in our lifetime. We will continue to bend the moral arc of the universe toward justice, each and every day."

Remember that the Pastoral Care team and I are here for you, as well as your other friends at First Parish. Please remember to come to worship to join with your beloved community in prayer and song. From our RE staff, I also recommend to everyone who has children at home to look at the resources being provided to teachers like from [Teaching Tolerance](#) and the [Huffington Post](#). These resources may even be of help to the adults in your household.

Again, take care of yourselves and your loved ones. You are in my heart and prayers.

- *Rev. Catie*

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Listening Sessions with the Making Room Task Force

How can we expand the capacity of the sanctuary? What are the advantages and disadvantages of growing our membership in the first place? The Making Room Task Force is holding three listening sessions in early December to hear your opinions on various strategies. We will be meeting on Sunday December 4 at 12:30pm in the sanctuary, Wednesday December 7 at 4pm in the parlor, and Sunday December 11 at 9:30am in the parlor. Come tell us what options you find palatable and which ones are completely unacceptable.

The members of the Making Room Task Force are Amy Brown (RE), Ross Donald (Music), Eliot Jekowski (Parish), Jim Leffingwell (Worship), Kay Taylor (Membership), and Darren Zinner (Ministry).

For more background on this issue, read the blog posts by Darren Zinner and Eliot Jekovsky on pp 8-9.

Friendly Feasts are Back

The Friendly Feasts will return in January and happen through June, as **Pot Luck** dinners! Meet new people and greet old friends. There is an opportunity for you to host if you wish. Sign-up sheets will be available Sundays through December. Contact Helen Lane helenblane@gmail.com, or Lyn Jekowsky lynjekowsky@comcast.net for more info.

Upcoming Grief and Loss Support Group

Loss is a universally shared aspect of our lives. Research tells us that the support of others can lighten the burden of grief when we've suffered the loss of a loved one, a job, a relationship, or one's health, as examples. On Sunday, December 11, the Pastoral Care Team is launching a group for those seeking mutual support in their loss. The group facilitator is Andrea Goldberg, licensed social worker and First Parish member, who brings both professional and personal perspective to this topic. Join us after church in the Kiel Room, classroom 3, downstairs from 12 - 1:30. RSVP to janelklein1927@gmail.com if you plan to come, or just join us on December 11.

Helpers needed for Lay-Led Christmas Day Service

This year Christmas Eve falls on a Saturday, and then Christmas Day is on a Sunday. While staff will be leading two Christmas Eve services as they always do, Christmas Day will feature a more informal service, with music led by church member Gail Lehman. If you would be interested in helping out or you have recommendations for readings, please reach out to Rev. Catie at minister@uuneedham.org.

Help Decorate First Parish with Your Photos

One of the tasks of the Interior Arrangement Committee is to display interesting, engaging artifacts and pictures in the church. To showcase the vibrant life at First Parish, we would like to display rotating photos that feature the many activities that people are involved in. If you are involved in such an event, please email us your photos at maryann.oldfield@gmail.com or amycicala293@gmail.com. We will be enlarging and putting up changing photos in the hallway outside Parish Hall. If you don't want to have your photo shown, please let us know.

Update on Our Hymnal Project

Our goal has been reached with many thanks to everyone who purchased a gray or teal hymnal. A special thank you to the Memorial Fund Committee for a generous donation to help us achieve this goal. The books have been ordered. Once they arrive at the church the process of getting the chalice bookplates prepared with each dedication will begin. As soon as possible, we will be filling the empty book racks in the Sanctuary. Again, thank you to all who have participated.

~ Jessie Bowen, Music Committee Chair

Calling all Musicians!

We need your help!

Can you play an instrument or lead a song?

If you can help out at a Children's Worship please contact Jen Duhamel at reassistant.uuneedham@gmail.com.

FIRST PARISH PROGRAMMING

Interfaith World AIDS Day Event

**Thursday, December 1st at 6-8:30 pm
at the Congregational Church of Needham**

Join Rev. Catie, Pastor Daryn Stylianopoulos from First Baptist, and Rev. Jim Mitulski from the Congregational Church for a World AIDS Day event. The event will begin with a showing of the film *Wilhemina's War*, and then will conclude with a time of worship amidst panels from the [AIDS Memorial Quilt](#). For more information, visit the Congregational Church's [facebook page](#).

Small Group Ministry Potluck—SAVE THE DATE!

On Friday, December 2nd The Parish is hosting a potluck dinner for all of our members currently participating in our Small Group Ministry Program and for those who are considering joining or rejoining a group in January. More specific details will follow, but here are the basics for now:

Date: Friday December 2nd 2016

Time: 6:45- 8:30pm

Location: Parish Hall

If you are not currently in a group, contact Helen-blane@gmail.com by November 30th to confirm your attendance.

Homegrown Presents A Celtic Christmas with Robbie O'Connell and Rose Clancy Saturday, December 3, 8pm; doors open at 7:30

Robbie O'Connell returns to the Homegrown stage, where his Christmas season shows have been hugely popular for years. This year he's joined by accomplished fiddler, mandolinist and banjoist **Rose Clancy**. Doors open at 7:30. Tickets and details available online at uuneedham.org/homegrown-coffeehouse. Contact Jim Sargent to volunteer.



Support Happy Holidays at the Pathways Shelter Family

December 4th, 11:30-12:30 pm (Parish Hall)

Remember to take a mitten from the Mitten Tree to buy a gift for kids and parents staying at Pathways Family Shelter. **Gifts are due back at First Parish on December 11th.** Speak with Amy Gilmore with any questions.

Making Room Task Force Listening Session Sunday, Dec. 4 at 12:30pm in the Meetinghouse

Details page 4.

Holiday Helper Mini Auction -- FINAL DAY this Sunday 12/4!!

Come Bid at Social Hour! The silent auction closes at 12:00 this Sunday (depending on the timing of the service). Come bid and take home some wonderful holiday goodies, great gifts, holiday help or sign up for a fun social event. Checkout will be in the parlor and all items will be ready to take home. Cash, checks and credit cards accepted. All proceeds go to support programs at First Parish. Thank you so much for your support!

Soup Sunday December 4

It's the first Sunday so it must be Soup Sunday! Our Senior Youth Group is back at it again, cooking up a

storm to help raise money for their service trip and other Social Justice missions! Please remember to bring cash so that you can enjoy some delicious soup for lunch or dinner. It makes a PERFECT Football watching meal.

Caregivers' Support Group

The Caregivers' Support Group will meet in December, on Sundays, December 4th and 18th, at 12 pm following social hour, downstairs in the Youth Room. If you are caring for a loved one, from nearby or afar, please come to a meeting, we welcome you. Come to listen or to share, in a safe and supportive atmosphere.

Our meetings are confidential.

Facilitator: Lyn Jekowsky lynjekowsky@comcast.net

Worship at North Hill

Wednesday, December 7th, 10:00-11:00 am
Event Center, 4th Floor of Pines Edge at North Hill

North Hill residents and friends are invited to an intimate Unitarian Universalist worship service led by Rev. Catie. Please note the new start time of 10:00 am. All are welcome!

Making Room Task Force Listening Session

Wednesday, Dec. 7 at 12:30pm in the Parlor
 Details page 4.

Meditation Group

The Meditation Group will meet Wednesday evenings in December, the 7th, 14th, 21th and 28th, from 7:30 to 8:30 in the Youth Room. We welcome all to an informal hour of mindfulness, of calm, in your busy week. Contact Lyn Jekowsky or Lynne Rachlis for more information.

Making Room Task Force Listening Session

Sunday, Dec. 11 at 9:30am in the Parlor
 Details page 4.

Green Congregation Committee

Sunday, Dec. 11 at noon in the Parlor

Grief and Loss Support Group

Sunday, December 11, 12-1:30pm,
in the Kiel Room, classroom 3

Details page 4. RSVP to janetklein1927@gmail.com if you plan to come, or just join us on December 11.

Sunday Night Book Group

Holiday Celebration

The next meeting will be **December 11** at the home of Cathy Livingston, 27 Warren St., 7:30pm. The book for discussion is *My Brilliant Friend* by Elena Ferrante. Please send book suggestions for the next 6-8 months to Muriel Gehman by Dec. 5. Please recommend only books you have read. Everyone is welcome.

Positively Aging Annual Holiday Party

Tuesday December 13 at 4pm in the parlor

Positively Aging will have its annual Holiday Party Tuesday December 13 at 4pm in the parlor. We'll have our usual unplanned potluck, and drinks will be provided.

In the past, we have brought childrens' books to give to the Home for Little Wanderers. This year, we have a special opportunity to contribute books. Jackie Shepherd, a member of our group, is volunteering at the Nathan Hale Elementary School in Roxbury, one of the poorest parts of Boston. Jackie and her daughter discovered a library with a few books, all in boxes, because there was no librarian. They organized the library and began reading to the children. As the teachers got to know them, they talked with them about lacking books in their classrooms that would have stories about children who looked like them or had similar experiences. Teachers were already using their own money to buy classroom supplies. So Jackie talked with us about the possibility of our either buying some of the books that the teachers wanted or giving her some money so she could buy them.

At our meeting, Jackie is going to tell us about the school and some of the children she's working with. She has also provided us with a list of books that teachers need. We are asking the Positively Aging folks to either buy a book that is needed by the teachers or come with whatever money you think you would like to give, so that Jackie can buy books.

For more information, see a member of the Positively Aging Planning Team: Helen Lane, Phyllis Beck, Fred Kresse or Kay Taylor. If you feel you cannot contribute to buy books, please come to the meeting anyway. We hope to see all of you.

The Big Questions Forum

Tuesday, December 13 in the Parlor

Join Tad Staley, Tony Cicala, Fred Kresse and other fellow First Parishioners for some in-depth exploration of some of life's most vexing questions. Watch the *Bell Notes* and website for more info on this month's topic.

Join Rev. Catie and the Lunch Bunch

Wednesday, December 14th, 12:30 pm (Parish Hall)

Rev. Catie is hosting members and friends of First Parish for a monthly brown-bag lunch date. In the past, this gathering has been primarily for "elders and friends" of First Parish, but the regular attendees have requested for the lunch to be advertised as open to people of all ages! Catie will provide a sweet treat for dessert. RSVP to Catie and Buffy Duhig, particularly if you need assistance with a ride to the church.

Parish Committee

Wednesday, December 14, at 7pm in the Parlor.

Social Action Committee

Wednesday, December 14, 7pm in the Youth Room

Bellman Target Date

The target date for submitting items to the **January *Bellman*** is Sunday, December 18.

ALSO OF INTEREST

Countering Islamophobia:

Organizing as a Unified Force

December 3, 2016; Simmons College

Presenters: Hayat Imam, Dorchester People for Peace, Kanwal Haq, Jetpac Inc.

The appalling surge of hate crimes since the Trump win requires that we give a strong, coordinated response. We must commit to "power up" in whatever field we find ourselves, so we can become a collective force to reckon with. Our goal is that this workshop will be a crucible for forging ideas and creative actions against all forms of violence and racism, including Islamophobia. We have found that changing attitudes is not always enough, we need to think of ways to make institutional changes. We'll focus on two approaches for impacting fundamental institutions in our society: increasing civic engagement, and educating ourselves to take power in local government; and building a solid network of advocates and allies to tackle racism, wars that create refugees and suffering, and the rights of vulnerable communities, using settings such as Schools and City Councils.

We'll encourage participatory dialogue and an interactive process. Those of us most affected can lead the way, but those of us who are allies are crucial for support and help with organizing. We win if we all win!

Hayat Imam gave a Needham Lyceum presentation last year that was well-received. This workshop is part of a post-election conference organized by Mass Peace Action. For more info, go to <http://masspeaceaction.org/event/the-next-four-years/>.

Christmas Vespers at Wellesley College

Sunday, December 4 at 7:30pm in Houghton Chapel

A long-standing Wellesley tradition, Christmas Vespers heralds the arrival of the holiday season in the beautiful setting of Houghton Chapel. The evening features an evening of candlelight, music, readings and carols with the Wellesley Choir and Chamber Singers conducted by Lisa Graham and organist James David Christie. This event is free and open to the public. We are wheelchair accessible.

FROM THE FIRST PARISH BLOG

Why focus on growth now?

Can't we just 'make do' for a while?

Notes from the "Making Room" Task Force

By Darren Zinner, November 30, 2016

In a November 18 blog post (see page 9), Eliot Jekowsky outlined general reasons for membership growth. He discussed the benefits of actively growing: expanding our diversity, becoming a sanctuary for others, and adding fresh energy and resources to our membership. This blog is focused on the question, "Why now?" The reasons listed above are relevant at all times and for any sized church. What is so special about this moment that we have formed a task force to examine the size of our sanctuary?

The answer is both functional and emotional. Functionally, we are full. Sunday services regularly sees an average of 140 attendees, including children and their teachers, and consistently draws more than 180. A rule of thumb in ministry is that a church feels full when it hits 80% of its comfortable seating capacity. After this point, new visitors and "on the fence" congregants start to decide that there isn't really room for them to come to services. While no one likely gets up and leaves in the middle of the service because of space issues, newcomers feel awkward making strangers move to accommodate them.

The official seating capacity in the sanctuary is 220, but that assumes we sit five across in each section of the pews. The comfortable seating capacity is closer to 180 people, and 80% of that drops us to around 140 – precisely the average attendance over the last three years. Since Rev. Cate joined us, we have increased our membership by 10-15 new members per year, and many of these are new families with children. In short, we have very limited room to grow, and the numbers suggest that we may even be limiting our future growth opportunities.

But emotionally, this is a unique time to consider how we should make more room for newcomers. This election outcome has taken many, including me, by surprise. I think I speak for most of us when I share my disappointment that so many in our country would vote for someone with essentially anti-UU ideals. In these coming years, we must dedicate ourselves to being an ally for each other and also our neighbors



and groups across this country. This outcome will make some of us feel unsafe and we must dedicate ourselves to create a sanctuary for all who seek it. Now more than ever, we must continue to support the voices of those that are most vulnerable.

The "Making Room" task force wants to start a conversation about growth. We want to talk about why we should grow and discuss potential strategies for us to consider to make more room. All these choices contain concerning issues. For instance, we could go to two services, replace pews with chairs/theater seating, expand the building, remove the children from starting services in the sanctuary, have ushers aggressively squeeze people into pews, or simulcast the service into Parish Hall in a "worship cafe" style service. Many of these options reflect how we see ourselves as a congregation. For instance, there is more room after the kids leave, but we have made being "multigenerational" part of our identity over the last decade.

In addition to speaking to relevant committees, the Making Room Task Force is hosting three listening sessions to hear everyone's opinions on various strategies. We hope to conclude by late winter, so any recommendation can be part of our budget planning for next year. We will be meeting on Sunday December 4 at 12:30pm in the sanctuary, Wednesday December 7 at 4pm in the parlor, and Sunday December 11 at 9:30am in the parlor. We hope to see you there.

Chalice Lighting from November 27

This lovely and timely poem is reprinted at the suggestion of Kathi Cotte and with permission of the author, who is the minister at First Unitarian Church of Albuquerque.

Invocation

by Angela Herrera

Don't leave your broken heart at the door,
 Bring it to the altar of life.
 Don't leave your anger behind:
 it has high standards
 and the world needs vision.
 Bring them with you,
 and your joy, and your passion.
 Bring your loving
 and your courage
 and your conviction.
 Bring your need for healing
 and your power to heal.
 There is work to do
 and you have all that you need to do it
 right here in this room.

Annual Nature Balance

By Dave Knapton, November 20, 2016

A summer night from my yard
 when checking clouds for rain,
 I saw something special,
 bringing me a lift of hope.

Near an elm tree top,
 a small, soft blinking light
 moving through the darkness.
 First Firefly of summer.

I called my friend to share
 a very welcome sight.
 "Everything's all right." But --
 every year, fewer Fireflies.

Flickering yards and fields,
 fond memories of Firefly shows.
 Yet, every year more habitat lost and
 toxins encroach nearly everywhere.

If greed with lust conquer reason,
 and Fireflies dwindle to the last,
 life-friendly Earth may be turning
 barren; just a cipher entry, in a
 far, far away alien database.

Should First Parish Keep Growing?**Notes from the "Making Room" Task Force**By [Eliot Jekowsky](#), November 18, 2016

The Making Room Task Force is charged with starting a conversation about growth and space. As the representative from Parish Committee on this Task Force, I think it is important to start the conversation by discussing what growth means.

Before we called our new minister, we conducted a congregational survey in 2013. At that time, over 80% of congregants stated they were in favor of growing our membership. Additionally, over the last year, the Parish Committee started a strategic planning process, hosting several listening sessions that culminated in four strategic goals. These goals were presented at the 2016 Annual Meeting and included Growth, Financial Stability, Social Justice, and Multi-generational Programming.

To date, the size of our sanctuary has limited us to passive growth, that is, only responding to interested members as they walk in the door. But from our conversations and survey responses from existing parishioners, we have identified several reasons to pursue growth more actively.

1. Diversity: We live in a multicultural world. We would like to bring in those who are not fully represented in our church community, including young adults, people of diverse races and ethnic backgrounds, and other voices and perspectives.
2. Sanctuary: We have the opportunity to create a spiritual home for many of our neighbors who haven't found one. In this age of conflict and confusion, we should open our doors to offer a safe space for vulnerable groups, as well as new families eager to raise their children in a welcoming community.
3. Additional Energy, Ideas and Resources: Additional members bring their time, passions, and financial resources that help maintain and grow the mission of our church. Additional pledge units provide us with greater financial stability. New members can become our RE teachers, serve on our committees, and bolster our many social action activities. We should embrace

growth as a concept, encouraging us to be receptive to the changing structure of our world. New members will help prevent us from becoming stagnant and simply maintaining a comfortable status quo. Growth allows us to adopt new methods and perspectives that will guide us toward the future.

Of course, growth is not a universal good. Many of us are uncomfortable with change. As we become larger, we recognize that folks will worry about diluting the personal connections among congregants. Growth will require change, which could range from reconfiguring the physical space of our building to adding an additional church service. We need to be inclusive and strategic about how we think about growth, which brings us to the formation of the Making Room Task Force.

In the next blog, we will address why we need to act now, rather than making do for a while.

Note: The Making Room Task Force will be hosting listening sessions on Sunday December 4 at 12:30pm in the sanctuary, Wednesday December 7 at 4pm in the parlor, and Sunday December 11 at 9:30am in the parlor. See page 4 for more info.

End-of-year Giving Basics

By Susanna Whitman, November 15, 2016

What was that pledge letter I got in October all about?

In February each year the Stewardship Committee opens the pledge campaign to fund next year's First Parish budget. Each household that is active within First Parish is asked to commit—or pledge—an amount that is generous to give in the coming year. Pledging is the commitment to give. For example, in February 2017 we will be committing to give money for the church year July 1, 2017 – June 30, 2018. First Parish asks that you let us know what you plan to give so that we can plan the budget and know what programs we can make real. The budget is then brought for the congregation's approval at the annual meeting in May, based on what is pledged to be given in the coming year.

Paying the pledge is giving the money that you pledged to give.

The pledge is paid during the year that it is meant to fund, for example, starting to pay or paying in full, on July 1st and afterward. Some folks pay as they can, some make a single pledge payment, and many pay monthly. Our parish administrator Susanna Whitman sends a pledge statement three times a year to let everyone know how much they have left to pay on their pledge commitment, along with a letter from Erik Bailey our Treasurer, describing payment and statement details.

Please direct questions about payment to Susanna in the office or about the pledge campaign to the Budget Drive Committee. Thank you for your generosity!

Methods of Payment for Your Pledge

You can pay your pledge or give a donation to First Parish either by check or by credit card online. Both methods can be scheduled ahead, to save time each month. You can direct your bank to mail First Parish a check each month to pay your pledge, or you can schedule payments in Realm to automatically pay on a certain date each month. For online payments, please carefully select the fund from the drop-down menu as the office cannot correct funds selected in error. If automatic payments don't suit your needs, you can make online payments manually, through the donate button on the website <http://uneedham.org/> or write a check at your convenience. Please call Susanna Whitman, Parish Administrator in the office if you have questions (781) 444-0823. Thanks for the many ways in which you sustain our vibrant community at First Parish.

Year End Donations

We know that many people make donations at year end for tax purposes. If you put a check in the collection plate please be sure to note if it is a payment on your pledge. Checks received in the plate will be credited on the date of the check. If you mail a donation, the gift date is credited as the postmark so please mail them before the end of the calendar year. Many thanks for your generosity.

Checks are payable to: First Parish in Needham. Please always note on your check in the memo line which fund you are paying into, such as 16-17 pledge, plate collection, hymnals, memorial donation, music endowment, etc.

First Parish in Needham, Unitarian Universalist

Find the most complete and up-to-date information about worship, events, and programs at First Parish on our website, www.uuneedham.org.

Minister: Rev. Catie Scudera; 781-514-5464; Minister@uuneedham.org

Director of Lifespan Religious Education: Mark LaPointe; 781-444-0823; dre@uuneedham.org

Lifespan Religious Education Assistant: Jennifer Duhamel; 781-444-0823; reassistant@gmail.com

Youth Programs Coordinator: Kate Campe, youth@uuneedham.org

Music Director: Irina Georgieva; 585-319-1196; Music@uuneedham.com

Asst Music Director for Youth & Intergenerational Programs: Kate Campe, Kidsmusic@uuneedham.com

Administrator: Susanna Whitman; 781-444-0823; office@uuneedham.org

The Parish Committee: Gail Hedges (President), Beth Sargent, (Vice President), Erik Bailey (Treasurer), Marguerite Robbins (Clerk),
Members-at-large: Eliot Jekowsky, Geoff Austrian, Katie Edwards, Kristen Neff, Joan Mecsas, Suzanne Smart.

Bellman Information: The deadline for the **January Bellman** will be **Sunday, December 18**. Please send all website, *Bellman* and *Bell Note* items to bellman@uuneedham.org.

This issue compiled, edited and produced by David Mecsas.

To receive **The Bellman** call or email Susanna Whitman at 781-444-0823 or office@uuneedham.org.