

THE FOCALPOINT

FIRST PARISH ^{IN} LEXINGTON
UNITARIAN  UNIVERSALIST

July 2017

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Please stay tuned to the Weekly Update for news throughout the summer. The next Focalpoint will be published at the end of August with information about Ingathering and other September events.

Happy Summer!

July 2, Marianne DiBlasi
"Garden of Hope"



Gardens are often used as metaphors for a peaceful sanctuary; where all is good and right and beautiful – a garden of paradise. For many Christians, salvation is achieved by accepting Jesus as their Lord and Savior, and Heaven is their eternal garden of paradise. What do Unitarians and Universalists say about salvation? What is our garden of paradise?

July 9, Bethany Russell-Lowe
"What's in a Name?"



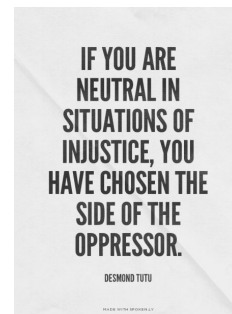
"Please, call me by my true names," Vietnamese Buddhist monk and peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh writes. What is a "true" name? How is it different from a plain ol' name? What are the true names we use for That Which is Greater Than Ourselves? And why does any of this matter, anyway? Come explore and indulge in these questions!

July 16, Lisa Perry-Wood
"Waking Up to Our True Selves"



What would it mean to be truly present in all of our lived experience? What moments are we missing, caught up in our emotions, distracted by events, worldly and personal. We'll explore practices to stay present and care for ourselves, through meditation, centering prayer, and deep listening.

July 23, Lisa Perry-Wood
"Staying Present to Injustice: Lessons from a Prison Ministry"



Many of us have been witnessing and acting to end unjust incarceration; Lisa has spent the last four years as a prison mentor. How does what we've learned in this work move us into an even deeper exploration of all the injustices in our world?

July 30, Lisa Perry-Wood
"Presence for Death and Dying: Awake and Aware to the End of Life"



Drawing from the work of Stephen and Ondrea Levine, the Tibetans, and Ram Dass, we'll look at ways to face death and dying with grace and gratitude. And we will consider: How differently would we live our lives if we weren't afraid to die?

Upcoming services:

- August 6th—Lisa Perry-Wood
- August 13th—Rev. Anne Mason
- August 20th—Joe Foster
- August 27th—Lisa Perry-Wood
- September 3rd—Mandy Beal



Reprinted from the Weekly Update:

In this my second post as your new chair of the Board (I'll never do one this long again!), I want to recap for you just one portion of last week's Board meeting—to reveal both a consequential decision made that night and also how the Board reached that decision. Both may tell something about the directions this new Board is likely to take, directions that, certainly at this early stage, you may want to encourage or discourage by communicating with us.

First, some background. As you may already know, the FUSE program, which occupies a large portion of our space during the week, is suddenly moving to new quarters, causing, among other consequences, a deficit of \$26K in the budget for next year. The resulting substantial hole in our operating budget will be difficult either to fill or to work around. With that in mind, let me try to capture briefly the Board's discussion of this particular problem and its potential meaning for the upcoming year.

We began by considering this question/concern: How should we fill the hole in the budget left by the FUSE program?

Fortunately for our discussion, some members of the Board have already been in sub-groups examining how we could optimize our space and the revenue we might derive from it. Briefly, they revealed that we are amateurs at being landlords: we have a maze of historical relationships with various tenants (for-profit and not-for-profit) that are not

optimal either for revenue or for mission. Conversations among that group and with professionals in the congregation confirmed that we would have to develop significant new managerial capacity to become an effective commercial landlord, including the capacity to recruit and manage new tenants.

Our discussion moved to the relative costs and benefits of renting our space to outside organizations or companies of any kind. Fundamentally, we wrestled with this question: is trying to increase rental income an optimal use of our energy and our resources?

The primary *benefit* of renting our building is clear: the \$26K from FUSE is a lot of money to plug into a budget that is already too thin.

We also discussed the *costs* of capturing that income. Acting as landlords for unrelated businesses requires considerable management, maintenance, cleaning, conflict resolution (a lot of that this year), wear and tear, negotiating to handle special events, etc. etc. And in this case, there would be the additional costs (in time and energy) of marketing, recruiting, contracting, adapting space, etc., for a new and appropriate tenant, in short order.

Further, our discussion revealed the costs of lost opportunities. Committing our space to other organizations (especially unrelated businesses) for three to five years reduces our own options for enlarging the congregation,

increasing its visibility and impact, expanding its own programs and services to the community, incubating new partnerships with social justice organizations, etc. etc.—all food for thought and good discussion.

At the outset of the meeting, probably most Board members (including me) expected that we would immediately try to find a new tenant. By the end of the meeting, however, we reached a different conclusion. We decided to pause, to use this next six months to examine, experiment, and reflect on how we can best use our precious space (and other resources as well) to serve our mission. During the meeting, our ministerial staff suggested some ideas they desperately want to try with our space, experiments designed to expand our reach in religious education, music, and ministry. You may have other ideas, and we look forward to hearing them. We also want to pause long enough to revamp the way we seek and manage rental income in order to optimize our returns on that as well. This seems like a good time to reconsider and experiment.

I think we reached that conclusion for several reasons. First, we each came to feel that we could absorb the financial loss for this year (not easily, but nonetheless) to invest in our future. Careful reports from the finance committee revealed an upward trend: the annual canvass exceeded expectations, the Mayfair haul was higher than ever, the capital campaign is way over our original goal already. And we have an endowment to back us up. We can sustain a deficit for this year.

Second, earlier discussion about the capital campaign had focused us on the future. With the early signs of success for the first phase of the campaign, we are sure that our building will be safe, strengthened, and even beautiful again. For phase two, we can begin to focus on how to best use, adapt, configure, or modify all of our resources, including the building, in order to expand our congregation, our ministry, and our mission here on the green.

Third, the members of the Board recognize and share the energy and optimism of our congregation and the confidence we have in our ministry and staff. We want to reflect and amplify that optimism. We want to invest in our future.

We hope we made the right decision, and we hope that you will tell us what you think.

In fellowship,

David Rose

Board Chair



First Parish Celebrates the 325th Year of the Congregation

We've been together for 325 years! First Parish is planning a celebration on Sunday afternoon December 3, for the congregation and for the wider Lexington community, to celebrate this occasion. The event will feature a dramatic presentation by Don Cohen of the creation of the church body and of our covenant. It may also include period music, bell-ringing, a procession, our first Communion tankards, and a 17th-century (modified!) lunch. Please put this event on your calendar.

The month of November will provide other opportunities to celebrate the existence of the congregation. Programs being considered are art and document exhibits featuring FP history; a Thursday evening adult education series on UU history; related projects for children and youth; the creation of a model of our first church building (even as we begin congregation-wide discussion of our capital campaign for a building that meets our developing needs); and outside speakers.

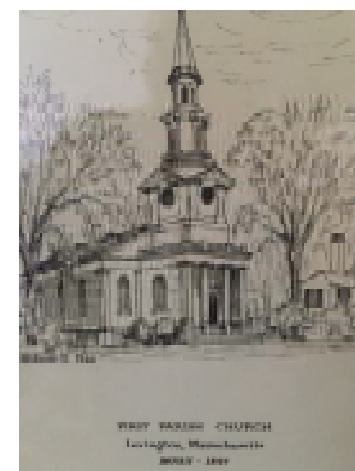
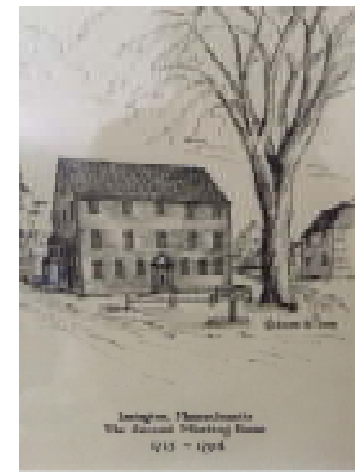
The 325th Celebration Committee is working with the History Committee and with Lexington historians such as Richard Kollen, Sam Doran, and Charlie Bowen to research the period in which the church and town were founded.

We are looking for volunteers for all aspects of these events. Please contact Helen Cohen if you are interested (helencohen@rcn.com) or any member of the committee.

First Parish Celebrates 325th Year of the Congregation

Our next meeting is on Wednesday, August 2, at 1:00pm, in Rev. Anne Mason's office. Whether or not you can make that meeting, you can join in the fun and in helping us to reflect on the meaning of becoming a church at any time in the next months. Thank you!

The 325th Celebration Committee: Helen Cohen, The Rev. Anne Mason, Dan Fenn, Bill Smith, and Don Cohen





Staffing Update for Children and Youth Programs

I am delighted to share that Katie Camire will be returning next year as our Youth Coordinator. Katie will lead Senior High Youth Group, Junior High Youth Group, and also be our lead Our Whole Lives teacher. Katie will also be going on the high school service trip.

For our Nursery, we have decided to not fill the position of Nursery Caregiver at this time. Instead, we will have a small team of adult volunteers rotating every Sunday and paid teenagers staffing the nursery.

For our Kindergarten— 2nd grade classroom, I am happy to share that we have hired Annelie Nygren-Mitchell to teach this group. Annelie has been a teacher at the Nashoba Brooks School in Concord since 2005 and is currently a teacher in their Extended Day afternoon program. Annelie shadowed Jeb this spring, and is looking forward to working with our team here and getting to know our families.

Summer Note:

The nursery will not be staffed during summer services; however, it remains open for use by families. There is also a rocking chair in the back of the sanctuary for our families with babies. If you have any questions about programming for children or youth that will start in September, please contact Lisa Maria Steinberg, Director of Lifespan Religious Education.

~Lisa Maria

The office will be open Monday through Thursday from 8:30am to 1:30pm through August 18.

Rev. Anne Mason: Beginning June 26, I will be on vacation through the month of July. **Lisa Perry-Wood will be on-call for pastoral emergencies and can be reached at lperrywood@gmail.com or 781-883-3411.** In August, I will be on study leave but available for ministerial support. Please email minister@fplex.org or leave a message at 781-862-8200 x2.

Lisa Maria Steinberg: I will be on vacation the weeks of June 20-26 and July 22-29. Throughout the summer, I will be working both offsite and in the office planning next year's children, youth, and adult programming. I'm available by appointment any time outside of vacation by emailing me at dre@fplex.org.

Rip Jackson: Over the summer, I will be offline enjoying vacation and comp time. I will also be in the office at the end of July. I will be attending three continuing education workshops between late July and early September. And finally, I will be doing some work offsite beginning to prepare and plan for next year's music and concerts. Please leave me a message at music@fplex.org

Jane Foley: I will be on vacation the weeks of June 20-23 and August 7-11. Voicemail will be monitored during those weeks, and email will be answered when I am in the office. Messages can be left at admin@fplex.org or 781-862-8200 x1.

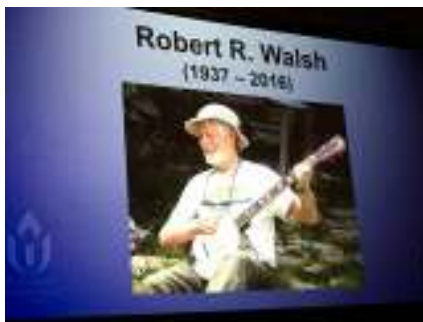
Bob Coughlin: I will be on vacation from June 30 – July 15. For building emergencies, contact Jane Foley in the office at admin@fplex.org or 781-862-8200 x1.



General Assembly (GA) 2017 took place in New Orleans last week. At this annual meeting of our Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), 4,000+ UUs gathered for important business, inspiring workshops, amazing lectures, wonderful worship, beautiful music, and to be in loving community. Through the miracle of live-streaming, it was a joy to know

members of First Parish were worshipping together on Sunday morning across time and space.

Each year, rites of passage for ministers are celebrated at the Service of the Living Tradition. This year, Beth Walsh's father, Rev. Robbie Walsh, was honored as one of the ministers who died this past year.



First Parish members, Beth Walsh, Deb Weiner, Ben Soule, and Marianne DiBlasi attended GA as delegates and Elisabeth Jas was an on-line delegate. As a delegate, we voted on business issues and for the next UUA President. It was a momentous moment in our history when delegates elected our first women president – Susan Frederick-Gray – into office.

In addition to electing the UUA President, a lot of other things happened at GA. The following is a summary of some key moments and discussions with links to learn more.

Considering the state of the nation and the world and recent hiring controversy turmoil within the denomination, the overarching conversation was about justice, spiritual growth and the evolution of governance and how all three are intertwined. The overall experience was thoughtful, caring, and soulful as we were invited to look more deeply at our UU culture and systems of oppression. An article in UU World reports on a message delivered by the three interim co-presidents that provides background, learnings, and actions taken during their 11-week interim presidency.

One key action taken during the interim period is, the UUA Board of Trustees appointed six people to work for two years on a Commission on Institutional Change to analyze structural racism and a culture of white supremacy within the UUA.

Although it may seem that systems of racial oppression have just come to light recently, a pivotal moment in our UU history is the Black Empowerment Controversy in 1969 when 1500 black members of our UU denomination walked out of General Assembly and left Unitarian Universalism. Systemic racial oppression has continued and has brought us to this moment – a moment of opportunity to do the transformative work of shifting our UU culture to Beloved Community for all. At General Session III, Dr. Sanyika talked about what happened in the late 1960s

A significant part of GA is engaging in our democratic process of proposing, discussing, amending, and voting on UUA business. Delegates voted to adopt the following:

Combating Escalating Inequality

Making the “Standing on the Side of Love” Campaign more inclusive

Appointment of Study Commission to consider adding an 8th Principle to UU Principles and Purposes.

If you want to see what happened at GA, here are two resources for you to visit online:

UU World’s coverage of GA, go to <https://www.uuworld.org/ga>

GA 2017 Online: On-Demand Video, Transcripts, and Workshop Materials, <http://www.uua.org/ga/off-site/2017>



JOIN US TO SEW for

DAYS FOR GIRLS

SATURDAY JULY 29TH FROM 9:00 A.M. TO 1:00 PM

AT FIRST PARISH IN LEXINGTON

Days for Girls is an organization that provides health education and feminine hygiene kits to girls and women in more than 100 countries who otherwise would not have access to either. Their mission states, “Days for Girls is dedicated to creating a more free, dignified, and educated world, through providing lasting access to feminine hygiene solutions and health education.” Visit their website to learn more at www.daysforgirls.org.

Join us to sew reusable cloth kits for girls who do not otherwise have access to sanitary products. **Please bring your sewing machine!** Supplies will be provided.

Questions? Contact Amy Breiting or Roberta Pittore for more information.

