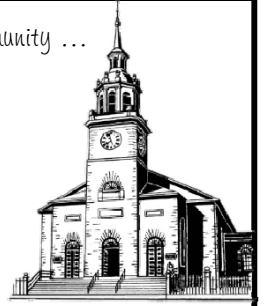




An ancient folk tale tells the power of gathering our individual gifts to create community ...

Stone Soup

The First Parish in Portland, Maine
Unitarian Universalist
A Welcoming Congregation in the Heart of the City



January 2012

Volume XV, Number 5

Notes from Rev. Sillari

Sweet Darkness

by David Whyte

When your eyes are tired
the world is tired also.

When your vision has gone
no part of the world can find you.

Time to go into the dark
where the night has eyes
to recognize its own.

There you can be sure
you are not beyond love.

The dark will be your womb
tonight.

The night will give you a horizon
further than you can see.

You must learn one thing:
the world was made to be free in.

Give up all the other worlds
except the one to which you belong.

Sometimes it takes darkness and the sweet
confinement of your aloneness
to learn

anything or anyone
that does not bring you alive

is too small for you.



Dear Members and Friends of
First Parish,

Happy New Year! Although
the days are getting longer now,
the darkness continues to bless
our lives. Now that the busy-
ness of the holidays is over, we
can relax, go inside. Spending
time sleeping, indoors, and
alone allows us to reflect upon
what is important in our lives.
As the poem alongside conveys,

darkness is a teacher. With its sweet embrace it assists us
in seeing more clearly our place and purpose in life. The
New Year is often a time we look at the past and the future
with new eyes. What has been working in our lives? What
brings us peace and joy? What are we ready to let go of
and how do we want to manifest as we move forward?
These questions cannot be answered unless we spend time
in the womb of darkness. As the poem says, *the night will
give you a horizon further than you can see.*

So let's be quiet; let's welcome solitude and stillness. Let's
pay attention to our dreams which can convey undiscovered
wisdom and guidance. We can even ask to have and
remember dreams about specific issues in our lives before
we go to sleep. Dreams are a doorway into the soul's jour-
ney to become whole. I recently had a dream I was going
surfing. This dream is particularly poignant because I have
never been surfing, not to mention my back injury (yes, it
is slowly getting better) and the winter weather. Yet, recall-
ing the joy and excitement I felt in the dream dressed and
equipped with surfing gear, tells me that surfing, freedom,
strength and good health are in the future.

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We worship together every Sunday at 10:00 am. Join us!

425 Congress St. Portland, Maine 04101 207-773-5747 www.firstparishportland.org office@firstparishportland.org

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Interested in Learning More About Our Neighborhood Initiatives?

Join the Conversation!

by Marge Stockford

Eight months ago, in May 2011, we came together as a congregation to choose a focus for our Faith in Action program for the 2011-12 church year. Teams within the church had just spent several weeks researching three possible focus areas – sustainability, music and arts, and our neighborhood – and presented their compelling cases why each area would be worthwhile for us to put the considerable resources of the church behind. When we voted, “our neighborhood” won by a

two-to-one majority over both of its competitors.

That enthusiastic support of the neighborhood initiative has carried over into the projects it has generated. Within a month, two dozen people came together in a Faith in Action planning meeting and came up with more than a half dozen

project ideas. Over these past eight months, several of these projects have been launched into action. We have held four monthly neighborhood community dinners, feeding the bodies and souls of those who live close by who are hungry, we have begun an in-depth training program in restorative justice as we work with Portland’s police, courts, and schools to build a center that helps both victims and offenders in our

neighborhood, we have raised money and invested time and emotional support to help Burundian members of our neighborhood to achieve political asylum, and we have started a tutoring project with students at our neighboring school, Portland Public High School. In addition, the ongoing project to give monthly support to the Preble Street Soup Kitchen has continued. It’s been a busy eight months!

While we are both proud of and grateful for the work that has

begun in our neighborhood, as we do more we see the need for more. Therefore, we would like to encourage more of you to get involved, in the projects that have already been started and/or in new projects you might like to suggest. On Sunday,

January 15th, immediately

after coffee hour, we invite you to join us to hear more details about the projects already underway and to brainstorm about projects we could add to this list. Come help us serve our community and our neighborhood.

If you have any questions prior to the meeting, please contact Marge Stockford, Chair, Faith in Action Committee, mstockford@maine.rr.com, 207-619-7133.

On Sunday, January 15th, immediately after coffee hour, we invite you to join us to hear more details about the projects already underway and to brainstorm about projects we could add to this list. Come help us serve our community and our neighborhood.

Notes from Rev. Sillari ctd.

(continued from page 1) It was in the darkness of my sleep that I discovered that surfing will help me feel alive.

David Whyte’s poem is asking us to let go of anyone or anything that does not make us feel alive. He is suggesting that sweet darkness can help us discover what is not working in our lives, what does not support us feeling free in the world. Our relationships, our addictions, our jobs, our homes, our communities can all influence our sense of freedom. Yet, it is ultimately our mind that controls whether or not we feel free. Who and what we engage with is secondary. Once we are internally free of attachments to things, people, our bodies, the future, then a feeling of freedom naturally follows. So the question becomes: what in our mind is preventing us from feeling free?

In the depth of the cold stark winter, freedom sometimes feels less accessible. Our loneliness, sadness, depression, and fear of death may intensify with the darkness. During this time perhaps we need to go outside and greet the sun and the critters in the morning with a big hello. Maybe we need to make a call and reach out to someone. Maybe we need to find a way to grow in community, nurture our spirit or help heal the world. First Parish has a number of programs that may support us through our winter journey. Chalice groups, committee work, faith in action projects are all opportunities to move through the sweet darkness of our lives together. Sometimes commitment and connection bring us freedom. Sometimes being alone is what we need. Sometimes we may need to go surfing. What ever it is that opens our lives up to freedom may be discovered in the sweet darkness of winter. May we all be blessed by the teachings from darkness as we enter the New Year.

With infinite blessings, Rev. Christina

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Tutoring for Our Neighbor, Portland High School

It Takes a Community

by Allen Armstrong

One of the many Faith in Action projects that First Parish has taken on this year as part of the “neighborhood” initiative is tutoring students at Portland High School, right behind us on Cumberland Avenue. Allen Armstrong initiated conversations with PHS’s volunteer coordinator in the fall and identified opportunities for volunteers to assist students with some classroom subjects in addition to working with students who are English language learners. To date, three First Parishioners have begun tutor-

ing students: Leigh Mundhenk and Wes Bonney are working with the English Language Learners and Allen Armstrong is assisting with Physics. They are making an approximately once/week commitment to work with the students. PHS appreciates this support from First Parish to date and would welcome additional participants, either during school hours (8AM to 2:10 PM) or after. If you would like to work with young people and can find the time in your schedule, call Allen at 774-1682 or write armstrong105@gmail.com for more information.



A Note From The Trustees

by Stephen Jenks, President of the Board of Trustees of First Parish

We awarded a contract for repair of the steeple tower belfry to Jay Southgate of Southgate Steeplejacks of Barre, Vermont. They came on December 20th and removed the balustrade that was badly deteriorated and in danger of falling. They also took detailed measurements of the inside belfry supports and will begin constructing new ones in their shop in Vermont this winter and spring. Next summer they will remove the belfry, take it to their shop and refurbish it. Next fall they will return and reinstall the refurbished belfry. There will be a temporary structure covering the bell while the belfry is gone.

We also have contracted to have the Meeting House ceiling - the patch and the cracks in the ceiling - repaired early in Jan-

uary. Scaffolding will be erected in the Meeting House on December 27th and work will begin by January 3rd. The contractor is Jon Burnham. All work will be completed by January 20th as there is a wedding in the Meeting House on the 27th. While the scaffolding is in the church, the left hand sections of pews (viewed from the entry to the Meeting House) will be closed off for use as will the left hand side of the balcony.

Next summer, the carpet in the Parish House will be taken up and replaced with a new hard wood floor that is generously being donated by Harro Jakel, so by fall, we hope also to paint the room and have a fresh new look!

Pageant of the Nativity

After many months of preparation, the pageant has now come to an end for this year...yet the spirit of community, the feelings of awe and wonder, and the strength of the story are still with us. Thank you for being part of the 85th Nativity Pageant as one of the 150 cast, crew, and choir members or 530 congregants who shared in this inspiring moment. Collected donations of \$1000 in support of the Pageant of the Nativity and the mission of First Parish to nurture the spirit, serve the community, and help to heal the world are greatly appreciated.

-The Pageant Committee
Laurie Hasty, chair
Linda Blue
Bette Brunswick
Charmen Goehring-Fox
Linda Shary

STONE SOUP CORRECTION:

In the December Stone Soup article about the Safe Harbor launch, wonderful singer Nancy Sferra, of the Maine Songwriters' Association, was mistakenly given the same last name as her talented friend and colleague Shanna Underwood. Thanks Peter Alexander, for the heads up. Mea culpa!~~Kitty Coughlin

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First Parish Library Corner

Books to Support the Our Whole Lives Curriculum

by Sue Comyns, on behalf of the First Parish Library Committee

Parents... Bet you didn't know that the First Parish Library has a wonderful collection of resources you may find useful as your children begin to ask questions about sexuality.

For children ages **4 and up**: It's Not the Stork – A Book about Girls, Boys, Babies and Friends;

ages **7 and up**: It's so Amazing – A Book about Eggs, Sperm, Birth, Babies and Families;

ages **10 and up**: It's Perfectly Normal – Changing Bodies, Grown Up Sex and Sexual Health.

What's the Big Secret will guide you through talking about sex with boys and girls and if humor appeals to you, Where Did I Come From is a winner. It covers the facts of Life “without any nonsense” and with funny yet informative illustrations.

Several additional titles provide accurate, age appropriate information about healthy sexuality, sexual identity and sexual orientation. Be sure to browse our collection that supports the UU religious education Our Whole Lives curriculum. And if you have any questions or specific needs, your Library Committee members will be happy to help.

First Parish Budget Half-Time Show

by Stephanie Eglinton, Finance Council Chair

At the half-year mark of the church fiscal year, let's take a time-out to look at how our expected income and expenses are playing out compared to the budget (ok, that's the end of my capacity for sports metaphors).

The income side. Did you know that two-thirds of the \$278,000 required to run First Parish comes from your financial commitments? Building rentals, endowment income, fundraising and Sunday collections all make up the final third. The fiscal year runs July 1 through June 30 so we are grateful if you are at least half way through your pledge payments. **If you are new to First Parish and missed the stewardship campaign last spring, please contact treasurer Allen Armstrong (774-1682, armstrong105@gmail.com) about making a commitment** for the remainder of the fiscal year. The pledging pro-

cess is so important to helping us budget and live responsibly within our means.

So far, pledge income is tracking well, thanks in part to some folks who pre-paid for the year. We also have a target, however, to raise \$10,000 from fundraising which will require some real effort in 2012. We are hoping to gather volunteers for a fun spring auction event.

The expense side. Expenses – from staff salaries to heating costs to postage -- are also tracking relatively closely with our lean budget. As we grow as a community and grow our vision to serve the neighborhood, there is growing pressure to do more with more resources.

If you have any questions about First Parish finances feel free to contact me at seglinto@maine.rr.com.

Calling all Atheists, Agnostics, Theists, Deists and Seekers!
Please join Reverend Christina for a conversation about God.

Wednesday February 8th 6:30-8:30pm

Please let Emily in the office know if you will be coming.

office@firstparishportland.org / 773-5747

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Chalice Groups (a.k.a Small Group Ministry) Will Begin in January!

An Opportunity for Continuous Spiritual Deepening with Others

by Jen DeWilde Caswell

We are pleased to be able to offer the congregation several choices to accommodate different life schedules. All groups will begin in January, meeting at the church and later decide if that is the continued preference.

Group options

- **Daytime group: 1st Tuesday of each month 11:30am -1pm.**
Bring your lunch if you like.
- **Evening group: 3rd Wednesday of each month 6:30-8pm**
- **Buddhist group: 2nd and 4th Monday of each month 7-8:30pm**
- **Couples group: 3rd Sunday of each month 7-8:30pm**
- **Young Women's group: 3rd Sunday of each month 4:30-6pm**
- **Young Adults' group: 2nd Wednesday of each month 7-8:30pm**

If you're interested in joining a group but the times listed don't work for you, call Emily, and tell her what would work for you. Perhaps in the near future, we can make it happen!

Things to know

- these are intentional, structured, lay-led groups of between 6-10 people
- membership in First Parish is NOT required.
- all groups are open for new participants
- your commitment is to make a good-faith effort to attend each session through June
- facilitators have a monthly connection with each other and with Rev. Christina.
- sign up with Emily in the First Parish office: 773-5747 or office@firstparishportland.org
- you will then get a confirmation and more information in the mail the first week in January.

Why join?***

Chalice Groups are an opportunity to create deeper relationships (intimacy) and spiritual exploration (search for meaning). They will offer a context in which to speak our concerns with the expectation that our views will be heard and respected. We will experience a safe setting in which there can be consideration of issues without rancor. Chalice Groups will provide a sacred space in which we practice right relationship, which has the healing and transformational power of life. We openheartedly share and experience the fact that beneath our differences we all have deep needs, strength, courage, and wisdom to share. We open ourselves up to discover our underlying assumptions about reality and examine our ways of being, which may have become so habitual that they seem to us just the way things are. "Within the minimal structure of Small Group Ministry we can reflect upon our own motivations, confront and refine our emotions, consider our ethics, deepen our attentiveness to others, cultivate wisdom, and express our love through service."

***adapted from The Complete Guide to Small Group Ministry by Robert L. Hill

Do you have an announcement or article you would like to see included in the First Parish Sunday Bulletin (weekly), or Stone Soup (monthly)?

Please submit content to Emily Brock: office@firstparishportland.org

Content due by Wednesday noon for Sunday's Bulletin

and by the 15th of the month for the following month's Stone Soup!

Are UU a Great Communicator?

If you have web-site skills, are willing to help with PR and would enjoy connecting with our wider Unitarian Universalist community, First Parish needs you! We are seeking several people to serve on the **Communications Council**. Please e-mail Bette Brunswick at bettejnb@yahoo.com for more information. Thank you for considering this most important ministry at First Parish.

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Living Our Mission

by Anna Allocco, Governing Board President



One of the most significant shifts we're making as a Congregation is the move from being Minister-centered to being Mission-centered.

Historically, the congregation of First Parish defers to the personality, goals and skills of the Minister as driving the spiritual and physical growth of the First Parish congregation. This would be an easy trend for us to continue because Reverend Christina is so great: likeable, smart, engaging, with interests that resonate with many people in the congregation and a plethora of skills that she generously shares with us. We could just sit back and let Christina run the show!

However, this approach of deferring to the Minister, of being Minister-centered, does not empower the congregation. In the worst-case scenario, being Minister-centered creates a community where we (unconsciously) collude to make our church about an individual rather than the Mission. In such a context, only one person is recognized as powerfully embodying the Mission. This is not consistent with Unitarian Universalist principles. What is consistent with UU principles is recognizing that every member of the congregation has a valuable and unique contribution to make in the expression of our Mission.

Lao Tzu, author of the Tao Te Ching (some of you may have been here for Davis Balestracci's sermon about The Tao this September) wrote, "A leader is best when people

barely know he exists, when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say: we did it ourselves." We empower people to do it ourselves when we presence the Mission because everyone has equal access to the Mission. Only one person can be the Minister!

A poignant example of First Parish moving in this direction is Reverend Christina's article in the December Stone Soup. In that article, she wrote that the best thing members of the congregation can do to support her healing is to serve our Mission by being a Good Neighbor and bringing the spirit of First Parish to life. In other words, give the ride to someone without a car, tutor a student at Portland High School, help serve food at a Neighborhood Dinner, show up for Sunday service, volunteer to serve on the Communications Council, sing in the choir, join a Chalice Group, volunteer in RE, file books in the library.... You get the drift!

Our Mission has the power to transform us. Our willingness to Be a Good Neighbor, to nurture our spirit, to grow in community, and to help heal the world, may have a profound impact on our lives. This impact is accessible when we relate directly with the Mission, rather than rely on an intermediary (however wonderful she may be) to have that experience for us.

Have you Read our First Parish Church By-Laws?

by the First Parish By-Laws Revision Team: Bette Brunswick, Bruce Carver, Artha Freebury, Joan Stanton, Henri Benoit

If so, then you know that our practices are guided by our religious principles and congregational polity. The By-laws are the internal rules of the First Parish Society. Our voting members have the final say about all By-law revisions deemed necessary by the Governing Board.

The current By-laws promote a governance structure that the Governing Board believes to be cumbersome and outmoded. To address this issue, the Governing Board has formed an ad-hoc committee to review existing By-Laws and revise or propose new By-Laws that are concise, understandable, workable and adaptable -- so that they reflect how the members of the congregation may best relate to one another and may best

make decisions consistent with the mission statement of First Parish.

The By-laws Revision Team plans to offer several forums in 2012 and to publish updates as we progress. We envision a collaborative process to encourage the congregation's participation. Please read your Stone Soup newsletters for more information.

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Questions and More Questions

by Allison Gammons, Director of Religious Exploration



In second grade my older brother came home one day full of questions. “What is God? Where is heaven? What is hell? What is a soul? Who is Jesus? How does someone get saved? What does that mean, to be saved?” A slew of questions, asked with concern. Some kids on the bus, it seemed, had told him he was going to hell because

his family didn’t go to church.

My parents weren’t “unchurched.” Both had been raised in households with rich religious lives. My mother’s grandfather and great-grandfather had been ministers, and her mother would have been, had it been an opportunity open to her. My father was raised in a deeply devoted Catholic household, with parents whose courtship had revolved around researching different religions. Four out of five of my parents’ children had been baptized. We attended church on the big holidays, and when my grandparents visited. But the questions my brother asked with such concern that afternoon jolted my parents into action, prompting them to seek out a church where my siblings and I would be given the opportunity to explore and find our own answers.

This scenario isn’t unusual—many families find themselves seeking a church as their children begin to get older, looking

for a place to help in the search for answers to the myriad questions.

As Unitarian Universalists, we don’t often provide answers; instead, we offer more questions, the most important of which being, I think, “What do you think?”

Raising Unitarian Universalist children can be an exciting challenge. With encouragement to think and question, children and youth will formulate their own answers, and ask ever more questions.

As Director of Religious Exploration, I am privileged to get glimpses of the spiritual exploration the children and youth of First Parish are undertaking. This winter I saw it as we talked about why we might celebrate Jesus’ birthday, and in discussions on how to set up our worship space, during which we heard opinions from the very youngest and from the oldest youth.

Many adults in the congregation have had moments to share in these experiences. By being mentors, mystery pals, or volunteers, they’ve had a hand in guiding the children as they ask questions and search for answers. Even the briefest interaction can have an influence on the children and youth of this community. Smiling at them at coffee hour, asking what they’ve done in RE, asking their thoughts about the children’s story. The children and youth of First Parish are full of thoughts, ideas, and questions, and as adults, there is much that we can learn from them.

Unitarian Universalist Parenting/Parents as Spiritual Guides Workshop

This spring we will be offering a workshop mini-series on “UU Parenting” to explore the role of parents as spiritual guides, and the unique challenges that can come with raising a Unitarian Universalist child.

If you are interested in learning more about this group, or think you would like to participate, please contact Allison Gammons, Director of Religious Exploration (allisondre@gmail.com) by January 30th. The times and dates, as well as the number of sessions in the series will be determined based on the availability and preferences of those interested in participating. The UU Parenting mini-series will begin in mid-February or early March and is open to parents and other adults who find themselves in a parenting role.

First Parish Family Fun Night

On January 20th we will be having the first of our Winter Family Fun nights!

Join us from 5pm-8pm for games and a potluck dinner in the Parish Hall.

Families of all shapes and sizes are invited to come!

For more information, contact Allison Gammons, Director of Religious Exploration: allisondre@gmail.com

See the last page for information on a Faith In Action Project undertaken by our RE students.

Your assistance will make this a success!

**THE FIRST PARISH IN PORTLAND
425 CONGRESS STREET
PORTLAND, ME 04101**

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

If you would like to participate in the January 29th Music Service, please contact Music Director, Dr. Deirdre McClure
music@firstparishportland.org

Music theory classes are beginning at First Parish. Even if you don't sing in the choir, you are welcome to attend!
Thursday evenings, 6:30pm

Join in First Parish's Shoebox Ministry

by Charmen Goehring-Fox and the RE Committee

As a way to involve our children in the First Parish community's Faith In Action plan of helping our neighbors this year, we are planning a Shoebox Ministry. We are putting together shoeboxes with essential personal items to be given to our homeless neighbors.

We welcome your help in our project! Please send in the following items during the next few Sundays. If you travel, consider bringing home the hotel soap, shampoo and conditioner (unused, of course!) We will also need shoeboxes or even drawstring bags to hold the items. The children will be decorating the boxes and bags, sorting donated items, filling the boxes and bags, and finally, helping to deliver the supplies in late January/early February.

There will be a collection box in the Parish Hall near the RE bulletin board where you may drop off donations. If you have questions, please contact Allison, Charmen Fox, or Olivia Blom.

Below you'll find the "recipe" for one shoebox. We hope you'll pitch in and help us to gather the "ingredients" for many of these shoeboxes so that we can help many people in need in our neighborhood!

For one shoebox, combine the following in a box or drawstring bag:

- 1 standard size bottle of shampoo (or multiple hotel/travel size)
- 1 standard size bottle of conditioner (or multiple hotel/travel size)
- 1 can shaving cream
- 1 tube toothpaste
- 1 adult toothbrush
- 1 washcloth (new or clean used)
- 1 month supply of women's sanitary products
- 1 deodorant
- 1 large bar of soap (individually wrapped or in a bag)
- 1 comb or hairbrush
- 2 individual band-aids
- 2 disposable razors
- 1 body lotion (or multiple hotel/travel size)
- 1 pocket-size packet of tissues
- 1 pair of socks (new or clean used)
- 1 mending or sewing kit
- 1 magazine or other reading material



Optional Shoebox Ingredients:

- 1 small packet of laundry soap
- 1 shower cap
- 1 bath or shower gel
- 1 hairspray
- 1 small notebook and pen
- Stationary with stamped envelopes
- Other miscellaneous grooming items for men or women
- 1 pair of new socks

