

February 2010

First Parish News



Upcoming Events:

- February 7, Sunday service and RE 10am
- February 14, Sunday service and RE 10am followed by Sundae Social
- February 21, Sunday service and RE 10am
- February 27, Country Breakfast
- February 28, Sunday service and RE 10am

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First Parish of Northfield Unitarian Monthly Newsletter

Announcements

Coming Musical Events

Two musical events are in the planning stage for this spring/early summer. Both programs are planned as fund raisers for First Parish Church:

A gift has been received to help sponsor a concert in memory of Mary Metcalf, who was a significant contributor to the musical life of First Parish Church.

At the same time, we also hope to honor Joseph Elliott, Jr. by including him as organist in the program, as well as inviting a group from NMH School to perform. These ideas are being discussed with the individuals involved and a date is yet to be set.

A piano duet concert is planned for the weekend of May 1st (avoiding the public school vacation week in April). Chris Harris and Lynne Walker will play pieces from the Ragtime and Latin repertoire. We hope to feature Charles Hunting, baritone, as a special guest as well. Chris Harris has generously offered to handle the publicity. This performance will be dedicated to restoring the First Parish Unitarian Church tower clock.

Definite dates and times will be published in the March Newsletter.

RE News

RE has been flourishing recently (the 24th of January we welcomed 13 children plus Paul!). We are still focusing on the Golden Rule and are exploring it in other religions. I hope to purchase the UU Kids Book that I discovered at the UUA bookstore and would like to have a copy for each of the children. For this month, we will be having our Valentine buddies again and will exchange cards and enjoy ice cream on

the 14th. I am still hoping to get a few guest visitors to come in and share a craft or an interest with the children (UU related or not).

I would like to thank Lynne and Stephanie especially for their contribution to the immense success of the children's musical participation in the Christmas Eve. service. The children loved participating in the service and I was terribly proud of them all. ~Deb

A reminder about the Welcoming Letter from the Parish Committee

In keeping with being a welcoming congregation, the Parish Committee is sending a very nice "Welcoming Letter" to people who might be new to the community or who you think are looking for a spiritual home. Along with the letter we will send our Church Brochure and a schedule of our Sunday services and special events. Please get names and addresses to Betty Gibson.

The Parish Committee meets monthly and we welcome your presence, your concerns and/or suggestions or both.

Church Potluck

We will have a church potluck Sunday, January 31st at 10 am. Please bring a dish to share and come enjoy the conversation and fun.

Church Donations

Please check out an update to our website with information on donating to First Parish. A portion of your online purchases at any store from iGive.com will go toward First Parish if you follow the link from our website. You can now also send one time or recurring donations to the church using PayPal.

Church News

Notes from Lynne: Christmas Eve 2009

What do "Come Christmas!" (by M. Maureen Killoran), a violin and piano duet of "Away in a Manger", children singing "Behold That Star", twinkling lights and window candles, the Christmas Story as found in the Holy Scriptures, vocal ensembles of "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel", and yes. . . . even "Winter Wonderland", the aroma of fresh greens, an impassioned reading of "Ring Out, Wild Bells" (by Alfred, Lord Tennyson), and angelic voices wafting from the balcony have in common?

This creative mix blended into a vivid, colorful, music and poetry filled, - inspired - Christmas Eve offering for First Parish Unitarian members, families, friends and visitors just about a month ago, on December 24, 2009 at 7:00 pm in First Parish's main sanctuary, warmed – almost enough – for the occasion!

Under the able direction of Deborah Potee, Religious Education Director, a small but devoted and enthusiastic group of parents and friends designed and prepared this year's service in the absence of the Rev. Marguerite Sheehan whose presence was missed here, but was required at her second parish in Winchendon, Mass.

The following are the individuals who participated. We are grateful for their personal gifts of time, talent and love generously poured into this special evening of celebration.

Readings:

Paul Bocko: Keeping Christmas by Henry Van Dyke

Children: Christmas Morning by Elizabeth Madox Roberts

Fiona Bird, Nina and Bailey Bocko, Vivienne Potee,

Jane and Ella Potee-Martin,

Matilda and Milaina Hall, Sal deBethune, Kaylee and Kensey Gibson.

Betty Gibson: Scripture: Luke 2:1-20

Deborah Potee: Come Christmas! B M. Maureen Killoran

Ruth Potee: Ring Out, Wild Bells by Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Music:

Lynne Walker, Music Director, piano and organ

Karina Berenson: violin

Children: Children's Vocal Ensemble (names included above)

Stephanie Ciccarello: soprano soloist

Carolyn and Steve Baskowski, Stephanie Ciccarello, Betty Gibson, and Elliott Hunnewell : Vocal Ensemble

Steve Baskowski, Michael Bird, Paul Bocko, and Richard Fitzgerald: Men's Ensemble

Decorations: Director, parents and children of Religious Education

Programs: Deborah Potee and Lynne Walker; cover art by Joseph Marchello.

We would be remiss if we left out the shimmering beauty of voices filling the old church with the ageless singing of traditional and much loved Carols.

"Ring out the old, ring in the new, . . . ring out the false, ring in the true. . . .

Ring in the love of truth and right; ring in the common love of good." - Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Pastoral Friends

The Parish Committee has decided to increase our awareness about the health and well being of our congregation by putting our "pastoral friends alerts!" in our newsletter and sometimes by email. Please let Reverend Marguerite or Betty Gibson know if you would like to be mentioned in these "caring alerts."

- Noelle Anson is home recovering well from knee surgery. She is happy to have folks check in on her and Walter through the first weeks of recovery.

- Jean Shepherd is either at Charlene Manor in Greenfield or back home after a short stay. Either way she continues to be high spirited and happy to receive visitors. Just give a call so you know where to find her!

- And finally we are keeping Alex Stewart and his wife Hilda in our thoughts and prayers. Hilda is scheduled for surgery in Boston in early February. Alex appreciates folks keeping in touch with them.

~ Reverend Marguerite

Minister's Corner

This month I read a study about spiritually vital congregations (Faith Communities Today.) While it is true that most mainline churches, including most Unitarian Universalist churches are facing declining attendance, financial struggles and uncertainty about mission, some churches are thriving. The survey concluded that spiritually vital and alive congregations have some things in common. Challenges for congregations include having clarity and distinctiveness of identity, creating vibrant worship, being open to change, managing conflict and diversity and creating excellent programs. Vital congregations have managed to grapple with all these issues. And, no surprise, they also tend to do well in two areas: hospitality to strangers and support for lay volunteers.

I believe that we at First Parish know who we are but are still shy about saying so in a way that brings in visitors. Our new brochure is one way we are addressing this as is the news coverage on our church painting and clock repair. We are working on new forms of worship including our Chalice Sundays. Do you think these are going well? We try to balance openness to change with our love for tradition. I believe that we as a church do not shy from healthy conflict and in focused ways, have developed programs (mainly food and children!) that stand out in our town. I believe that we are not yet prioritized welcoming visitors and not as great as we might be with maintaining contact with those who come in the door. Do we support our lay volunteers well? I think we could do this better. It is hard for volunteers to honor volunteering!

It was heartening to me to read this study because it showed me that First Parish is not unique in our struggles but is very healthy in

the directions we are growing. If you were "checking our vitals" how do you think we are doing? Let's keep talking about the health and vitality of our congregation. We are approaching spring and our Annual Canvas. It is already time to think about next year. How are we doing? Who are we? What do we want to be? What do you think?

~Marguerite

Reflections on Haiti

I am writing this reflection a week after the devastating earthquake in Haiti. By the time this is printed the numbers of dead will have raised and the desperation of the people will not be assuaged. Our hearts have broken into pieces for the people of Haiti and their loved ones and still we have found and will continue to find ways, to make a difference in their pain. The reconstruction in Haiti will take years. I am grateful to be part of a church that cares and is willing and ready to care for the long haul. We have demonstrated how we can do this locally by our many years commitment to Loaves and Fishes, and now to the Northfield Food Pantry. Our connection with Haiti will not be so intimate, but I know that if we choose to make it so, it will not be less generous. Thank you even now, for all that you have offered in the way of monetary gifts and prayers.

~Marguerite