

# THE SPIRE JANUARY 2021



## LIGHT UP YOUR WINTER BIBLE STUDY

TUESDAY, JANUARY 26, 5PM



Zoom Bible Study, ( <https://zoom.us/j/95721703863> )

Join your pastors and other church friends for Bible study on Tuesday, January 26 at 5pm via Zoom ( <https://zoom.us/j/95721703863> ).

We will look at the lectionary readings for Sundays, January 31 and February 7. Having just read about the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Mark's gospel, we will encounter Jesus being confronted by demonic powers [Mark 1:21-28] and then illness [Mark 1:29-34]. To begin the conversation, ponder these questions:

- Before we begin hearing "*Tubular Bells*" playing in the background, our nation has just been shaken to its core. How do we confront the legacy and allegiance that too many have to white supremacy?
- We have access to medicines and health care unimaginable in Jesus' day. Even so, are advances in medicine all that is needed to heal broken lives and a broken world?

Again, join us as we read together these texts in preparation for worship on January 31 and February 7 via Zoom ( <https://zoom.us/j/95721703863> ) and discuss the challenge of power turned in on itself and illness.

As we have learned no time is right for everyone. If you are able, please join us at this time. If you are interested, and this is not a good time, please let us know ( [richardedens@gmail.com](mailto:richardedens@gmail.com) or [jillredens@gmail.com](mailto:jillredens@gmail.com) ).

## ANNUAL BUDGET MEETING

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 7TH



Our 2020 Fiscal Annual Meeting will be held virtually after Zoom Communion on Sunday, February 7<sup>th</sup>. Please join us for this important discussion about our 20201 budget. Specific Zoom meeting details will be sent in upcoming weekly emails.

# FROM THE PASTORS

REV. DR. JILL EDENS & REV. RICHARD EDENS

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Tod Bolsinger's book, *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory*, begins when Lewis and Clark reached the Continental Divide expecting to find a navigable river to take them to the Pacific. Instead, they saw the Rocky Mountains and three shifts took place for them to be successful:

One, finding a water route was a failed mission. They had to **stop being expert canoeists** as the why of their journey - seeking a water route to the Pacific – had to be re-imagined into exploring a new world. Many congregations including our own have come face-to-face with an intimidating mountain range, an imposing new culture, that is larger than anything our imagination could fathom. The vessel that has gotten us this far, even when the pandemic is over, will not be how our journey continues.



Two, in this new environment, Lewis and Clark, had to become **adaptive learners**. Isn't that true for us today? It is helpful to remember that being a disciple has always been a call to be a **humble learner**.

And three, the good news Lewis and Clark discovered was that their **salvation was already at work** in the new environment in which they found themselves. The story of Lewis & Clark is also the story of Sacagawea. Among "expert canoeists," descendants of European colonialists and commissioned by the President, she had no voice, no privilege, and no power; yet she was the key for going forward. She was not headed towards imposing mountains as foreign terrain; **she was headed home**.

Perhaps our calling as we look ahead for First Parish is to trust

- **The map that guided us is being redrawn.**
- **God will help us as we seek to become humble learners in this new territory.**
- **Our future lies in identifying and accepting leadership from those who are already at home in the world that is rushing towards us.**

Hope to see you on Sunday,

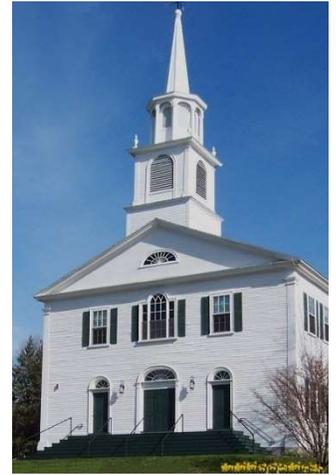
*Richard & Jill Edens*

## **TRANSITION COMMITTEE UPDATE**

### **Congregational Feedback Survey Overview**

As part of the minister search process, the Transition Committee prepared a congregational feedback survey in November 2020 via GoogleForms and paper copies were sent to people who received the Spire via mail. We were very pleased that 59 people responded to the survey. Thank you to everyone who participated in the survey; your feedback was very helpful.

We would like to share key takeaways and insights from the survey with the congregation to help frame some of the work that the Search Committee will be starting in reviewing candidates who express interest based on First Parish's Local Church Profile.



### **About First Parish**

- People attend church at First Parish for its fellowship and sense of community (87.7% of responses), the Sunday experience (56.9% of responses) and love of music (46.2% of responses).
- First Parish could use the most improvement in new members (87.7% of responses), connecting with younger generations (61.5% of responses) and a bigger volunteer base (33.8% of responses)

### **About Our Future Minister**

- The most important ministerial priorities (ranked in priority order)
  1. Building Transformational Leadership Skills
  2. Working Together for Justice and Mercy
  3. Strengthening Inter- and Intra-Personal Assets
  4. Exhibiting a Strong Spiritual Foundation
- The most important personal and professional characteristics of a future pastor
  - Thoughtful and pastoral (65.2% of responses)
  - Honest and trustworthy (43.9% of responses)
  - Outgoing and extroverted (42.4% of responses)
- The leading strengths of a future pastor
  - Pastor (72.3% of responses)
  - Preacher (72.3% of responses)
  - Teacher (44.6% of responses)
- The top goals that First Parish desires to be achieved in partnership and collaboration with a new minister
  - Growth in numbers (90.9% of responses)
  - Increased/new vision for the church (74.2% of responses)
  - Successfully assimilating into the church and culture (51.5% of responses)
- First Parish members and friends believe a new pastor should focus most of their energy/time on the following activities
  - Attracting new members and retaining current members (72.7% of responses)
  - Pastoral care (54.5% of responses)
  - Teaching and the weekend experience (42.4%)

## Key Takeaways

The responses to the open-ended questions of “What do you hope will be different/expanded/changed when a new minister joins First Parish?” and “What else would you like to be considered as we prayerfully search for a new minister?” reinforced the following key takeaways:

- Members and friends would like someone with energy and enthusiasm who is “friendly, welcoming, non-judgmental, flexible, open to innovation, and open to suggestions from the laity”
- Reinvigorating Christian education and mission opportunities both for children, youth and adults is important to many parishioners...“More families and places for children/youth to be involved, more mission opportunities, more varied opportunities for people to be involved both for their learning and helping others.”
- Growth in members is a key priority...“my hope is for a pastor who will bring in new members through their preaching, approachability, and warmth (sense of caring).”

Finally, I would like to express my appreciation for the hard work and dedication of the transition committee including Andrea Deininger, Dave Blomquist, Dave Ball, Ned Hall, Nancy Hyde, and Landon Bayer as well as our interim co-pastors, Rick and Jill Edens. As the search committee begins its work, please know that we will thoughtfully consider feedback provided by the congregation and take to heart the following verbatim comment of one of the survey responses...“I pray we will be patient and open in discerning the best fit for our congregation as we look to grow our numbers, our vision, and our calling as a community of faith.”

Peace,  
Bob Deininger, Chair, Transition Committee

## 2020 MISSION AND OUTREACH REPORT

### DONATIONS

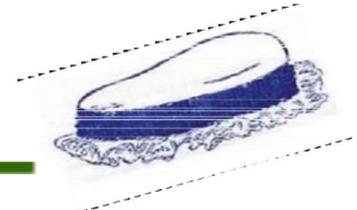
- Even though we did not have a pumpkin sale in 2020, we were able to use pumpkin money from past years to help a number of organizations that serve the homeless and food insecure.
- **Pine Street Inn** \$500
- **Rosie’s Place** \$500
- **Greater Boston Food Bank** \$500
- **Ecclesia Ministries**, the ministry to the homeless on Boston Common \$250
- We also gave 500 to the **Community Chaplaincy** that serves seniors in assisted living and children with emotional disabilities.
- In addition, we provided 2,500 to **the Harris Fund** administered by the social workers at Lifeworks an affiliate of the ARC. The Harris Fund provides one time help for families to avoid homelessness.



### CHRISTMAS FAMILIES

Thank you for your wonderful generosity. Not only did we meet the needs of the three families that Lifeworks asked us to help, we exceeded their wishes and had additional funds left that Lifeworks used to help two additional families.

The Outreach Committee



Finally, we are seeing some light at the end of this long tunnel during the Covid 19 pandemic. I hope that each of you will get vaccinated as your time frame in the rollout arrives. I can't wait for my turn! This is the time of Epiphany, the time when Christians recognize the newly born Jesus as God Incarnate and honors a visit from the Magi to the infant after following a bright star on a long journey. The following poem by T.S. Elliot is a beautiful interpretation of that time in Jesus' life. My prayer is that you all will have a HAPPY HEALTHY NEW YEAR, hang in there, Help is on the way!

May we all be Blessed and have Peace, *Marge*

### *The Journey Of The Magi*

*A cold coming we had of it,  
Just the worst time of the year  
For a journey, and such a long journey:  
The ways deep and the weather sharp,  
The very dead of winter.'  
And the camels galled, sorefooted, refractory,  
Lying down in the melting snow.  
There were times we regretted  
The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,  
And the silken girls bringing sherbet.  
Then the camel men cursing and grumbling  
and running away, and wanting their liquor and women,  
And the night-fires going out, and the lack of shelters,  
And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly  
And the villages dirty and charging high prices:  
A hard time we had of it.  
At the end we preferred to travel all night,  
Sleeping in snatches,  
With the voices singing in our ears, saying  
That this was all folly.  
  
Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley,  
Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation;  
With a running stream and a water-mill beating the darkness,  
And three trees on the low sky,  
And an old white horse galloped away in the meadow.  
Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves over the lintel,  
Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver,  
And feet kicking the empty wine-skins.  
But there was no information, and so we continued  
And arriving at evening, not a moment too soon  
Finding the place; it was (you might say) satisfactory.  
  
All this was a long time ago, I remember,  
And I would do it again, but set down  
This set down  
This: were we led all that way for  
Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly  
We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death,  
But had thought they were different; this Birth was  
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.  
We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,  
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,  
With an alien people clutching their gods.  
I should be glad of another death.*

# Thank You

We have recently received thank you notes from the ARC and several ARC families who were so appreciative of your generosity at Christmas.

*Thank you for the gifts. We really appreciate them and you. We are truly blessed. I can't thank you enough. God bless you all and have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. Love to you all.*

*First Parish of Westwood,*

*Thank you for your gift cards. You were very thoughtful to remember us in this way, and I do wish you the best in this coming year.*

*Dear First Parish Church Members,*

*We are sincerely grateful for your donations to our Holiday Gift Giving Program this year. Despite the unprecedented events in 2020, your congregation was still able to come together and support the families that we serve.*

*Although you were unable to congregate in person, you were still able to successfully organize this year's program. We are so appreciative of the hard work and sacrifices that you had to make in order to pull all of this together. We were so elated to learn of the additional monetary donations that the parishioners had raised. We found that it took us a bit of time to decide on who would receive this money as many families continue to struggle. When it came time to decide, we chose for the money to help one family pay their rent and another to buy some essential items.*

*Our families will be sending thank you letters directly to your Parish. Please know that we are so thankful for the thoughtfulness that you have shown this holiday season.*