

## MARTHA'S MUSINGS

The theological theme of the month is GRACE. Contemporary Unitarian Universalist theologian Myrium Renaud defines a theology of grace: "Grace is often understood to mean the gift of an unexpected rescue. It's the buoy that appears at our side when we're about to drown." My Lutheran faith formation was grounded in the notion that one cannot earn or deserve grace—"Grace happens," as the bumper-sticker announces.

As an adult, I've come to understand that the evolutionary process is the grace that the "Big Bang" theory offers. When we discover that our way of life,—say "slavery," or "turbo-capitalism," is not only failing but implicates each of us in the suffering, this is not (only) failure, but is feedback that a time of adaptation and evolution is at hand.

We can trust that all of us will be held in the everlasting arms of a universe emerging.

Grace is at the heart of our liberal religious tradition that tells us that "revelation is continuous," and that "resources (immanent and transcendent) are available for meaningful change" in a way that grounds us in an ongoing and dynamic hope. As my father often said to my tears of despair, "This too shall pass."

The liberal tradition echoes the 13th century mystic Mowlana Jalaluddin Rumi's vision of grace in the poem, "Zero Circle:"

*Be helpless, dumbfounded,  
Unable to say yes or no.  
Then a stretcher will come from grace to gather us up.  
We are too dull-eyed to see that beauty.  
If we say we can, we're lying.  
If we say No, we don't see it,  
That No will behead us  
And shut tight our window onto spirit.  
So let us rather not be sure of anything,  
Beside ourselves, and only that, so  
Miraculous beings come running to help.  
Crazed, lying in a zero circle, mute,  
We shall be saying finally,  
With tremendous eloquence,  
Lead us.  
When we have totally surrendered to that beauty,  
We shall be a mighty kindness.*

May we be that mighty kindness as evolution makes us new.

**Blessings,  
Rev. Martha**

## JIM'S SABBATICAL JOTTINGS

Dear Ones,

I returned from traveling with Sufis with deeper love and appreciation for journeys of the spirit, and new energy and joy for the tasks of everyday life. The holidays found me spending more focused time with family and friends than I normally can. I love the adults my children have become! My life is also undergoing a major transition. I came to First Parish in Brookline as a bi-vocational minister, serving as both the senior partner at Seaflower Ventures and as your Co-Minister, which was one of the many good reasons Rev. Martha and I approached Brookline about splitting one ministerial position between the two of us, I had another half time commitment that I split my professional life between. After 16 years running the venture fund I created, we finished closing the firm effective 12/31/11, and I have just this week dropped the final financial information off with my tax accountant to prepare our final filings. This means [www.seaflower.com](http://www.seaflower.com) no longer exists, and my email addresses [jim@seaflower.com](mailto:jim@seaflower.com) and [sherblom@seaflower.com](mailto:sherblom@seaflower.com) no longer function. I will return from sabbatical able to devote my entire professional time and focus to Unitarian Universalist ministry. If you wish to email me, please reach me at [jimsherblom@gmail.com](mailto:jimsherblom@gmail.com) or once I return from sabbatical at Rev. Martha's and my shared email of [ministers@firstparishinbrookline.org](mailto:ministers@firstparishinbrookline.org) It feels like life offers me new ways of being in the world!

I have plunged into writing my doctoral thesis this month and completed the first 60 pages of the first draft. I am writing about sources of ministerial authority, organizational management, financial health and wellbeing, and sources of community transformation in the context of our postmodern globalizing future, with particular consideration of the impact of generational dynamics on our congregations. As UU ministerial colleagues have heard the topic of my dissertation, and knew I was on sabbatical so free on Sundays, they have begun to ask me to help transform their UU congregations too. I have already done workshops or preached to two congregations in the UU Mass Bay District around their financial health and wellbeing, and I have agreed that when I return from China I will lead worship for another, and lead a workshop on generational issues in UU congregations for yet another. It is wonderful that my research, and our growing awareness of these issues in Brookline, can help many other UU churches be more successful in meeting the aspirations of their members as well.

Enter the dragon! By the time you read this I will be on my way to China to spend the next month with Taoists. They tell me that spending the first month of the year of the dragon, the most auspicious year in the Chinese zodiac, studying with Taoist masters is very auspicious indeed! Taoists say mastering the art of wu-wei, effortless doing, and learning to trust "the way things are" will be good for me. I'll let you judge for yourself when I return. I carried the well wishes of the congregation with me, in the form of a sweatshirt so many people signed on my last Sunday, into the mystical twirling of the Sufis. Now that sweatshirt will also accompany me into the mysteries of the Taoist Way. In that sense, as well as in the love I hold for you in my heart, I take you all with me on this mystical journey.

**Blessings on your journey and my prayers for you until I return, Rev. Jim**

## STAINED GLASS NEWS

February 1, 2012 was the deadline for submission of our proposal to the Cabot Charitable Trust for a Challenge grant. We are very encouraged by the enthusiastic Letters of Support that we have received from Erica Hirschler, Croll Senior Curator of American Painters at the Museum of Fine Arts, Judith Neiswander, Advocacy Coordinator at Boston Preservation Alliance, Professor Peter Fergusson from the Department of Art at Wellesley College, Marilyn Justice from the Charles J. Connick Stained Glass Foundation, and long time First Parish member, and Council member of Historic New England, Dr. John Little. Recognition from members of the wider community of the significance of our collection lends credence to the importance of our restoration and preservation efforts. We are grateful to all who have contributed financially to make our outreach to outside supporters possible.

To celebrate our progress, and yes, raise more money, we encourage one and all to join us for our Heart and Soul event, February 11 in Pierce Hall, 8 PM to midnight. DJ Bruno will provide the dance music; send us your requests for your favorites. Let's dance down those plywood panels, and buy a raffle ticket; you might win the Kindle Fire.

*Stained Glass Committee: Sheila Hussey, Chair, Chip DeWitt, Sally Dwyer, Jeff Cadow, Frank Hutchins, Susan Andrews and Skye Kramer*



First Parish  
STAINED GLASS FUND

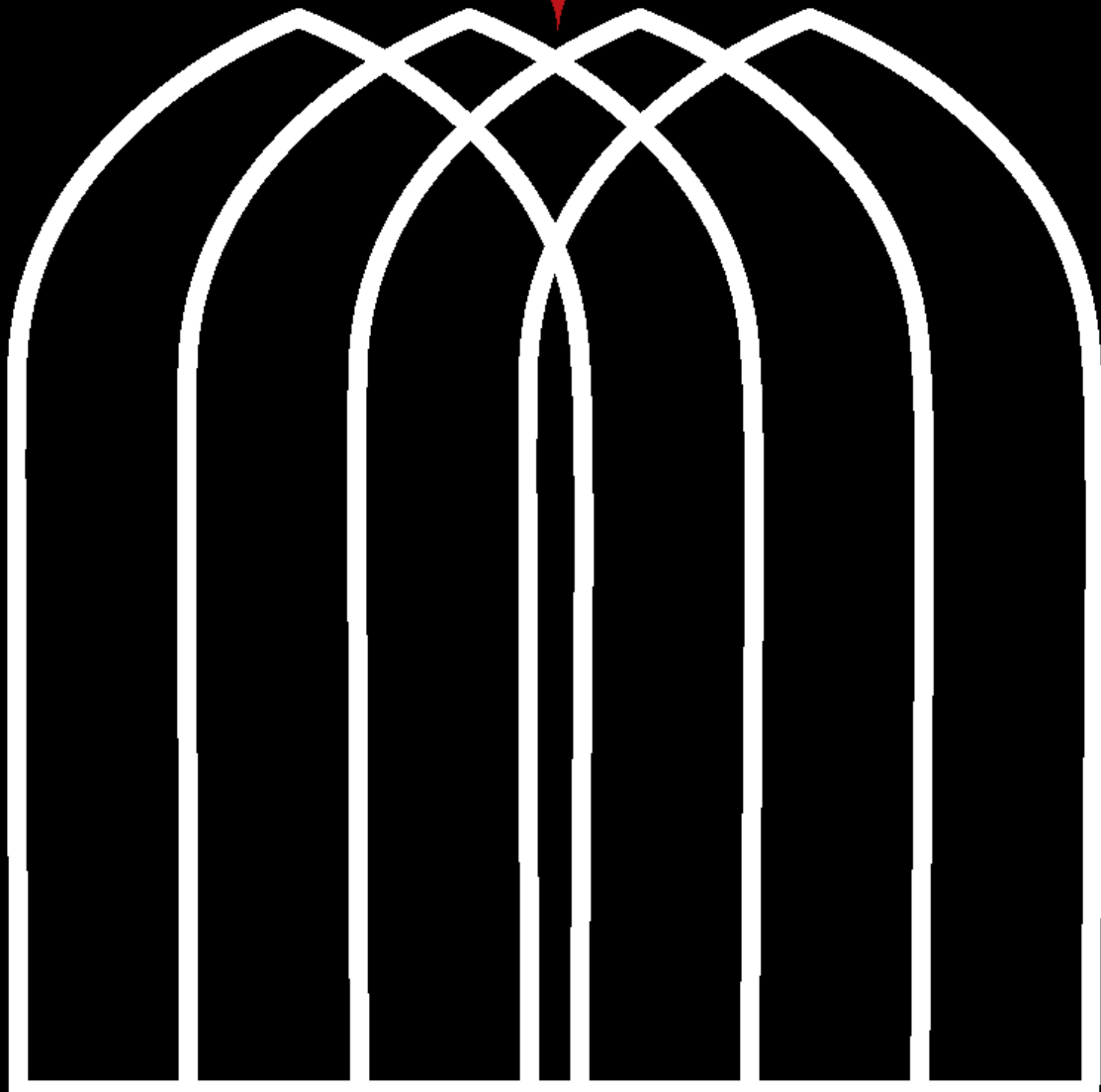
First Parish in Brookline  
382 Walnut Street Brookline  
Tickets \$25  
8:00–Midnight

February 11, 2012

Dance Music by DJ Bruno Robles  
Raffles Prizes including a Kindle Fire!

# HEART & SOUL

*Dance the night away and support the restoration  
of our historic stained glass windows.*



## WORSHIP SCHEDULE

**February 5 - Telling Our Stories: Building the Beloved Community** - As religious people, we are called to build the beloved community here on earth. What would the world be like if we treated all people as though they were beloved and precious children of God—if each person we encountered contained the spark of the divine? We begin to treat each other as beloved when we tell our stories and listen to the stories of others. Join the diversity team and Robin Barraza as we begin to weave the diverse stories of our congregation into one story—our story.

**February 12 - To Whom it May Concern: The Intimacy of Prayer** - We'll explore the life of a "kneeler in training," Etty Hillesum, as we consider the intimacy of prayer.

**February 19 - Give it up** - There are so many things that we can give up in the name of transformation. What can letting go and giving up teach us? What is a transfiguration that awaits you? What inkling of a transformation or a change of heart that might be in your tomorrow?

**February 26 - Twelve Steps of Compassion** - What are practices and principles that make compassion the center of faithful living? How might the Ten Commandments, the Eight Fold Path, and the Twelve Steps be practices and principles that guide us to open hearted living?

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## IMBOLC CELEBRATION

It seems that winter is just getting started but it is actually half way between Winter Solstice and the Spring Equinox. That calls for a celebration. Join the Worship Committee for the first ever Imbolc Celebration at First Parish. Please come to Lyons Chapel on **February 4** at **7:00 pm**. Light refreshments will be served following the ritual. Please contact Adele Munger Mathieu if you would like to help or if you have any questions.

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## NEW EXPERIMENT IN CHILD CARE

With all the comings and goings in our multigenerational congregation the need arises to provide child care for certain events so that all may participate in the activities of the church.

With this in mind, we have now scheduled regular child care twice a month until the end of the church year. This childcare will take place in the Nursery with two paid staff, and additional volunteers if needed. This will be a time for children to play together and continue to build community. There are no food or drinks provided so please make sure your child arrives with whatever they need to allow them to enjoy this time together. This service is provided free to congregants on the first Sunday of every month before church from 9:30 - 10:45 and the third Sunday after church from 12:15-1:30. The dates are:

<b>9:30 -10:45 am</b>	<b>2/5, 3/4, 4/1, 5/6, 6/3</b>
<b>12:15 -1:30 pm</b>	<b>2/19, 3/18, 4/15, 5/20</b>

If you will be taking advantage of this childcare please email Nancy Natowitz at [assist@firstparishinbrookline.org](mailto:assist@firstparishinbrookline.org) so we can plan appropriately.

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## INFORMATION ABOUT RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Information about Religious Education at First Parish is available each week at hospitality hour. Visitors, newcomers, long-timers, parents, empty-nesters, curious about growth of enrollment? Stop by the RE table where a member of the RE Committee is available to respond to questions and engage in conversation about our programs for children and youth. What is your vision for the future of RE at First Parish? Share your thoughts! Learn about volunteer opportunities!

## REBECCA'S RE-FLECTIONS

### Sharing our Stories

I recently attended a storytelling workshop with a group of DRE's and ministers and at one point the topic turned to a discussion of the Time for All Ages. There were a variety of approaches, perspectives and questions shared, but the one question that resonated with me came from a fairly new DRE who asked why we have the time for all ages at all, as she found the teachers wanted more time in the classroom with the children and felt rushed to finish the lesson plan they had prepared.

A seasoned DRE, whom I greatly admire, responded that we have the Time for All Ages because it is an opportunity to share our stories, stories of our faith and our heritage, stories with a purpose. She then shared with us a day when a beloved parishioner came up to her during social hour with a concern that the story she had told was not clear enough for children. The parishioner said that she had been watching her grandson's face and it was clear that he did not comprehend the social justice message of the story. The parishioner urged the DRE to tell more light hearted and fun stories during the Time for All Ages, and save the important messages for class time. The parishioner stated that religious instruction must take place in the classroom when the children are focused on learning, and the DRE should pay more attention to keeping the children happy during those first 15 minutes of worship.

Those of us at the storytelling workshop were on the edge of our seats waiting to hear how the DRE responded to the parishioner, but she never told us. Instead, she turned to the young DRE who had originally asked why we have a time for all ages and she responded:

*We have the Time for All Ages because it is the only time on that particular Sunday when we can be sure that everyone at church heard the same story. We have given them a starting point for a discussion. Adults during Social Hour, or parents at home around the dinner table can ask children "Why do you think they told that story today?" or "Were you as surprised by the ending as I was?" or "I'm not sure I really understood that story, can you explain it to me?"*

My own sentiments echo those of this DRE. The Time for All Ages is a chance for all of us to have a discussion about a shared story, that hopefully is rich in meaning and has many interpretations. I have never had a parishioner question why we have the Time for All Ages, but I have heard conversations during Social Hour about the story shared in the Time for All Ages, and for that I am grateful. I hope we will all continue to share our stories with one another.

**In Faith, Rebecca**

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## FROM OUR ANIMAL CAREGIVERS MINISTRY

Baby bunnies - so soft, friendly, and adorable. Six were recently surrendered at the MSPCA, where I volunteer. Oh, and their mother. Why, you might well ask? Good question...and to honor this month I'd like to offer three tips for happily loving our fellow creatures. Before you adopt a fellow animal, consider:

1. Falling in love is grand, but true, fair and enduring love includes a practical assessment: can we afford food, medical and dental care, shelter, and the occasional fun date?
2. Are we crushing or are we really in it "till death do us part?" Most animal companions will age and die before we will: are we emotionally and financially prepared to do our very best throughout the life of our friend? Can we afford pet insurance, for example?
3. Most of us wouldn't bring a stranger into our homes, but a surprising number of people bring animals they know almost nothing about (Parrots live over sixty years? Unspayed rabbits have huge litters?) into their lives and expect magic. Make sure every being in your current household is on board and informed about the species you're want to bring home.

Loving another means being responsible to and for that being: once you've made a considered choice, I hope you enjoy a rich, full life together.

All are very welcome to the following: All Creatures Worship, February 5th from 5 to 6 in Pierce Hall; Pet Loss Healing Circle on February 28th from 7 to 9 pm in Dana; SAVE THE DATE: "Refill the Well – Spiritual Practices for Animal Caregivers," The Center at Westwoods, Westwood, MA from 6:30 to 8:30 pm.

I appreciate and love my work with and from this congregation. Thank you.

**Happy Valentine's Day to you all! Rev. Eliza**

## SAVE THE DATES ... COMING SOON

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### **MINDFULNESS MEDITATION REREAT**

**at First Parish**

**"Have you noticed how Getting and Doing what you want doesn't Really make you HAPPY?"**

Our Sangha at FP will be offering a Meditation Retreat Day

**Date:** Saturday, March 3<sup>rd</sup>  
**Where:** Dana Room  
**Time:** 8:30 registration; 9am-5pm retreat (Lunch included)  
**Cost:** \$30 for all day

We will explore our lives using Mindfulness meditations and contemplations including; sitting, walking, and chanting, as well as spoken inquiry and deep listening. Open to new and experienced practitioners. Keep your eyes open for posters and signups at Sunday hospitality

Please contact Hank Reisner if you have questions

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### **THE FUTURE OF FAITH FORMATION**

**Sunday - March 11<sup>th</sup> – After Church!**

**A Congregational Conversation about Religious Education at First Parish**

Join in a conversation, sponsored by the Parish Committee and presented by the Religious Exploration Committee – an opportunity for everyone, parents or otherwise, to share your thoughts about the future of RE and learn what the RE Committee is envisioning as our enrollment grows. CHILD CARE WILL BE AVAILABLE!

Questions? Contact any member of the RE Committee: Matt Etemad-Gilbertson, Kayla Parker, Clare Reilly, Leslie Spaneas, Gene Thompson-Grove, Scott Ullrich, Laura Walters, Bob Williamson, Ann Dinsmoor, Chair.

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### **SPRING IS COMING – And so is the sign-up for 2012 CAPE COD SEA CAMPS!!**

Come one, come all to the 16th annual First Parish Cape Cod Sea Camps retreat on the bay side in Brewster – the single most fun event on the First Parish calendar and a great way to spend Memorial Day Weekend making new friends and rekindling old. It's truly community-building at its best. Our weekend at this starts Saturday, May 26, with check-in between 2 and 3 PM, and ends Monday morning, May 28, with checkout at 10 AM. Come enjoy all our traditional events, such as swimming and beach combing, softball, sunset beach singing, open mike night (all talents welcomed), a bike trip on the Cape Bike path, and Sunday lay service. For children and youth, there are great grounds for running around and making their own fun, sports facilities such as floor hockey rink and basketball courts, and of course the beach. For younger children, there are also such planned activities as rock painting and making fairy houses. For all youth, there are outings to play mini-golf or seeing a movie at the Wellfleet drive-in. In a tradition begun last year, we bring our own fixings for delicious dinners we put together ourselves Saturday and Sunday nights, making for better food and camaraderie over these meals.

Sign-ups will begin the first Sunday in March and continue through early May at the Cape Cod Sea Camps Retreat table at coffee hour. You can also sign up by contacting Mary McCarthy or Silva Cameron to sign-up via email. We hope to see you there!

## RE Calendar for FEBRUARY

<b>February 5</b>	11:00 Worship then RE Classes (Child care in Nursery beginning at 9:30am)
<b>February 12</b>	11:00 Worship then RE Classes
<b>February 19</b>	11:00 Worship then MAD Sunday Children in Sanctuary and then Pierce Hall (Child care in Nursery from 12:15 to 1:30)
<b>February 26</b>	11:00 Worship then RE Classes

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## ONGOING OPPORTUNITIES

**Book Club** - The FP Book Club normally meets the first Sunday of each month at 7:30 PM in the Peterson Room. There's no obligation or long-term commitment required to participate! If a title strikes your fancy, we'd be delighted to have you join us. If you've been especially impressed by a book and have a burning desire to discuss it with others, let us know about it. To be added to the mailing list, contact Julie Horvath.

- Next meeting **February 5<sup>th</sup>**: *The Tiger's Wife*, by Tea Obreht

**Brookline Food Pantry** - First Parish has an on-going system of contributing durable foods to the Brookline Food Pantry. Bring your food donations to the receiving rack near the Dana Room. If you are interested in helping deliver the Food Pantry items from our rack to the pantry ~1x/month: contact Ed Loechler or Leslie Spaneas.

**Caring Ministry Team** - As members of the lay pastoral care ministry we are called to be present with you, members and friends, when you wish a compassionate listening ear during times of transition and stress whatever form it might take. We support those who are adjusting to change, loss, illness or death. We share in moments of celebration and happiness. We reach out to those who are unable to get out and who would like a visit. Please contact us if we might be of help or comfort. We count on the congregation to keep us in touch with pastoral needs of our community.

\*\*\* Jean Ashland, Madeline Fine, Jon Hazilla, Hank Reisner, Mary Rogers \*\*\*

**Consider Providing Sunday Morning Flowers** – Each Sunday, in order to make our Sanctuary glow and our hospitality hour enjoyable, we need your help. Flowers for our beautiful chancel are needed for Sunday mornings. A sign-up sheet is available in the corridor outside the church office. This is a great way to reserve ahead of time for special celebratory dates and occasions.

**Meditation Group – 9:30 am – Every Sunday** - All are invited to come sit with the First Parish Sangha on Sunday mornings. There will be short sittings and shared readings (including starting with a check in, sitting for ~20 minutes, a shared reading, and then reflection). Meditation practices are from various traditions, but the basis of our Sangha is from the teachings of the Buddhist monk, Thich Naht Hahn. Readings are generally from Buddhist texts and/or spiritual poets/writers. Mindfulness, compassion, and kindness are ever present in our morning gatherings. No meditation experience is needed, instruction will be provided. Please join us before the service (take stairs near the Peterson Room and follow the signs).

**Social Action – What's Happening?** – Here's an easy way to hear what's happening on the Social Action front at First Parish – join our listserv by sending a message to [socialaction-subscribe@firstparishinbrookline.org](mailto:socialaction-subscribe@firstparishinbrookline.org) from your preferred email address. You'll hear a bit more than in the general church notices about opportunities to make a difference in our church and wider community. Also; to unsubscribe: [socialaction-unsubscribe@firstparishinbrookline.org](mailto:socialaction-unsubscribe@firstparishinbrookline.org)

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## NEXT NEWSLETTER

March Issue

Deadline for material – Friday - February 24<sup>th</sup>