

Sabbatical Handbook 2016



First Parish Church of Groton

HEARING THE CALL

RESPONDING TO THE CALL

MAKING THE WAY BY WALKING

PACKING LIGHT

CROSSING THE THRESHOLD

EMBRACING THE UNKNOWN

THE PRACTICE OF BEING UNCOMFORTABLE

BEGINNING AGAIN

COMING HOME

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Back Cover photo by Herm Raymond

Special thanks to Brenna Mayer for the Original Design and layout and for her editing work in this iteration. And to Andrew Watson Printing Company for the beautiful printing of this handbook.

Photos of children in RE activities used by permission

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*Note: The answering machine will pick up whenever the church office is closed. You will be told who to call for help with a family crisis or other emergency.

And the world cannot be discovered by a journey of miles, no matter how long, but only by A Spiritual Journey, a journey of one inch, very arduous and humbling and joyful, by which we arrive at the ground at our feet, and learn to be at home.
~ Wendell Berry ~



**FIRST PARISH CHURCH OF GROTON
UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST**

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OFFICE HOURS
Tuesday through Friday 9 am to 3 pm

SABBATICAL WELCOME

Well, here we are again. After 8 years since her previous sabbatical, Elea will be going on another sabbatical leave of absence for four months starting on January 25th through May 15th 2016. We survived and even thrived through her last one and we have no doubt that the same will be true this time.

The Sabbatical Committee has been working with Elea and Karen, our wonderful intern minister, to prepare for this important time. Karen, as official interim minister, will be with us throughout these upcoming four months on a part-time basis. For that reason, all the committees are ramping up to support her and our congregation in the continuing work of the church.

Unlike the previous sabbatical with different guest preachers each week, Karen will be preaching most Sundays. We anticipate that, having known and loved her since her arrival here last September, Karen will be a familiar and steady presence during these months.

Our theme for this sabbatical is *pilgrimage*. Elea will experience her own journey and we will have ours. This time will present a wonderful opportunity for our congregation to, once again, come together, reach out to each other, and support each other as we travel through our own pilgrimage personally and as a congregation.

Of course, we will miss Elea when she is gone and we know she will return with stories and adventures to share with us. We, too, will be able to share our own recounting of the path we have walked together, caring for each other.

We look forward to sharing the Sabbatical experience with you.

Sincerely,

The Sabbatical Committee

Pat Hartvigsen

Kathryn Ellis Moore

Amy Grosso

Peg Lorenz

Meghann Porter Marshall

FROM REVEREND ELEA KEMLER



Dearest,

How did it get to be 16 years? Thank you for the gift of this, my second sabbatical, as your minister. While it is hard to believe it has been 8 years since the last one, I do remember that Caleb and Isabel were preschoolers at the Sunshine School at the time, so it must be true. It has been a full 7.5 years, both in the life of our congregation and in my own life. I am looking forward to the chance to step away from the daily and weekly tasks of ministry in order to read, walk, cook, maybe sing with a group and do some other things I love. I hope I will be able to gather up stories, experiences, travels and new ideas to bring back to you.

During the sabbatical you will be in good hands – as you will be in the care of one another. You will also be in the care of our very capable Intern Minister, Karen Johnston, who will become First Parish's Sabbatical Minister in my absence. In just a year and a half, Karen has created deep connections with so many of you. Our children and youth trust her. She knows our congregation and has already become a minister here. We are very lucky to have her. The Sabbatical Planning Committee and Worship Committee have worked together to ensure that the church will be well served and will continue to thrive in my absence.

What will I be doing with the gift of time you have given me? The focus of my sabbatical will be community service. I will be cooking at the Neighborhood Supper Program in Maynard/Sudbury and temporarily chairing the board of Groton Community Dinners. I hope to be volunteering with an organization in Lowell called UTEC (United Teen Equality Center) whose mission is to “ignite and nurture the ambition of our most disconnected youth to trade violence and poverty for social and economic success.” For more information, visit <https://www.utec-lowell.org/>.

My travel plans include a week in Santa Rosa, CA with the kids to visit my mother and sister and her family. I will also be spending two days in Nashville, TN at Thistle Farms. Thistle Farms is a community of women who have survived prostitution, trafficking and addiction. They employ survivors through social enterprises which include a natural body care company, Thistle Stop Cafe, an artisan studio, and global marketplace called Shared Trade. Their beautiful motto is “Love Heals.” For more information visit: <http://thistlefarms.org/>.

My goal for this sabbatical time is to be a kind of spiritual pilgrim, to reach out to places and people beyond the boundaries of my usual daily life. I hope to be of some use, to serve, and to have time to reflect on those experiences. I also hope to create connections that will last beyond the sabbatical and will enrich our life as a congregation.

Of course I will miss you when I am away and I will hold you in my thoughts and prayers every day. My deep hope is that each of you will make this sabbatical time your own in some way – that you will, in the company of one another, reflect upon your own spiritual pilgrimage and how you are being transformed by the journey you are on.

Blessings,
Elea

How to Use This Handbook

We have designed this handbook to be something of a Sabbatical Reference Guide, a book to refer to throughout the Sabbatical time for answers to questions about services, other church events, what will change and stay the same, who to call and, in general, how we will carry on the business of running the church.

Ministerial Continuity provides a message from Karen our Sabbatical minister and The **Worship** section contains information on Sabbatical Worship Leaders as well as some information about our Music and volunteer opportunities.

Religious Education describes the rich programming we offer to children and youth of First Parish. **Pastoral Visitors** reminds us that we are never alone in difficult times and can easily get in touch with the Sabbatical Minister, a Pastoral Visitor or a member of the Caring Committee.

The section on **Community** reminds us of our shared responsibility to make visitors feel welcome and how people can get more involved at First Parish.

The last section, At a Glance, includes a collection of *Frequently Asked Questions* for quick answers to key questions, along with names, and email addresses of key people you may want to contact—church staff, board members, and committee chairs. Ongoing volunteer opportunities are listed here, too.

In addition to the essential information within these pages, we have included images and text that address our Sabbatical theme. We hope they will help you to welcome this time as an opportunity for spiritual awakening and renewal.

We wish to thank all committee chairs and others who generously supplied information and encouragement for producing this Handbook! Welcome to the Sabbatical time at First Parish!

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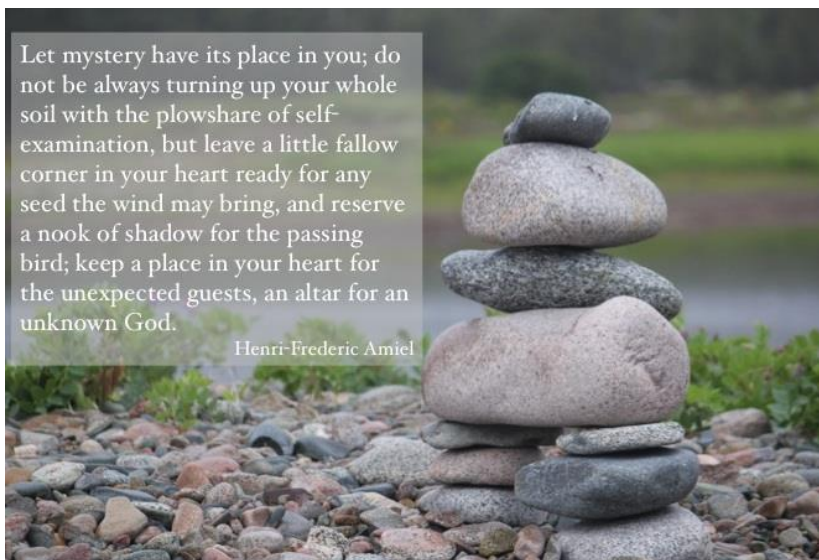
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Ministerial Continuity

Let mystery have its place in you; do not be always turning up your whole soil with the plowshare of self-examination, but leave a little fallow corner in your heart ready for any seed the wind may bring, and reserve a nook of shadow for the passing bird; keep a place in your heart for the unexpected guests, an altar for an unknown God.

Henri-Frederic Amiel

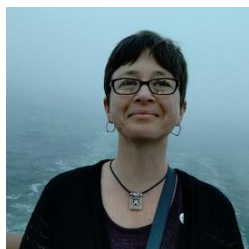


CONTINUING TOGETHER

Some of us might be able to remember when Elea took her first sabbatical eight years ago. Many of us cannot because we were not here then. We have become part of the First Parish community since that time. So what exactly is a sabbatical?

Within Unitarian Universalism, it is standard practice to grant a minister a paid sabbatical leave after seven years of service to one congregation as a way for that minister to replenish her heart, mind, and spirit. A sabbatical is not a vacation. It looks different for every minister. Some go far away. Some stay at home. Some write a book. Some get their hands dirty with something other than sermon writing. (Hopefully there is some measure of relaxation, because ministry is hard work and does not offer too many chances to rest.) When a minister goes on sabbatical by leaving, the congregation, too, goes on sabbatical, but by staying in place. There is much to be gained during this sabbatical period — a chance for a congregation to learn about spiritual lives and intentions in the absence of a beloved minister, the opportunity to exercise in a new way “muscles” of caring for one another, developing leadership, posing spiritual questions and reflecting upon them, and stepping up to tasks that might otherwise fall to the minister.

FROM OUR SABBATICAL MINISTER



Though I've been your Intern Minister since September, 2014, there may be much about me that you do not know. We all have stories that aren't necessarily apparent from our day-to-day encounters. So let me tell you a little about myself — some of it relevant, some of it random -- as we move into First Parish's Sabbatical Pilgrimage. I have studied German, French, Swedish, Swahili and Spanish. Fluent in the first, proficient when talking to three-year-olds in the last one, the other three are lost to me now. Just before coming to First Parish, I served for two years as a co-minister of a tiny rural church in the hilltowns of Western Massachusetts. For the past twenty years I have been working as a licensed clinical social worker, primarily in the field of infants, toddlers and their families, with a special focus on home visiting with teen parents. To calm my mind before falling asleep, I play Ken-Ken, which is a kind of like Sudoku on steroids. In December, I completed my Masters of Divinity — a cooperative program between Hartford

Seminary and Andover Newton Theological School. I was raised atheist. I first came into Unitarian Universalism 20 years ago. My husband is Buddhist. My brother is Jewish. One of my young adult kids identifies as UU and one falls into the “None” category. I’m an adoptive parent and raised my children both as part of a very active “Village;” to get through both the good and the complex times, I wrote (and for a brief period, performed) poetry. One of my favorite things to do is walk going about my daily business with stickers in my bag, get permission from a parent, and then let a child choose one.

I can’t tell you how thrilled and honored I am to be your sabbatical minister. I so look forward to accompanying First Parish, and each of you, during this time that offers itself up to reflection, renewal, and unknown possibilities.

ROLE OF THE SABBATICAL MINISTER

As sabbatical minister, you have hired me to work 30 hours for about four months, fulfilling a mix of tasks related to the sabbatical and to completing my internship. This is considerably fewer hours than Elea works.

Who will fill any gaps? That is one of the questions that Sabbatical Committee has been working on in the past several months. One answer is: the congregation! Lay leaders of all ilk will be stepping forward to take on tasks, as well as to support the sabbatical minister. The other answer is that I will step in. What does that look like?

Though my home and my family will still be in Northampton, this year I am renting a small apartment in Groton. During the sabbatical, I will be living here part-time, allowing me to be more present to the needs of the church.

You may see me around town more, which I look forward to. I will move my office down to the first floor to the Minister’s Study: meeting with people around pastoral concerns, attending Committee meetings, and being available for scheduled and some drop-in conversations.

Though it will be flexible from week to week, most likely I will be in Groton Sunday mornings for worship and most likely Tuesday afternoons through Thursdays for other church work. Monday will be my day of rest (responding to calls and emails will wait until Tuesday) and Friday will be my day for worship preparation, which will more likely than not find me working from my home in Florence.

During this sabbatical, I hope to be in the midst of searching for congregation I will be able to serve in the coming years. Though I will be preaching most Sundays, there will be times that I will be away.

The Sabbatical Committee, working with the Worship Committee, have developed wonderful worship opportunities for those Sundays – the details of which are elsewhere in this book.

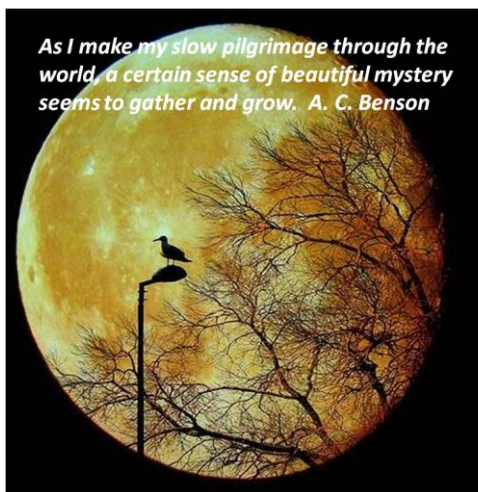
What if there is a pastoral emergency? The Pastoral Visitors and I will be in regular communication, whether I here or at my home, so that we can make sure that the congregation's needs are attended to in a tender and timely way.

What if you need to get a hold of me? My cell phone number is in the directory; it is (413) 575-7718. Feel free to call or text me – being sure to let me know who you are and how best to get ahold of you!

Or you can email me at kjohnston@uugroton.org. Using email or my cell phone number is a more reliable way to get me – better than leaving a message on my voice mail at church.



*As I make my slow pilgrimage through the
world, a certain sense of beautiful mystery
seems to gather and grow. A. C. Benson*



OUR WORSHIP LIFE

We gather together each Sunday to worship and share, during times of change and continuity. The Sabbatical period at First Parish offers us an opportunity to grow and learn with each other.

Worship Leaders

To ensure the smooth running of the Sunday worship service, whether our Sabbatical Minister, a guest preacher, or a First Parish member is in the pulpit, the Worship

*Pilgrimage to the place
of the wise is to find
escape from the flame of
separateness. ~Rumi*

Committee will continue to use our experienced Worship Leaders to support and co-lead all Sunday worship services during the Sabbatical time. We seek to ensure that all services are meaningful, with each preserving a sense of the sacred within the sanctuary and

enhancing the religious experience of all involved.

Welcoming All Committee

In opening our hearts and minds to new experiences, we also open our doors to new visitors — potential members, invited guest speakers, and others. Please remember to give a warm welcome to them all. If you are approached by a visitor regarding a Sunday service, refer them to the Worship Leader for that week. If you are approached about membership, please refer them to a Welcoming All Committee member.

*Faith is not the clinging to
a shrine but an endless
pilgrimage of the heart
~Abraham Joshua Heschel*

Volunteer Opportunities

Volunteer opportunities for the worship services still abound at First Parish — especially when the minister is away! Ushers, greeters, chalice lighters, and flower providers are needed. To sign up for any of these volunteer jobs, refer to the At a Glance Resources list.



Music and Choirs

Ideally, a human life should be a constant pilgrimage of discovery.

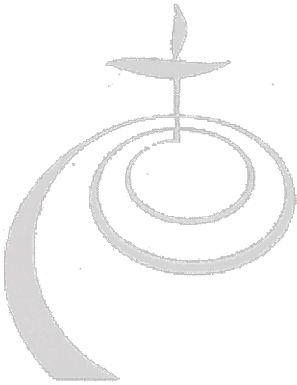
The most exciting discoveries happen at the frontiers. When you come to know something new, you come closer to yourself and the world. Discovery enlarges and refines your sensibility. When you discover something, you transfigure some of the foreshadowing of the world.

~John O'Donohue

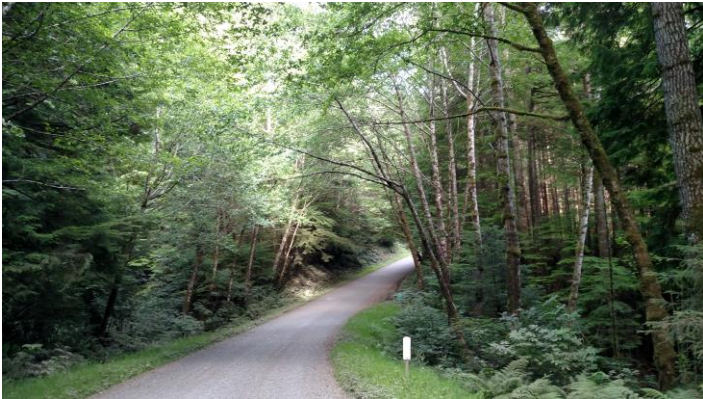
Music is one of the most inspiring parts of our services. An Adult Choir, a Youth Choir, and a Children's Choir provide music for most services. In addition, we are blessed to have a number of talented musicians in our congregation who also contribute to our services.

Adult Choir rehearsals take place on Thursdays from 7:30 – 9:30 pm in the vestry. The Children's and Youth Choirs rehearse on alternate Sundays from 11:45 am to 12:30 in the sanctuary. Each choir also rehearses at 9:00 am before services at which they sing. If you are interested in joining one of the choirs, please

contact music director Shawn McCann by email at music@uugroton.org, or see him after church.



Religious Education



EDUCATING OURSELVES

The religious education program for children and youth encourages open inquiry into the questions that life brings, respect for every individual person as well as for the Community at large and the desire to be involved with social action projects. It strives to welcome, respect, and support the individuals in the family along with the family as a whole.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Religious education for children and youth spans infants to graduating seniors, with many opportunities for involvement across ages and within age-groups, as appropriate.

Church School

Church school for preschool children through grade 5 convenes Sundays from 10:20 to 11:20 am. All children begin with their families in the church sanctuary and then are sent to their individual classes.

Nursery and Growing Times

Care for infants and babies is available in our nursery. And toddler and preschool care is available in Growing Times from 9:45 to 11:15 am each Sunday.

Middle Matters

Middle Matters, for middle-school aged youth (grades 6 to 8), is a Sunday morning program for our junior youth. It is a hands-on workshop that explores such themes as social action, neighboring faiths, and our UU principles and sources. Middle Matters youth also learn about worship elements in art, music, and ritual in preparation for a youth-led worship service in the spring.

High-School Youth

Youth in grades 9 to 12 are invited to volunteer in religious education classes during Sunday mornings. Specialized roles in childcare and coffee hour are supported by the RE Council. Youth involvement in leadership and worship roles is encouraged. The Director of Religious Education collaborates with each youth to design his or her individualized youth action plan.

Bridging Program

Youth in their final year of high school are invited to take part in the Bridging program. In this program, the Bridging Support Team meets with senior youth (Bridger's) to support developing a faith identity and

navigating upcoming transitions. Monthly small-group discussions are held with peers and the support team. Bridger's serve the lead role in the youth-led worship service and receive guidance in theme selection and sermon development.

Evening Activities

All youth are invited to engage in evening activities as well, including pizza and movie nights, youth "cons," and social action projects. Annual outreach projects include CityReach in Boston, sandwich making and delivery to local shelters, and support of the local food pantry (Loaves and Fishes). Project group leaders set the program schedule.

Coming of Age Program

The Coming of Age Program provides a substantive spiritual program for youth in transition from childhood to adolescence. This program runs every other year, with the current session running from the fall of 2015 to the spring of 2016.

Our Whole Lives Program

Our Whole Lives (OWL) is a human sexuality program created by the UUA for teens in 7th to 9th grade. OWL is an excellent program that integrates sexuality education and values from the perspective of our Unitarian Universalist community. Youth learn about sexuality in a positive, supportive atmosphere. Facilitators from the Groton, Harvard, Hudson, Littleton, and Stow/Acton UU churches teach the program. All facilitators have completed an official OWL training course. Overview of the Our Whole Lives Program: The OWL program is written for seventh to ninth-graders and is part of an "all ages" UU curriculum concerning human sexuality education. It is important to provide our youth with accurate, timely information about sexuality and to help them strengthen their values at this important time in their lives. Contact DRE Liz Davis-Chaffin for details.

Religious Education Committee

Intergeneration Worship Working Group

Monica Smyth, Danika Garner, Gerri Harter, Meghann Marshall

Religious Education Council

Meghann Marshall, Renee Brunelle, Sherry Spaulding, Donnie Funch

ONGOING ADULT PROGRAMS

In addition to workshops and other events, First Parish offers many ongoing programs for adults that will continue during the Sabbatical period.

Small Group Ministry

Small group ministry at First Parish Church of Groton, and many other Unitarian Universalist churches, is about fulfilling two human hopes — for deep connection, where we can be truly known and accepted for who we are, and for spiritual exploration, time to reflect on issues of profound significance in our lives.

People gather in groups of 6 with two co-coaches to talk, listen, think and share thoughts and feelings about some of life's most important questions. Groups are structured and focused to allow people to go deeper — within ourselves, in our connections to one another, and in our understanding of what is sacred.

*A voice comes to your soul
saying, Lift your foot. Cross
over. Move into emptiness of
question and answer and
question.
~Rumi*

Friday Art Group

ART & Brown Bag Lunch Open Studio Fridays First & Third Fridays of Every Month from 11:30-1:30pm come join us in the Parish House Great Room the 1st and 3rd Fridays of each month to work on those art projects you've been meaning to make time for. Kindly bring your lunch; tea will be available. We follow a modified form of the Small Group Ministry format: lighting a chalice and reading opening/closing inspirational words and checking in by sharing whatever we're currently working on. Our intention is to create art in community and have fun. Materials are available if you have no current project or want ideas. Conversation encouraged and all ages welcome. Contact Lindy Hanninen for more information or questions at 978-448-6741(H); or email: lhanninen@verizon.net.

Healing Conversations: Small Group for those grieving the death of a loved one or experiencing a major life loss

Healing Conversations is a small group specifically for those who are moving through grief of the death of someone they love or

experiencing a major life loss. The small group will gather to share stories and experiences, to learn about the grief process and to talk about what it means to move toward healing. This group is for those who are in a season of grief. Some of the questions we will explore together are: What is this thing called grief? How have things shifted in my life? How do I take care of myself? The next one will be held in April 2016, please contact Pamela Worden pamelaworden@gmail.com for more details.

Storytelling for Grownups

True stories, told live. Come listen, laugh, cry. Storytellers share tales large and small, funny and sad, in a coffeehouse-style setting, borrowing from THE MOTH tradition of storytelling. New storytellers are always welcome. For more information contact Sarah Iacobucci at: sarah.iacobucci@gmail.com. The next story night is Saturday April 2, 2016.

Racial Justice Working Group

The purpose of the newly formed Racial Justice Working group is to learn, grow and take action for racial justice. The group will be offering opportunities for the congregation to join this important work in the spring so please watch your newsletters and weekly emails for details. Contact Person: Owen Shuman oshuman@gmail.com



Pastoral Care

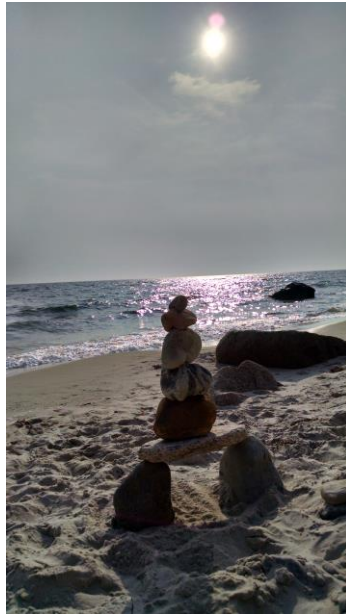


*Resolve to be always beginning – to be
a beginner!*

~Rainer Maria Rilke

CARING AMONG OURSELVES

Elea's Sabbatical provides us with an opportunity to increase our awareness and participation in caring for one another. While we already do so, the Sabbatical will help us define more intentionally the ways in which we will support this important work. It is our hope that our more focused efforts will extend well beyond the actual Sabbatical time—it will become part of the way we always care for and support each other.



CARING COMMITTEE

The role of the Caring Committee will remain the same during Elea's Sabbatical. It will continue to concentrate its work on providing for the real and tangible needs of the congregation, including preparation and delivery of meals, transportation to appointments, and sending cards and making supportive phone calls. Each month throughout the year, two committee members serve as coordinators of caring activities. Look for their names and phone numbers in the Sunday Order of Service announcements, the weekly online NNO newsletter, and the monthly mailed newsletter.



The Pilgrim heart seeks a peacefulness of belonging that is also a restlessness. It may feel anything but peaceful. The paradox is that there is no soul-peace that is not also unrest; there is no family that does not include strangers; there is not true home that is not a world-home.

~Sarah York



PASTORAL VISITORS TEAM

The role of the Pastoral Visitors Team will be to assist Karen Johnston our Sabbatical Minister in supporting members of the congregation during times of immediate crisis, illness and recovery, and occasions when longer-term assistance and follow-up may be needed. The Team will take their direction from Karen who will help prioritize and delegate pastoral visitor responsibilities, as appropriate. The Pastoral Visitors Team will include a number of people from within the congregation who, with training, have agreed to participate in this work. Similar in structure to the Caring Committee the name and phone number of the Pastoral Visitor Team contact for each month will be announced in the Sunday Order of Service announcements, the weekly online NNO newsletter and the monthly mailed newsletter.



*We travelers, walking to the sun, can't see
Ahead, but looking back the very light
That blinded us shows us the way we came,
Along which blessings now appear, risen
As if from sightlessness to sight, and we,
By blessing brightly lit, keep going toward
That blessed light that yet to us is dark.
~Wendell Berry*



Community



*One day Alice came to a
fork in the road and saw
a Cheshire cat in a tree.
“Which road do I take?”
she asked. “Where do you
want to go?” was his
response. “I don’t know”
Alice answered. “Then,”
said the cat, “it doesn’t
matter.”*

~Lewis Carroll

WELCOMING ALL COMMITTEE

The Welcoming All Committee (formerly known as the *Membership Committee*) encourages and welcomes visitors! They communicate the work and resources of the church to the greater community. They organize the greeting aspect of Sunday worship. They also run the Connection to Community classes for newcomers. They also organize the Bring a Friend and New Member Sundays. They work to make newcomers feel connected and find what they are seeking at First Parish.

WELCOMING VISITORS

Thanks to the Welcoming All Committee, throughout the year newcomers to First Parish are warmly greeted at the entry doors and encouraged to sign our Guest Book and fill out nametags to wear to the Sunday service upstairs in the sanctuary. Ushers at the sanctuary doors provide Orders of Service and help visitors find empty seats in the pews. Committee members are always present at Fellowship Hour in the vestry immediately after each service to welcome visitors and answer questions about First Parish. And the custom of blue mugs will continue, where those who are newer to our congregation are encouraged to choose a dark blue mug at the coffee and tea table to signify that they are new (or “newish”) and would like to introduce themselves.

JOINING THE CHURCH

Several times a year the Welcoming All Committee hosts informational meetings and **Connecting to Community** classes for prospective members. These will continue during the Sabbatical time, led by members of the committee and other church leaders. Newcomers and regular visitors considering joining First Parish in the spring of 2016 can speak directly with Welcoming All Committee chair about coming to these sessions.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Volunteer service is the very foundation of congregational life at First Parish, connecting us to one another as we seek more ways to care for each other and to be a blessing to the world. During the Sabbatical time, as during the rest of the church year, the Worship Committee will make all visitors, especially newcomers, aware of the many ways to be of service, from ushering and chalice lighting to singing in the choir.

See the sections in this handbook on Worship, Religious Education, and Pastoral Visitors Team to find out more about how volunteers are helping in our church community. Check the At a Glance section for descriptions of many volunteer activities and contact information for all church committees. Check also the web pages for Music, Religious Education, and Social Action on our church website, www.uugroton.org, for specifics on volunteering in those areas.

*And You? When will you
begin that long journey into
yourself?
~Rumi*





Administration and Communications

*All journeys have secret destinations of
which the traveler is unaware.*

~Martin Buber



STAYING CONNECTED

There are many administrative activities that keep First Parish running smoothly on a day-to-day basis. In addition, various print and electronic means of communication keep us informed and current on services, meetings, and happenings in each other's lives and in the larger UU world. Both areas are vital to a vibrant, connected church community.

ADMINISTRATION

The church office has always been the busy hub of church business and will continue to be so during the Sabbatical time. The church office is located in the Parish House and is the place to call with questions about church life, from simple matters to serious emergencies. Office hours are Tuesday through Friday, 9 am to 3 pm. When the office is closed, the answering machine is on and will give you the name and phone number of the person on call for emergencies or further information.

During the Sabbatical time, there will always be a church leader on call who you can reach through the office phone number (978-448-6307).

Julie Skowranek, our Church Office Administrator (978-448-6307; jskowranek@uugroton.org), is the first contact for information and scheduling arrangements for major life events, such as weddings, child dedications, and funerals and memorial services. She is also the person to contact about all other uses of church facilities—from reserving the Great Room for a committee meeting to renting the vestry for a family birthday party. Julie maintains the Church Calendar—the official paper version, or master calendar, that is posted on the wall behind her desk and in the vestry entryway as well as the electronic version updated weekly on our church website and often reprinted in our monthly mailed newsletter. *Please give all calendar information—either changes or new dates—directly to Julie in person, by phone, or by email. Do not write anything on the master calendar yourself.*

COMMUNICATIONS

Communications within our church community include the weekly e-mail message, the monthly print newsletter, the order of service for each Sunday service, and the church website.

News, Needs, and Opportunities

The weekly email message News, Needs, and Opportunities (NNO) will continue throughout the church year. It includes messages from the church staff and church committees as well as reminders of upcoming events. Articles are due no later than Thursday at 12 noon each week. Please send your article to our Office Administrator (office@uugroton.org). To keep the NNO short and easy to read online, we are asking that you please follow these guidelines: Keep submissions short — between 100 and 250 words. Identify the submission as an event, an announcement, or related to a committee, RE, a classified ad, etc. Clearly list the name of your event, the day and date, and where it is taking place as well as a contact name, email, and phone number. Non-church-related community events will run as there is room. Listings, including ads, will run no more than 2 to 3 weeks.

Monthly print newsletter

The print newsletter, mailed each month to all members and friends of First Parish, will continue as usual, with Karen writing Elea's "View from my Window" column during the Sabbatical time. As always, Julie will gather all submissions and prepare the pages. Reminders of the due dates for submitting copy to the church office (by email, on disk, or handwritten) will be posted in the usual places.

*I long for You so much I have even begun to
travel where I have never been before.
~Hafiz*

Sunday Order of Service

Announcements included with the Sunday Order of Service are drawn from the NNO, the weekly email message sent out from the minister's office (see above). Elea usually prepares the Order of Service, with input from our Music Director Shawn McCann and the Worship Leader. During the Sabbatical time, preparation of each Sunday Order of Service will be handled by a Worship Leader and Karen or the guest minister for that Sunday. Julie will continue to prepare and assemble the Orders of Service each week in time for the ushers to distribute on Sunday mornings.

Website

Augmenting all these communications is our church's website: www.uugroton.org. The website serves not only as our electronic voice to the world, telling the public where we are and what our services are like, it contains our Bylaws, current and archived church news, and the monthly Church Calendar. The Members Only section contains electronic versions of recent issues of NNO and the mailed newsletters, sound recordings of a number of recent Sunday worship services, and our Church Directory of active members and friends, with phone numbers, addresses, and email addresses. (This directory is updated many times over the course of a year.) A new webpage on the website called "Sabbatical" will be regularly updated to keep us posted on the latest happenings during Elea's Sabbatical time. If you need the password for the Members Only section, contact our webmaster, Keith Dawson (kdawson@uugroton.org).

Other Sources

Other places to consult and gather up information about aspects of First Parish church life are the bulletin boards in the vestry and the entry to the vestry. Also, in the pew racks in the sanctuary and on the table on the vestry stage and the buffet in the entry, you will find an assortment of brochures and pamphlets on church matters.

If you would like transcripts of sermons preached during the Sabbatical time, please ask Julie or go to www.uugroton.org (under Minister).



At a Glance



*People travel to wonder
at the heights of
mountains, at huge
waves of the sea, at the
long courses of rivers, at
the vast compass of the
ocean, at the circular
motion of the
stars...and they pass by
themselves without
wondering.
~St. Augustine*

A QUICK LOOK

If you have searched the handbook but still need answers or need to get answers fast, take a glance at this section. We hope you will find the answers you seek.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is a Sabbatical?

A Sabbatical is a time of rest, based on the creation story of the Hebrew Bible in which God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh day — the day of Sabbath. This developed into the concept of a Sabbatical Year, which is explained in several places in the Hebrew Bible. The Biblical Sabbatical Year has two dimensions: It is a year during which farmland in Israel has to remain uncultivated and debts owed to individuals are forgiven. In the UU tradition, congregations give their ministers Sabbatical time roughly every seven years.

Why a Sabbatical for the minister?

Our congregation's agreement with Elea stipulates that "The Minister shall be eligible for a Sabbatical Leave after four years of continuous service to the Church. Sabbatical Leave shall accrue at the rate of one month for each year served. Leave may be taken at any time, subject to the approval of the Executive Committee. Full compensation shall continue during any Sabbatical Period." Elea will be taking four months of Sabbatical Leave, from mid-January through mid-May 2016.

Sabbaticals are widely taken by UU ministers, recognizing that the work of ministry can be intense and its daily requirements often take priority over reading, writing, research, and time for reflection, prayer, travel, family, and rest. Yet these are things which ultimately sustain a minister in the work of ministry. So a Sabbatical can be seen as an investment in the future — a way to keep the minister and the relationship between minister and congregation vital and healthy for the long term.

How does the congregation benefit from the Sabbatical?

During the Sabbatical, the congregation has the opportunity to reflect on the same themes and topics that Elea will be reflecting on during her time away. (For the Sabbatical themes, see the inside front cover.) We believe we will benefit individually and as a congregation from delving deeper into the idea of pilgrimage and being a pilgrim. The church leaders, committees and groups, and members and friends all have the chance to become stronger in supporting one another and taking leadership in the congregation.

Could the minister decide to resign during or immediately after the end of the Sabbatical?

Could the minister be fired during the Sabbatical?

No. According to the agreement between First Parish and Elea, “the Minister agrees to complete one full year of service following any Sabbatical Leave.” In addition, the Executive Committee (comprised of the Chair of Trustees, the Senior Deacon, and the Chair of the Leadership Development Committee) understands and will abide by the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association’s recommendation that “there will be no action on ministerial tenure during a sabbatical period.” In other words, a Sabbatical is not an ending – it is time away from active ministry. Elea plans to return to First Parish and we plan to keep her as our minister.

How will the church operate without the minister? Will things fall apart?

We are delighted that Karen Johnston will be working with us as our Sabbatical Intern Minister. She will be holding regular weekly office hours and preaching during the Sabbatical time. She will also be easily reachable by telephone and email.

While it will be a unique and different year, there are many important aspects of life at First Parish that will stay the same and we expect things to run quite smoothly during the Sabbatical. You will still receive the weekly News, Needs and Opportunities email and a monthly print newsletter. Sunday morning services, church school, and youth programs will still happen every week. Important programs like Coming of Age will still be offered. Our many committees will still meet and accomplish an amazing amount of work to manage the church and guide us to fulfill our vision to take care of one another and be a blessing to the world. And as always, your participation will make a difference in all that we do.

What if something bad happens to me or my family during the Sabbatical and I need a minister?

The Sabbatical Minister will handle all the same types of emergencies and pastoral needs that Elea usually does. Her contact information will be widely published. When in doubt, call the church office. Karen will be available to meet with you, visit you or your loved one in the hospital, and offer support and counsel.

In addition, the Pastoral Visitors Team will work closely with the Sabbatical Minister to support members of the congregation during times of immediate crisis, illness, and recovery and to help those who may need longer-term support. The Caring Committee will continue to provide cards, supportive phone calls, meals, and transportation to appointments to those in need, as usual.

Will we be in communication with the minister while she is on Sabbatical?

With rare exceptions, no. The relationship between minister and congregation is changed during the Sabbatical. Elea will not stop being the minister of First Parish during the Sabbatical or stop caring about us of course, but she will be stepping away from the congregation during this time. Karen, Liz, Julie, Shawn, other staff, and the members and friends of the congregation will be tending to the regular needs of our church until Elea returns. Members of the congregation should not call Elea at home during the Sabbatical, and she will not be reading or responding to church emails, Facebook, etc. during this time.

But what if we run into her at the supermarket or drugstore?

Given the small size of the greater Groton community, it is certainly possible you will run into Elea and her family during the Sabbatical period. If you run into Elea, feel free to stop and chat. It will help Elea to stay focused on her Sabbatical goals if we all remember to refrain from sharing church news with her when we see her. However, please do note that Elea's daughter Isabel still plans to attend church on a regular basis, so please feel free to speak with her when you see her.

RESOURCES

Contacts

You will find here names, phone numbers, and email addresses for church staff, governing boards, and chairpersons of key committees. For a detailed listing of all church committees, descriptions of their activities, and names of current committee members, look in the Members section of the church website, www.uugroton.org.

Church Staff

Minister, Rev. Elea Kemler	978-448-5106 minister@uugroton.org
Intern Minister, Karen G. Johnston	413-575-7718 (cell) kjohnston@uugroton.org
RE Director, Liz Davis-Chaffin	978-448-6307 LIZ@uugroton.org
Music Director, Shawn McCann	978-433-7922 (home) music@uugroton.org
Office Administrator, Julie Skowranek	978-448-6307 jskowranek@uugroton.org
Office Assistant, Debby Smith	978-448-6307 assistant@uugroton.org
Sexton, Joe Spencer	978-877-8173 (cell) uugrotonsexton@gmail.com
Bookkeeper, Maryanne Squeglia	978-448-6307 bookkeeper@uugroton.org

Church Officers

Moderator, Kurt Staven	978-501-2173
Treasurer, Paul Funch	978-448-2813
Asst. Treasurer, Eric Marshall	978-621-7880
Clerk, Ellen Brandt	978-448-3053

Board of Trustees

Chair, Gregg Baker	978-448-3847
Jay Lawrence	978-448-9506
Mary Jennings	978-448-5381

Board of Deacons

Steve Lieman	978-448-2223
Owen Shuman	978-448-5050
Steve Boczenowski	978-448-5013

Leadership Development Committee

Chair, Krista Ingram
Bernadette Dureault

Executive Committee

Reverend Elea Kemler
Gregg Baker (Board of Trustees)
Krista Ingram (Leadership Chair)

Endowment Fund

Carol Swift
Tim Svarczkopf
Nancy Kates

Ministerial Fund

Chair, David Eliades
Thomas Crow
June Johnson

Religious Education Staff and Programs

Intergeneration Worship Working Group – Danika Garner
Religious Education Council – Meghann Marshall
Coming of Age – Kathryn Ellis-Moore

Archives Preservation Committee

Steve Burne
Rev. George Downey
Pat Lawrence
Barbara Murray
Edythe Saltzman

Building and Grounds Committee

Jim Moisson
Allen King
Richard Muehlke
Terri Ragot
Rich Sheridan

Don Torgersen

Caring Committee

Paula Bogdanoff

Laura Lundberg Donovan

Holly Durkin

Cathy Gilson

Deb Kelly

Alison Manning

Judy Nauman

Donna Nowak

Maryellen Owen

Jennifer Peterson

Carol Swift

Carol Sarasin

Committee on Ministry

Steve Burne

Lindy Hanninen

David Kimpton

Barbara Rich

Coming of Age

RE Council

Finance Committee

Paul Funch

Marcel Kates

David Hill

Edythe Saltzman

Flower and Gardening Committee

Carol Swift

Eleanor Bond

Alison Dolear

Hatzy Hornblower

Sarah Iacobucci

Furnishings and Décor Committee

Terri Ragot

Gail Burne

Rev. George Downey

Deborah O'Rourke

Don Torgerson

Mental Health Working Group

Rebecca Pike
Deb and Steve Boczenowski
Cyrus Comminos
Valerie Eaton
Fritz Eberle
Andrea Forsmo
Alicia Hersey
Elizabeth Hinkleman
Christine Logan
Maryellen Owen
Greg and Kathy Reiff
Joan Wheeler

Old Groton Meeting House Advisory Committee

Steve Lieman
Eric Fisher
David Gordon
Allen King
Michael Roberts

Pastoral Visitors Team

Peg Lorenz
Barb Rich
Judy Nauman
Lauren Tellier
Marianne McCarthy
Zoann Guernsey

Racial Justice Working Group

Steve Boczenowski
June Johnson
Karen Johnston
Holly Estes
Sarah Iacabucci
Jack Wool
Susan Hughes
Edythe Saltzman
Owen Shuman

Renewal of Giving

Steve Boczenowski
Andrea Mason
Steve Lieman
Susan Randazzo

David Webb

Small Group Ministry

Kathryn Ellis Moore, Ginny Koslow – co-chairs

Internship Committee

Gregg Baker

David Gordon

Pat Hartvigsen

Andy Peterson

Barbara Rich

Technology Committee

Keith Dawson

David Hill

Jay Lawrence

Rocky Sandy

Stuart Schulman

Michael Vine

Welcoming All Committee

Sarah Iacabucci

Pat Lawrence

Judy Nauman

Deb Boczenowski

Susan Epting

Tom Rooney

Worship Committee

Lorretto Rooney

Irv Rockwood

Deb Kelly

Church Website

Keith Dawson

Volunteer Opportunities

Volunteer service connects us to one another and our mission to be of service to our church and the wider community. We welcome your participation during this Sabbatical time as we seek more ways to care for one another and be a blessing to the world. For more information about any of the activities described here, please call or email the church office (978-448-6307; office@uugroton.org) or call or email one or more of the church leaders listed above under Contacts. Also check out the church website, www.uugroton.org. It has a wealth of resources to help you get involved.

Building Maintenance and Decor

Our Buildings and Grounds Committee provides maintenance and upkeep of church buildings and grounds. Volunteer church checkers inspect all buildings every night (a one-week commitment twice a year) throughout the year. Interior furnishing and decor of our church buildings is seen to by the Furnishings and Décor Committee, which renovates interior spaces and keeps records of acquisitions and restoration, repair, replacement, or disposal of furnishings.

Music and Choir

The Children's Choir, Youth Choir, and Adult Choir, led by Music Director Shawn McCann, are open to all who can make the time commitment, can carry a tune, and have a sense of humor. Each choir rehearses once per week and performs monthly or more often during Sunday services and occasionally for special programs. Instrumentalists and vocalists from the church community often provide music during worship services.

Religious Education

The children's religious education program, including Nursery Care, offers many ways to help, from co-teaching a class to teaching one lesson during the church year. Parents of children in the RE program are encouraged to volunteer their time in some form each year but all church members and friends are encouraged to give time to the RE program. Experience is not necessary.

Ushering and Greeting

Each Sunday morning, volunteer greeters at the door welcome you to the worship service. In the sanctuary, ushers pass out the Order of Service, direct people to seats in the pews, and collect the offering.

Caring Committee

Traditionally churchgoers take responsibility for the well-being of all members of their church community. The First Parish Caring Committee would welcome your help in supporting those in the congregation who are experiencing life-changing events, such as serious illness, a new baby, or a death in the family. Volunteers provide transportation, groceries and prepared meals, cards, flowers, and visits.