



Welcoming Guide

First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church 2 Westford Street

Chelmsford, MA 01824

www.uuchelmsford.org

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Welcome to the First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church in Chelmsford.

The Membership Committee created the following guide as a resource for all newcomers to First Parish. Our goal is to introduce you to the congregation, answer many common questions, and to provide important information toward fulfilling involvement in our community.

The guide describes what defines us as a faith community, how we are governed and operate, and gives a summary of our history. It also contains a listing of our various committees, organizations and activities. Please take time to read it thoroughly. If there are any activities or organizations that particularly appeal to you, consider joining them. We can supply you with contact names for all major activities and committees here at First Parish.

Please remember this guide is not the sole reference. The best way to learn about the congregation is to speak to the members. Any member of the Membership Committee will welcome your questions and provide you with additional information.

Sincerely,

The 2015-2016 Membership Committee of First Parish:

Tracy Clifford
Jim Curley, Co-chair
Emma Buckley
Rose Lerer, Clerk
Theresa Popoloski
Chris Sweetnam
Neil Harmon, Co-chair

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Overview

First Parish is a liberal religious community of approximately 220 parishioners and 100 children and youth, with diverse interests and backgrounds. Children and youth often attend all or part of the Sunday service, and then are encouraged to attend religious education classes held in the religious education wing of the church. Childcare for children younger than three is also available during this time.

Church activities expand beyond Sunday morning to include evening adult education, adult and intergenerational social activities, social action projects and fund raising events. Although more information on these events is provided later in this brochure, the single most important way to stay informed of these opportunities is to make sure that you are on our mailing list to receive our monthly newsletter, "The Shooting Star." Newcomers who sign the visitor's book will receive the "Shooting Star" for six weeks, if they request it. Church members and friends who contribute at least \$45 annually, which covers the cost of the publication, will continue to receive the printed newsletter; the email version is free to all. Weekly announcements are distributed with the Order of Service on Sundays. The website is also an excellent source of information.

What Kind of Church is First Parish?

First Parish is a liberal religious community. No singular creed or doctrine is espoused. Instead, we covenant to affirm and promote the seven Unitarian Universalist Principles. We are encouraged to seek our own truths and to take our individual journeys toward spiritual growth in the companionship of fellow seekers. We honor the truths in all of the world's religions. We respect both ancient and modern teachers - the Hebrew Prophets, Jesus, Buddha, Martin Luther King, Gandhi, and important philosophical and humanitarian thinkers. We strive for a world community founded on ideals of human kinship, justice and peace. We encourage cooperation among people of goodwill in every land, and we encourage respectful relationship with our natural environment.

We are a member congregation of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), 24 Farnsworth Street, Boston, MA and the Clara Barton District (CBD) of the UUA. The UUA and the district directories, with more information about other congregations, our district, and our UU movement, are available in the church office and on the web at www.uua.org.

The Seven Unitarian Universalist Principles

We covenant to affirm and promote:

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person
- Justice, equity and compassion in human relations
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our

congregations

- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning
- The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all
- Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

The Living Tradition We Share Draws From Many Sources

- Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces that create and uphold life;
- Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love;
- Wisdom from the world's religions which inspire us in our ethical and spiritual life;
- Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves;
- Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit;
- Spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

Our History

This religious society began as the Church of Christ in Wenham, MA in 1644. At the request of the early settlers, Minister Rev. John Fiske moved most of his congregation to Chelmsford, MA to establish First Parish in 1655. As the first, and for many years the only, church in Chelmsford, First Parish shares a history inextricably connected with that of the town. For nearly 200 years the Chelmsford town meeting and the First Parish meeting were one and the same. It was not until 1831 that the church elected officers distinct from town officials. The present building is the fourth on the same site. In the first meetinghouse, a committee of citizens seated people according to age, rank, and estate. In 1712, the second meetinghouse was erected and privately owned pews began to supersede benches.

Built in 1792, the third church burned down on the evening of February 13, 1842 and was replaced by the present structure. At that time the Universalists joined the Unitarians to form United Parish - more than a century before the 1961 continental merger that resulted in the Unitarian Universalist Association. By the 1870's, First Parish had evolved into a primarily Unitarian Society. The town built the brick basement that was used as a town hall until 1880. The present Sunday school, office area, and chapel were built at the rear of the building in 1956.

Our Covenant

We, the members of First Parish of Chelmsford, covenant together
to sustain and support our beloved community by:
Honoring and celebrating the Spirit of Life
Nurturing all souls in our search for truth and the sacred
Caring and being present to one another in our joys and sorrows
Bearing witness through service to justice and peace
And being good stewards of our congregation, our heritage, our Unitarian Universalist
Principles, and our earth.

Covenant is at the heart of Unitarian Universalism. Our Principles and Purposes are the covenant that binds all of our individual Unitarian Universalist congregations together. In our tradition, we do not gather around a creed, or a set of stated right beliefs that one must adhere to in order to be accepted into membership of the congregation or church. Rather, we gather around covenant or the promises we make, after discussion, about how we wish to walk together in religious and spiritual community. Individuals make the choice to freely enter into covenant with one another and the congregation as a whole, to make and receive the commitments offered therein.

As Rebecca Parker wrote, "The words of a covenant are the icing on the cake. The true covenant is the one we live, the one we practice. Part of the covenantal process will be to keep having the conversation. This covenant is not meant to stand for all time. It takes the central practice of our tradition— covenant or promise-making —and puts it into our own words. Our hope is that we revisit our covenant every few years or so, to ensure that it is indeed part of an on-going conversation and expression of who we are now and in the generations to come."

Our Services

After Labor Day to mid-June:

- 10:00 a.m. in the sanctuary and 5:30 p.m. in the chapel.
- Religious education for children and youth runs concurrently with 10:00 services.
- A nursery is provided during the service for children younger than three years of age. There is no charge for this service.

Morning Services are held in the sanctuary and conducted by the minister. Special services are also led by guest ministers or lay leaders. On most Sundays children and youth begin in the sanctuary with their families, and then proceed to their religious education classes. Occasionally they begin in the Chapel or their classrooms. Please look for signs, posted each week, advising where children and youth convene.

Evening services are held in the chapel and are led by the minister in a less formal atmosphere. Held in a circle, they emphasize reflection, ritual and meditation more appropriate to smaller, more intimate worship. Music for the evening service is provided by members and friends, and is a source of centering.

Mid-June to Labor Day:

- Shorter, informal lay-led services, 9:00 a.m. in the Chapel
- No Religious Education Classes; no nursery.

Name Tags are Important

We want to welcome and get to know everyone so we ask that all wear a name tag. A sign-up sheet for permanent name tags, as well as materials for creating temporary ones, can be found on the table in the narthex, to the right as you enter the sanctuary. Those picking up new permanent name tags for the first time will find them on the table near the sign-up sheet. You do not need to be a member to have a permanent nametag.

If you are not attending Social Hour, please replace your name tag alphabetically on the board in the narthex. If attending Social Hour, please place your name tag in the basket on the vestry stairs near the elevator (the vestry is the social hall downstairs); it will be returned to the name tag rack.

Rites of Passage

At First Parish we celebrate rites of passage. We have services of dedication for infants and children. We offer the Coming-of-Age program and the Bridging Service to recognize and celebrate the transition of our youth into adulthood. We welcome new members and celebrate long-time members. The minister officiates at weddings and memorial services. Please contact the minister with questions and scheduling of these services.

Choirs

A Bell Choir and four regular Vocal choirs perform under the direction of Steve Zocchi.

Meetinghouse Ringers

Meetinghouse Ringers is the First Parish Hand Bell Choir. It is open to people high school-age and older. Music reading ability is expected of new members. Rehearsals are on Wednesday evening from 7:00 – 8:30 PM.

Senior Choir

Senior Choir, for High School-age and older, is one of the church's longest-running small group ministries. If you like to sing in a group, try us on for size. We rehearse on Thursdays from 7:30-8:45 PM, and warm-up for church at 9:15 on Sundays. Music reading, while helpful, is not required. We really are a fun group. If you have any questions about choir, please ask Music Director Steve Zocchi or any choir member.

Intermediate Choir

The Intermediate Choir is a mixed choir (SAB) for seventh grade through college (seventh and eighth graders must also sing in the Junior Choir). Rehearsals are on Sundays from 12:15 to 1:15 PM, unless otherwise indicated.

Junior Choir

The Junior Choir is a treble choir (unchanged voices), and welcomes ALL children in grades 3 through 8. You do NOT need to know how to read music, or have any prior singing experience. Rehearsals are after church – 11:15-12:15 PM. Second graders who have sung in the Carol Choir, who can read both music and English well, and who can participate fully in a 45 minute rehearsal may be invited to join the Junior Choir (please contact Music Director Steve Zocchi if you believe your 2nd grader fulfills these prerequisites).

Carol Choir

Carol Choir is for our youngest singers – age 3 through 2nd grade. Our Carol Choir performs at Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter. Times are announced.

Children and Youth Religious Education

Our Religious Education program encourages all parents to volunteer by teaching, being a guide, or sharing relevant interests or talents throughout the program. The Religious Education Council invites participation to carry out special activities. The RE program is held at the same time as the church service. Child care for infants and toddlers is also available in the nursery.

Goals of the Religious Education (R.E.) program include:

- Encourage the development of a Unitarian Universalist identity;
- Respect for self and others;
- Promote good works and community involvement;

- Promote respect for the natural world and the dignity of all life;
- Instill a sense of the importance of continual questioning;
- Provide meaningful worship and RE experiences;
- Create a supportive, caring and loving partnership with our UU families;
- Give a sense of worth, confidence and knowing they are beloved members of our community.

For a full description of the R.E. program with curriculum, activities, and events offered throughout the year please visit the FPC RE website: <http://www.uuchelmsford.org/re/>

Adult Religious Education

We periodically sponsor adult religious education courses and events, led by the minister or lay leaders. These could include courses or workshops on spirituality and spiritual development, Unitarian Universalist history and theology, world religions, leading worship, the Bible from the UU perspective, parenting and spirituality. Look for Adult Religious Education offerings in the *Shooting Star*. If you have a particular interest in taking or leading a course or workshop, please speak to our minister, Rev. Ellen Spero.

Small Group Ministry

Small Group Ministry provides an opportunity for parishioners to gather in small groups of seven to ten people that meet monthly to discuss a variety of spiritual, religious, and philosophical topics. The meetings follow a format – chalice-lighting and reading, check-in, reading and questions related to the session topic, discussion, and a closing reading. A facilitator moderates each group. Facilitators meet monthly with the minister for training. The sessions are developed by the facilitators. It is not intended to serve as a support group or as a substitute for worship or other church-related involvement. Contact Carlene Merrill at 978-256-7373 with questions and for additional information.

How to Find out What's Going on at First Parish

Newsletters and E-mail lists

The **Shooting Star** is the First Parish newsletter, an extremely valuable source of information published monthly. It is available in both electronic and paper format, but we encourage using the electronic format if possible to save paper and mailing costs. Please sign up on our website or call the First Parish office to receive the newsletter. Anyone may submit relevant articles for the *Shooting Star*. Articles must be submitted to Cindy Gist, the congregational administrator, at office@uuchelmsford.org by Sunday night of the week of publication. These dates are listed in the *Shooting Star* and the

monthly calendar.

The **Sunday Announcements** are available each Sunday with the *Order of Worship* or by email on the Friday preceding each Sunday's worship. To help save paper, please sign up on our website to receive these weekly emails. Anyone may submit announcements to the First Parish office by Thursday night before the requested Sunday edition.

Events Announcements including general notices and updates are sent via e-mail.

A separate **Social Action** e-mail list is kept for those interested in social action activities at First Parish and in the community.

Please sign up for any of these lists using the *Announcement Lists* link on our website. We do not automatically put anyone on any mailing lists without their request.

Websites

First Parish maintains a web site at www.uuchelmsford.org. The Unitarian Universalist Association maintains a web site at www.uua.org. We also have a Facebook page; find us at First Parish Unitarian Universalist Chelmsford. Our Twitter account is @uuchelmsford.

The Church Directory

The church directory is a list of names, addresses, phone numbers and email addresses available only to friends and members of First Parish and not to be used for anything but church or personal contact purposes. You must ask to receive or to be included in this directory by contacting the office.

How to Get Involved

The best way to become involved with the congregation is to attend worship services, talk to people at social hour, join the choir, work on our community out-reach and fund raising activities, join a Small Group Ministry group, come to social events, or attend adult education offerings.

Church Ministries

Caring about the church community, your personal spiritual growth, and concern for the health of the earth and her inhabitants will lead you to more intensive commitment. The work and functioning of the Parish is planned and organized at the committee level. Most committees have a rotating membership of two or three year terms. Committees recruit new members each spring, but people are welcome at anytime to visit and join committees with open membership. Participation is fun and creates friendships. Contact

Administrator Cindy Gist for the names of chairpersons and times when selected ministries typically meet.

First Parish offers numerous paths to spiritual fulfillment through service in such ministries as:

Outreach Ministries

- *Community Table* – Volunteers cook and serve a Sunday meal at the Lowell YMCA on a rotating schedule.
- *Faith in Action Program* – Funds social initiatives proposed by members.
- *Labyrinth* – A walking meditation or a spiritual tool, that leads to healing, self-knowledge, peace, and finding our purpose in life.
- *Mitten Tree* – R.E. project with donations distributed to homeless and battered women shelters.
- *NOLA Service Trip* – Multi-generational group of volunteers who dedicate a week of service to rebuild the well being of the residents of New Orleans.
- *Open Pantry of Greater Lowell* – Monthly collections of dry and canned goods and monetary donations for delivery to the food pantry.
- *Table of Plenty In Chelmsford, Inc.* – non-profit organization providing a weekly meal, year round for those needing nourishment or social interaction while respecting their privacy and dignity.
- *Prayer Shawl Ministry* - Sponsored by the Caring Connection, knitters and crocheters are called upon to create shawls which will be blessed by the congregation during a Sunday service and distributed to individuals, within and beyond, who are in need of emotional support.
- *Council on Faith in Action Ministry* – Coordinates all the church groups that perform social action and manages Fair Trade sales.

Fellowship Ministries

- *Game Night* – Meet on Friday evenings for fellowship and fun
- *Knitting Group* – Gathers informally to knit or crochet personal projects for annual parish fund raisers.
- *Membership* – Strives to make everyone welcome, nurtured, and integrated into the church community.
- *Music* - Works with the Music Director to support First Parish's music programs.
- *Publicity* – Develops advertisements for First Parish and its fundraisers. Manages the website.
- *Social Hour* – Manages the schedule for social hour.
- *Ushers* – Plans and provides for Ushers at each First Parish religious service.
- *Welcoming Congregation* – Promotes a more supportive, inclusive environment in our church for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities.
- *Women's Alliance* – Open to men as well as women, this group hosts social and educational programs, and performs service projects.

- *Women's Discussion Group* – Topics of interest to women are shared and discussed monthly in member homes.
- *Worship* – Coordinates lay led services and is an advisory group for the minister.
- *Young Adult Group* – Group of 18-35 year olds who socialize and discuss big questions.

Pastoral Care Ministries

- *Caring Connection* – Provides care and short term assistance to people in emergencies, such as bringing meals or giving rides; fosters the building of supportive connections.
- *Pastoral Care Team* – Supports the minister in pastoral care concerns and offers assistance to people in need while maintaining confidentiality.
- *Healing Circle* – Offers spiritual support to parishioners who request prayers, meditation or healing energy.

Stewardship Ministries

- Finance
 - *Board of Investment* – Manages the investments of First Parish's endowment funds.
 - *Canvass* – Organizes and coordinates First Parish's annual fundraising canvass.
 - *Long Range Planning* – Develops and monitors the five-year plan for First Parish.
- Property Maintenance
 - *Archives & Historical* – Maintains the archives and rich oral history of First Parish.
 - *Grounds* – Maintains the outside grounds of First Parish.
 - *House Management* – Responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the building.
 - *IT and Computer* – Maintains First Parish's computer systems.
- Staff Support
 - *Committee on Ministry* - Provides ministerial support.
 - *Human Resources* – Functions as the church's HR department.

The Church Year at a Glance

Although the calendar changes from year to year, we tend to maintain certain traditions throughout the year:

- Ingathering and Water Communion Service on opening Sunday (September)
- Member Recognition Service (October)
- Thanksgiving Service with collection for Lowell Food Pantry

- Holiday Fair Fundraiser (December)
- Christmas Eve Candlelight Services
- Ice Cream Social (February)
- Church Auction Fundraiser (Winter)
- Canvass Luncheon and Pledge Drive (March)
- May Breakfast Fundraiser
- Religious Education Service (June)
- COA Service (June)
- Bridging Ceremony (June)
- July 4th Breakfast Fundraiser
- Ceremonies to Celebrate Rites of Passage (throughout the year)
- Pet Dedication (Summer)

Volunteers are welcomed and needed at all fundraising events.

Shared Ministry on Sunday Mornings

An important part of our shared ministry at First Parish is working together to create a physically and spiritually nourishing space to complement the service. Signing up for Sunday morning tasks is an excellent place to start connecting with the church community. Shared by all members, these Sunday ministries are simple, sociable, one-shot tasks that require many volunteers throughout the year. These tasks include:

Chalice

It is our tradition for a member or friend of the congregation to light the chalice, offering a brief (1-2 minute) reading or reflection, perhaps on a significant date. The sign-up sheet is posted on the bulletin board in the vestry, to the left of the kitchen serving window.

Lay Reader

Do a reading in the service, or even participate more fully in a lay-led service. Contact the Worship Committee at worship-committee@uuchelmsford.org to get on the reader list. You will be contacted by the minister or a member of the Worship Committee when they need readers for a service.

Flowers

Bring flowers on Sunday or arrange for a delivery. Your choice of a Sunday might be in celebration or memory of a person or event in your life. The sign-up sheet is posted on the bulletin board in the vestry, to the left of the kitchen serving window.

Social Hour

After the service, we always meet in the vestry for socializing and fellowship. If you

volunteer to help with this (making coffee, tea, bringing a snack, setting up, etc.), someone will show you the ropes and help you out. The sign-up sheet is posted on the bulletin board in the vestry, to the left of the kitchen serving window.

Becoming a Member of First Parish

How do I become a member?

Those at least 16 years of age, who are in sympathy with the purposes of this church community, and wish to enter into covenant with us and with Unitarian Universalism, may signify their desire by signing the Book of Membership. They are then voted into official membership at the next congregational meeting. The Minister, or a member of the Membership Committee, will be present as you sign the Book of Membership.

We recommend you take a few steps before signing the Book of Membership:

1. Attend church long enough to become comfortable in the community and ready for the commitment of membership. For those new to Unitarian Universalism this will typically take at least several months, while for "old hand" UUs it might be a matter of weeks;
2. Attend a *Newcomer Information Session*, unless you've been attending church for a year or more and feel well grounded;
3. Attend a *New UU Session*, usually held in February or March, which is a 5-7 week class facilitated by the Membership Committee. This class covers UU and First Parish history, UU traditions, Covenant, Polity and Governance, Social Justice and a discussion of the meaning and responsibility of membership at First Parish;
4. Speak with the Minister or a member of the Membership Committee about joining the church.

What beliefs must I acknowledge as a member?

First Parish is a free religious society without a formal creed. Our members hold a wide variety of religious and spiritual beliefs. As Unitarian Universalists we affirm the UU Principles and Purposes; as a society we have a covenant adopted in 2008. Members are expected to support both.

What are my responsibilities as a member?

Becoming a member signifies that you not only support UU principles and the First Parish Covenant, but also that you are willing to make a serious commitment to this community

- to attend and participate in church life;
- to engage your time and talents in the shared ministry of the congregation;
- to support the church financially by making an annual contribution pledge.

Active participation by all members is crucial to the vitality of First Parish.

Making a Pledge to the Church

Why is it important to make a pledge?

First Parish, like all UU churches and societies, is completely self-supporting. Most of our funding comes from pledges by members and friends. The society is funded by pledged contributions and fund-raising activities coordinated by the congregation. Because First Parish is provided no other financial resources than those we generate ourselves, the annual Spring Canvass (pledge drive) is a critical part of church life. Individual pledges, amounts members and friends state as their intention to contribute over the next fiscal year, determine a realistic budget for each year. Committed funding allows us to budget for our needs and dreams. The only way to create a reality-based budget is to ask members and friends to let us know how much they will contribute in the coming year.

How much should my household pledge be?

When making your pledge please consider your financial circumstances and your ability to support the ministries of First Parish. In addition to helping fund operations, salaries, building maintenance, etc., a pledge needs to cover an annual per member assessment of \$82 to the Unitarian Universalist Association and \$60 to the Clara Barton District. As First Parish is self-supporting, pledges and fundraising need to cover church staffing, utilities, programs, our wide range of ministries and outreach, and maintenance of the building and grounds.

Everyone's circumstances differ, but with the support of our members' and friends' time, talent and treasure, our ministries can thrive.

How do I fulfill my pledge?

You may use pledge envelopes, place your check in the collection plate, or mail it to the Collector at church. You may pay your pledge weekly, monthly, or quarterly, but regularity helps maintain smoother operations. The Collector maintains and forwards quarterly statements on all pledge commitments.

What if I make a pledge but can't fulfill my pledge commitment?

People sometimes experience unexpected financial reversals. If you find you cannot fulfill your pledge, please contact the Collector, explain the situation, and advise him/her of a new payment schedule. If you prefer, you may speak to the Minister in confidence; she will inform the Collector without giving details of your situation.

How We Are Governed

First Parish is run democratically through congregational meetings in accordance with, our by-laws. Church members determine the budget, call the minister, and elect officers. The following committees are the heart of our governance.

The ***Standing Committee*** is the executive board of the Church, responsible for the business affairs of the society. Six members serve three-year rotating terms, and one member-at-large serves a one-year term. In addition, the Clerk and the Treasurer are members of the Standing Committee. The Standing Committee meets at 7:00 p.m. on the second Tuesday of every month. All meetings are open except during executive session.

The ***Church Council*** consists of chairpersons or representatives of all committees and other church groups. It meets monthly during the church year, to network, coordinate efforts, give support to and share experiences of all committees and groups. Any *Faith in Action* Grants are voted on and approved at the meetings.

The ***Nominating Committee*** nominates those who will fill elected and appointed positions, and monitors the health of all church committees.

Elected Positions are chosen at the annual meeting:

- Standing Committee
- Clerk
- Treasurer
- Collector
- Nominating Committee
- The Board of Investments
- Delegates to the UUA General Assembly

The ***Annual Meeting*** is in June, although special meetings may be called throughout the year. At this meeting the budget for the fiscal year is approved, officers are elected, and new members are voted into the congregation. The fiscal year of the church runs from July 1 to June 30.

More information on the government of First Parish can be found in the by-laws, available from the church office.

Staff Members

There are seven staff members of First Parish:

Minister: The Rev. Ellen Rowse Spero. She can be reached at the church at 978-256-5555, on her cell (texts as well) at 978-500-2531, or by e-mail minister@uuchelmsford.org

Intern Minister: Justine Sullivan. Leave a message at 978-256-5133 or email [Intern-](#)

Minister@uuchelmsford.org.

Music Director: Steve Zocchi. Leave a message for him at the church office (978-256-5133), or at home (978-761-0633), or by email music@uuchelmsford.org

Director of Religious Education (DRE): Dolores Heredia-Wood. Leave a message for her at the church office (978-256-5133), or email her at dre@uuchelmsford.org

Religious Education Administrative Assistant (REAA): Jill Hayes. Leave a message for her at the church office (978-256-5133), or email her at reaa@uuchelmsford.org

Congregational Administrator: Cindy Gist. Cindy runs the main office and can be reached at (978-256-5133), or by e-mail office@uuchelmsford.org

Event Coordinator: Leila Pelosi. (978-256-6923), or by email at pelosi@comcast.net.