



The Shooting Star

September 2025

the monthly newsletter of

First Parish Chelmsford UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST

2 Westford St. Chelmsford, MA 01824

Uuchelmsford.org

Office Info & Deadlines

Sunday Announcements:

Weekly, Wed. by 7pm

Newsletter: Fourth Sunday of the month, September 21

To receive the newsletter via email, please contact the church office at (978) 256-5133 or office@uuchelmsford.org

September Soul Matters Theme: *Building Belonging*

September 7

Intergenerational Water Communion
- Rev. Ellen Rowse Spero & Dolores Heredia-Wood

September 14

"Who Are Our Neighbors?" - Rev. Ellen Rowse Spero

September 21

"Be Not Afraid"
- Rev. Ellen Rowse Spero

September 28

"The Challenge of Universalism"
- Rev. Ellen Rowse Spero

Worship Service: Every Sunday at 10am

YouTube: www.youtube.com/c/UuchelmsfordOrg

LiveStream: www.uuchelmsford.org/worship-service

From Rev. Ellen Rowse Spero

Minister • (978) 256-5555 • minister@uuchelmsford.org

Dear First Parishers,

I hope that everyone has been enjoying the summer, especially these last couple of weeks of lovely weather. It feels more like September than August.

I feel like I am living in two worlds at the same time. The larger one of a country and a world troubled and troubling, where terrible things are happening every day and there seems no stopping the downward spiral. I find myself grieving for my country, for the individuals and families impacted by cruel laws and unabashed power grabs and for those abroad living in the shadow of war, violence, and forced starvation.

My other world is the one I live in day-to-day: with my family and friends, my neighbors, and with all of you. The one of too many tomatoes growing in the garden, a disorganized desk, and a to-do list that I cannot keep up with. Of daily walks, sometimes on my own, sometimes with my mom, sometimes with my neighbors. Of weekly trivia games with our team at the local pub. Of planning for a new church year with Dolores, Erica, Brian, the Standing Committee and other lay leaders. Of trying not to go the local ice cream place that is in walking distance every evening. Same with the local bookstore. Of occasionally checking in with Sam. Of sharing my daily life with Henry, Josh, Fave and my parents. This world inspires gratitude for all that I have been given even as I am anxious about the future for those I love, given that other larger world in which we are embedded.

We are living with such cognitive dissonance. Human beings are meaning-making creatures, and we do so through the stories we tell about what we experience happening around us. When we ground our stories in lies and falsehoods that deny the humanity of others, well, we are truly walking a dangerous path. That

people can deny and lie to themselves with such ease, that they cannot see what is happening to their neighbors or their planet is stunning to me. And yet, I imagine, they would argue that I am the one out of touch with reality. There are realities that people live with that I do not experience or understand.

Our Soul Matters worship theme for September is “Building Belonging.” If there is a spiritual practice, a spiritual task, a spiritual protest needed for these times, I believe this is it. Not just in our sanctuary, but in our communities, our country, our world. With so many polarizing messages out there of who doesn’t belong—on all sides—discerning what this means and how to do this feels essential. It is also at the heart of our Universalist heritage—if we trust that God or the Spirit of Love or the sacred in our humanity embraces everyone, what does that mean for how we live in the world? How do we share that joy?

A quick update on the music director: we are still in search for a permanent replacement. The search team has been working very hard over the summer: posting and sharing the job description everywhere we can think of; getting feedback from other religious and musical professionals; and rethinking and rewriting the position based on this feedback. This is a congregation that loves music, so I trust that we will find someone who understands and shares that love. In the interim, Brian Snow will ensure that we have music to listen to and sing each week. The senior and bell choirs are figuring out what is possible for them. Knowing this congregation, people will step up (as they already have) and we will make it work. It may even be fun!

A quick invitation: my spiritual writing mentor and friend, Michael McGregor, published a book, “An Island to Myself: The Place of Solitude in an Active Life.” It is a spiritual memoir about making room to listen to one’s soul. I have been reading it slowly over the summer, savoring its message amidst the chaos of our times. Michael will be coming for an author meet and greet at the Silver Unicorn in Acton in October 7 at 7 pm and has asked me to interview him. So, I am inviting EVERYONE I know, since I would love to share Michael with you and you with him.

Finally, September 7th will be our opening worship service for the new church. We will be back in the sanctuary at 10 am to celebrate with our annual water communion. If you wish to bring some water from your summer place—whether home or on the road—please do. We will pour it in our common bowl as we reflect on what it means to Build Belonging.

In faith,
Rev. Ellen

Standing Around – News and Notes from the SC (Standing Committee)

John Schneider, Standing Committee Chair

Greetings everyone! On behalf of the Standing Committee, welcome back to our sanctuary services season. One issue that stood out from the Spirit of Life project was the need to improve communication both externally and internally. To that end, as the SC chair, I am committed to authoring a monthly news and notes column to keep you informed of the SC’s work this year.

But first, who are the members of the SC and what is our ministry? The members elected by the congregation are Gail Burati, Tom Coffey, Ron Deschenes, Rebecca Gore, Ami Hughes, Dave Kaffine (treasurer), Colleen Leary (clerk), John Schneider, and Doug Snow. Rev. Ellen Spero is an ex officio (non-voting) member. Our ministry is to be stewards for the governance of First Parish addressing issues ranging from revenue and budget; staffing and HR; member, committee and volunteer engagement; community relations; building stewardship; strategic planning, etc. Our ministry is one way we live our covenant and sustain and support our beloved community. It’s challenging work but we have fun too, and Rev. Ellen always brings excellent baked goods to our meetings! We meet on the third Tuesday of the month, and we always have time on the agenda for “open forum” which is an opportunity for members to bring an issue to the SC for consideration.

On September 5th we are naming the kitchen after our beloved friend Carlene Merrill as a tribute to her dedication to First Parish. Carlene loved working in the kitchen to serve others, just one of the many ways she contributed to our congregational life. We will be officially launching the fundraising campaign for the Carelene Merrill Fund, a special fund we have established with generous support from her family that will provide bridge funding to meet unanticipated staff needs such as additional work hours, health care coverage, or professional development, for example, to advance First Parish's spiritual or community growth.

Finally, let me close with a personal observation. You'll notice that we are flying a Have Mercy flag above our entrance and may wonder why. In January, at the inaugural prayer service in Washington, Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde spoke these words to president Trump, "have mercy upon the people in our country who are scared now." While on a trip, Rev. Ellen saw the flag and suggested to the SC that we purchase one to display at First Parish. I also bought one to fly at my house. It's a simple message yet profound for our times and right on point for UU's. I hope you consider flying a Have Mercy flag too at your home.

You can reach me at 617-620-4758 or at jrs.gateway@gmail.com. Thank you.

Church Announcements

Social Action Mailing List

Want to stay up to date on social action events at First Parish and in our wider community? Sign up for our new email list. Once subscribed, you can also share events and opportunities with the community yourself. The list is moderated to keep messages on-topic and avoid overwhelming inboxes. To sign up, go to <https://forms.gle/AKHUCk8wLe5yuzsF7>

Circle Dinners with the Membership/Hospitality Committee

Thank you for your spirit of adventure! Over the summer the Membership/Hospitality Ministry facilitated three separate Circle Dinners in the homes of several gracious hosts. Guests enjoyed evenings of lively conversation, great food, and opportunities for connection. We shall do another round in January/February so you will have the opportunity to participate - again or for the first time. Looking forward to seeing you all at the start of our church year - just around the corner! PS - If you participated in the dinners, as guest or host, and would like to share feedback please email us at membership-hospitality@uuchelmsford.org

Online Social Hour

Due to the lack of attendance, we have decided to stop holding our online social hour until further notice. I would like to thank Marion Murphy, Eliot Mayer, Sue Jefferson and Barry Jefferson who faithfully hosted the space for the last couple of years. Rev. Ellen

Reserved Seating for Those Needing Masks

A reminder that the back row of chairs and the last row of pews on the Westford Street side of the sanctuary are reserved for people wearing masks for the health and safety of themselves or loved ones. Please respect this by wearing a mask if you sit in these two rows or finding seating elsewhere. Thank you, Rev. Ellen and the ushers.

Ralbovsky Family Seeking Dog Walker

We are looking for an occasional dog walker for our two beagles, Beau and Arrow. They need to be on leash at all times outside the house per Chelmsford regulations and because they are beagles and are born to run. They are very cute, very strong and pull, so good balance and strength are a must. Each dog weighs approximately 35 lbs. We are looking for someone who could walk them around the property of our townhome community sometime between 11am and 1pm and sometimes in the evening around 6pm. Someone who would be occasionally willing to take them on a bigger walk at the Cranberry Bog would be a plus. Please email Teri Ralbovsky at teriheardralbovsky@gmail.com if you are interested and with your fee.



Lifespan Faith Formation ~ September 2025

[Lifespan Faith Formation Webpage](#)

Building Belonging

Lifespan Faith Formation Director, Dolores GH. Wood; LFFD dre@uuchelmsford.org;

Thank you FPCC for the honour of serving you another year!

Lifespan Faith Formation is higher yoUU education 😊 It connects us from childhood to old age, to understand how & why & what & whom and where? To strengthen, to nourish, to communicate, to support, to serve, to treasure, to flourish ~ to worship, to pray. And even tackle those mysterious k-nots... FPCC Families united by the gift of love, hope and the Practice of our UU faith.

Commit >Affirm>Belong!



Lifespan Faith Formation Connections-

“Because of the social nature of humans...from birth to adulthood, the need for love and belonging is closely linked to the need for survival” (so we can all flourish) -Lisbeth K, ref. Abraham Maslow

Lifespan Faith Formation: Connect, Engage, Belong

Small Group Gatherings are the sacred spaces in between, where we take a moment to reflect and connect with others and ourselves. Beyond all the ways to engage at FPCC there are:

FPCC Women’s Groups; Two Men’s Groups (one 55+); Young Adults; Sacred Circle Spiritual Group

Bettered Year-Retirees, 70’s Plus Group - Resumes Sept 7th 12 noon

All Ages Family Jam Band, 2nd & 4th Sunday afternoons – Resumes Sept 14; Meet & Greet, Pizza!!

One Day Workshop/Retreats...And?

For more information, to get on a groups email list, or if you are interested in volunteering to facilitate/co-facilitate, or if you know of someone who might be interested in joining or starting a small group event, please contact me/Dolores~, LFFD dre@uuchelmsford.org



September UU RE YOUTH Faith Formation (REFF):

“We Are Unitarian Universalists” <https://vimeo.com/344862790>

This year we will be exploring “all about “UU” It will include Soul Matters, Flourishing Congregation Resources, UU Faith Practices and wherever our Imaginations and our stories may take us... For more program information; be added to REFF family email list, are

interested in volunteering, and/or share your story/talent... Please contact dre@uuchelmsford.org

>>More Information will be sent directly to families

○ **Nursery Room:** Is available for Parents/Guardians to stay with children as needed.

Please do not leave the children unattended. There is a device to listen to worship service also.

○ **September 14; REFF Resumes:** One Room Chapel to Kick-off; Kindergarten through High School

- Youth will have meet & greet and create age-appropriate groups.
- HS Youth activities to be further developed by High School Youth



Hello! Welcome!

*Membership-Hospitality Committee Mission is for~
visitors, friends and members to feel welcome & connected!*

We'd also like to remind everyone at FPCC that hospitality is a gift we All can give.

Please pause a moment, look around and connect with someone.

A smile, a warm hello, my name is....., how are YoUU?

- We want to make sure we reach out to everyone including those that are not able to come to church in person and join us online. Please let us know. We can also provide you with hard copies of hymnals.
- **Greeters:** We need greeters to extend our wonderful FPCC hospitality!
Is that person yoUU? Sure it is... Just once a month... Sunday mornings-9:30 to 10:15
Thank you in advance for being part of this cheery group of volunteers!
- **Interested in joining this very special committee that extends FPCC hospitality to all?**
Contact Dolores~ at dre@uuchelmsford.org on behalf of Membership-Hospitality Committee



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Looking forward to seeing you all at the start of our church year - just around the corner!

PS - If you participated in the dinners, as guest or host, and would like to share feedback please email us at membership-hospitality@uuchelmsford.org

*And speaking about extending
hospitality... Mark your calendars!*

Join Us FPCC!

For the Fall...

**Welcome! Potluck & Games~
Saturday, October 4th
6pm to 9pm in Vestry!**

Bring your favorite foods to share-
a smile... and ready to have fun.

For more information: dre@uuchelmsford.org on behalf of the Membership- Hospitality Committee

