

Our History 1980-2013

The '80s were vibrant years at First Parish. Membership grew slowly but steadily with young families joining and the Rev. Peter Richardson at the helm. Professional musicians usually provided music, but we also enjoyed the beginnings of a choir led by Mrs. Richardson. Despite some objection, children were welcomed at the services at least once a month. Thanks to a memorial gift, religious education bought new curricula, such as the groundbreaking Haunting House.

The Worship and Special Events Committee was formed and sponsored several creative, sometimes controversial, lay services each year. This group also established Third Friday potluck suppers and discussions in members' homes – a tradition that lasted for many years.

A church member founded The Kennebunk Forum, a group opposing nuclear weapons, which met at the church. They marched in the Memorial Day parade one year, much to the consternation of local veterans, and for several years held protests (attended by hundreds) on Ocean Ave., Kennebunkport, within view of the George H.W. Bush summer home. The Social Concerns Committee was active in opposing U.S. involvement and support of dictators and death squads in Central America.

The women of the church met weekly to study the Cakes for the Queen of Heaven curriculum by the Rev. Shirley Ranck, and this open meeting continued for many years. We were delighted to welcome the author as our interim minister in 1992, but some were surprised to hear her proclaim from the pulpit, "I am a witch!"

While Judith Smith-Valley was minister, we formed several "small group ministries" some of which still meet. A winter solstice celebration became a tradition, which attracts many from the community. We expanded the positions of religious education and music Director, and both programs flourished.

The building, however, was falling into disrepair, and because of badly peeling paint, had become an eyesore. In 1998, we ran a very successful capital campaign, involving townspeople as well as members and friends. The paint was stripped to bare wood, repairs were done, and the church shone by the end of the project.

Social Concerns concentrated on equal rights, and about a dozen members were trained and joined the Maine Speak Out project on gay rights. The church youth group was also involved, and we supported a state-wide referendum against discrimination.

The Rev. Carol Strecker became our next settled minister in 2003. During this decade, our congregation supported marriage equality. A banner we had exhibited on the front of the church before an election drew objections and had to be moved because it was within the zone where no political signs were allowed. In 2007, we became a "Welcoming Congregation."

A church member who is a physics professor started a two-week physics course during the summer, using creative methods to teach this difficult subject. Homemade lunches are provided by parishioners, and students are invited to stay in our homes as well. This has been a huge success and has raised considerable funds for the church.

The care of our 210-year-old building is never done! Nine years after the painting and renovation, our ceiling collapsed, leading to another capital campaign and the realization that we had to find a new way to fund preservation of the building. We established The First Parish Preservation Foundation, which is a non-profit separate from the church. This foundation enables people from the community to support the historic structure without giving money to a religious organization. The Board includes members from the community as well as the church.

During the past couple of years our entire staff has changed. Rev. Carol Strecker resigned as well as the directors of our choir and Religious Education Program, the latter also being our administrative assistant. These resignations were not related but coincidental. We hired three choir directors, who decided to move on for various reasons. Then we found our current music director, who we hope will stay with us for a long time. We are appreciating and working well with all of our new staff including our interim minister, the Rev. Marcel Duhamel.