

From the D.R.E.

Although April 27 was our last “regular RE” Sunday for this church year, religious education for children and youth continues and does not slow down... you can read in this newsletter about the various things that will be happening during May and June. Information is also posted on our First Parish website – the RE Calendar and the latest “UUp Date” newsletter for children in RE. The Little Red Wagon Walk for Hunger, the RE Field Day, Bridging Sunday, Memorial Day Sunday field trip, Coming of Age Worship Service....all of these Sundays happen before June 8 and they are for children of all ages.

I want to say a few words about the Coming of Age Worship Service that will be held on June 1. This tradition of recognizing children’s growing into young adulthood has evolved over the past ten years at First Parish. One of its hallmarks that has not changed very much is the part when the participants present some of their personal beliefs to the congregation. We now call it an “expression of beliefs” to acknowledge that some young people may feel called to express their beliefs through something other than a speech. Even so, the tradition involves sharing this with the congregation during the Coming of Age Worship Service. We now intentionally make this an inter-generational service, in part so that younger children can get a feel for what they might be doing some day in the future. A few years ago, a parent of a younger child told me that their child was scared about even thinking that they would ever stand up in front of everyone and talk. I do not remember what I said to that parent; probably something vaguely hopeful about waiting, and that children develop and mature, and so on. I feel have a better understanding now about how this could be a possible source of fear for some children (and some adults too).

Just in case there are other children who might feel similarly, here are some things to know about Coming of Age. First, the whole program is one that is *offered*, not required. We acknowledge that it falls into the category of a “challenging experience.” It is a decision that is left up to the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders and their families. Whether or not a young person chooses to go ahead with Coming of Age, it is important to know that he or she will always be considered part of our First Parish congregation. Those who decide to go ahead with the Coming of Age program receive lots of support during the whole process of spiritual and self discovery and contemplation– support from the facilitators, the group, and the adult mentors for each participant. The Coming of Age Worship Service is a small yet important part of the whole program. When they do share their thoughts with the congregation, hopefully each participant will know and believe that everyone here values them, and that however they express themselves on that day, they are welcome and loved always.

May it be so.

Jeanette Ruyle, *Director of Religious Education*