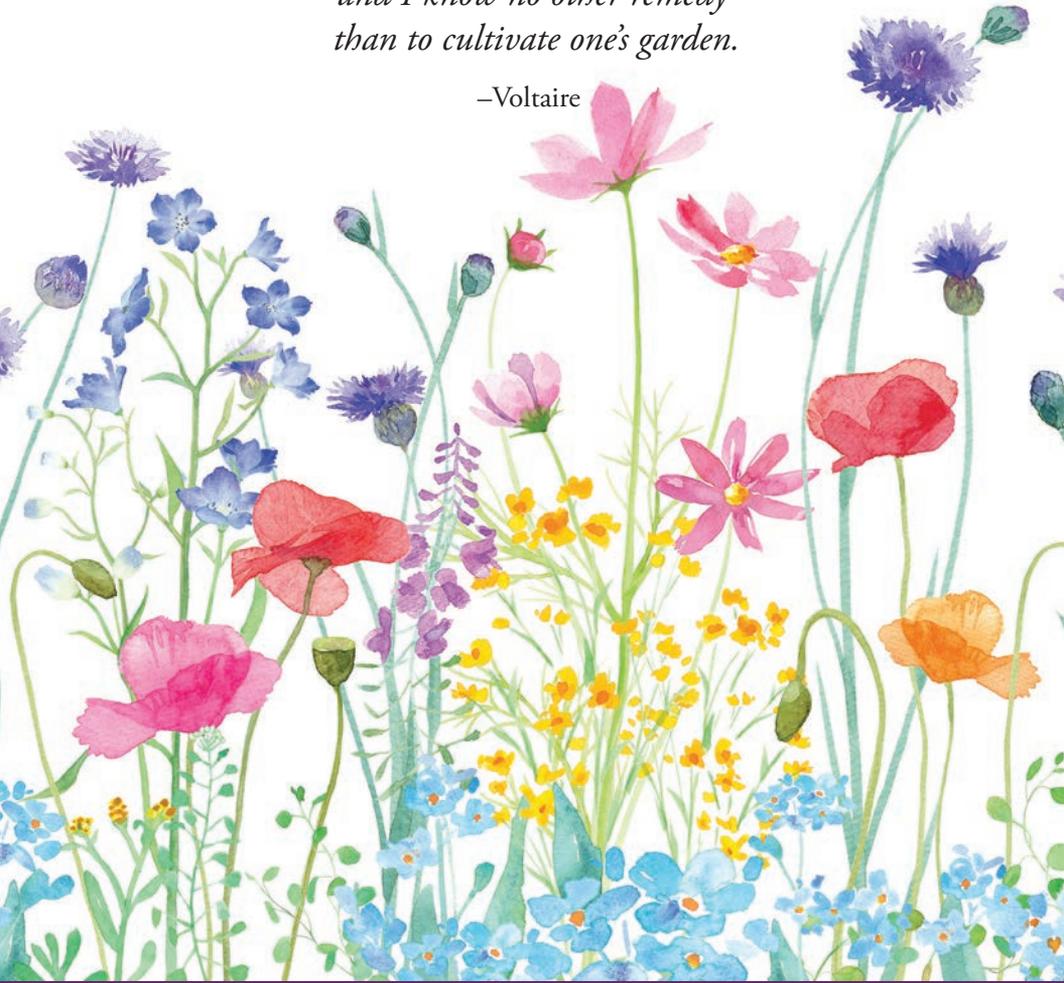




*Life is bristling with thorns,  
and I know no other remedy  
than to cultivate one's garden.*

—Voltaire



Growing the Gardens of Peace...together

## With Love from Reverend Rebecca

*One of my favorite memories of my son is of him reaching out of the pack on my back to the snow peas growing in the community garden. By ten months of age, he was already an avid vegetable lover, snow peas fresh from the stalk being something he especially enjoyed.*



*My children grew up in gardens: school friends and families, supporters of community supported agriculture and a food co-op, and a plethora of church members of all ages. They were held in the loving embrace of an extended family formed by common bonds of values and principles, rather than only biology. They learned that living in harmony with the Earth and each other was part of our responsibility and that belonging feels right and good. One of them now works for another UU congregation while the other comes to church only when visiting me here in Newburyport. Both are members and supporters of FRS. Our Unitarian Universalist values influence their lives in big and small ways. I see it every day.*

*This year's campaign theme, Growing the Gardens of Peace...together, meshes perfectly with our annual ministry theme of peace and our commitment to authentic connection, courageous action, love, spirituality, and wonder.*

*Gardens are places of peace and, like our church, have many forms. Gardens require our engagement and tending, alone and together. Gardening is both a labor of love and a holy act. It pushes us to learn new things, accept mistakes, and recognize the impact of outside influences, such as the weather or COVID in the case of our church.*

*All ages gather and learn about life at FRS, just as we the elders teach the young about heirloom vegetables and the young remind us of the weed's beauty. We all remember why the earth matters and what joy there is in life, while growing the gardens together.*

*I hope you know how important you are to the FRS gardens of peace and how your presence and participation matter. I trust that if we all give what we can of our skills, time, and treasure, our church will continue to flourish.*

*Please consider making a pledge that allows the Parish Board to plan accordingly and pay for all of our commitments in the many gardens we grow together.*

*Thank you for your generosity.*

*With love and gratitude,*

Reverend Rebecca



## Growing the Gardens of Peace... together

*"Peace comes from being able to contribute the best that we have, and all that we are, toward creating a world that supports everyone. But it is also securing the space for others to contribute the best that they have and all that they are,"* says Nigerian human rights activist Hafsat Abiola.

In the third year of a global pandemic with the world reeling from climate change and social upheaval, the First Religious Society has made Peace its central theme and Growing the Gardens of Peace its campaign mission.

Through its many gardens of peace, FRS is securing the space for all of us to contribute the best we have and all that we are to creating a world that supports everyone. Through myriad interest groups, committees, and programs our church supports, each member can participate in growing these gardens.

This annual campaign is all about our willingness to support all these initiatives. Your pledge pays for the building, the utilities, the supplies, and, most of all, the people who facilitate all this spiritual growth and community.

**Come help us expand these gardens!**

## Wide-Ranging Welcome is a Thriving Garden at FRS

**All are truly welcome here**, from legacy members in bow ties to the harried remote worker in yoga pants. Come as you are, and you will be welcome. Come between soccer games or come to spend the day. Come with a friend or come alone, and greeters will welcome you.



**FRS wants you to find your spiritual home here**, leading to a sense of belonging. There are Chalice Circles and book groups to draw you in, Parish Friends to support you when you are in need, and spiritual growth opportunities to suit every style and schedule.

**FRS thrives on diversity and understanding** with our 20 different interest or passion groups beyond the boards and committees that govern the church. From art to music to social justice to climate action, there are many ways to connect and contribute at FRS.

**Young Church builds joyful connection** with all ages, young and old together. This connection fosters respect for ourselves and others, deepens awareness of our interconnectedness, and engages us in social justice as an expression of our faith. Young activists take on real-world issues, creating signs and running activities for celebrations, standing in front of each other and the greater community speaking from their hearts, and traveling to learn about other people and lend a helping hand.



## Peaceful Sanctuary

Our sanctuary has become an important garden, especially after the isolation of the pandemic years.

**FRS is very much back** in person with the added benefit of online services and events and the ability to include people from all over in Zoom meetings and classes.

**This year beloved traditions returned** including the Annual Auction, Flower Communion, and Candlelight Service. Though maybe slightly changed, they may be even more meaningful than ever.



**Evolving history and new traditions** include the Earth Day Rally and Indigenous Peoples Day.

**Together, we have grown our community** by entering into the wider community through outdoor services, having chairs on the lawn to welcome tourists and townies to come sit for a while, and offering Cookies for Peace and church tours that remind the holiday shoppers that FRS is right here in the central part of this historic city.

## Our Partnerships in Building More Peaceful Gardens

**Within our growing and diverse community**, we are addressing the major issues of our time through our Accessibility Committee, Green Team, Welcoming Church, and Anti-racism Group.

**With our many partners in community outreach**, we support Habitat for Humanity, Afghan resettlement, and local food pantries.

**Beyond our local community**, our groups work on big issues like climate action, reproductive rights, reduction of gun violence, and support of Native American life.

*“The passion for racial justice expressed by our Society’s members in the wake of the Black Lives Matters movement inspired me to work towards ensuring that Newburyport’s renowned preservation of history was representative. As a result of our efforts, educational signs are being installed in public places that tell the stories of Newburyport’s rich black heritage.”*

Cyd Raschke  
FRS Parishioner



## Church Year Highlights

- 🕯️ Candlelight Service
- 🕯️ Wilson Music Series
- 🕯️ Monday Night Meditation
- 🕯️ Tuesday Morning Spiritual Practice
- 🕯️ Wednesday Morning Guided Relaxation
- 🕯️ Wellspring, a year-long spiritual development program
- 🕯️ UU Writers Group
- 🕯️ Visit from Patricia D. Rocker, Chairwoman of the Chappaquiddick Tribe, Wampanoag
- 🕯️ Our Whole Lives sexuality education for grades 7–9 with the Haverhill and Exeter UUs
- 🕯️ UU Film Forum
- 🕯️ Exploring Elderhood Together
- 🕯️ The growing Little Free Diverse Library
- 🕯️ Youth justice learning trip to Pine Ridge Reservation

*“Young Church is fun. It is a place where everyone can be themselves without anyone judging you. We learn together and from each other. Plus, Mara is funny and fun to be with. We always have a good time.”*

Nash Hansen (12)



## The 2023-2024 Annual Giving Campaign

The work of a vibrant and growing church requires the commitment of all its community members. The First Religious Society is fortunate to have so many caring and dedicated individuals willing to give of their time, talent, and treasure. Each year at this time, church members come together to look ahead and consider the gardens we grow and how we will support that work as a community.

Your commitment of a pledge to FRS is important to all of our efforts to plan for the year ahead. Each Sunday in March, we will hear from members of the FRS community about how your commitment helps build a more peaceful and just world. We hope you will attend these services in person or online and hear for yourself how your contributions make a difference.

We know that every pledge is profoundly personal. As you make this decision, please keep in mind the work ahead in your community as well as a few key facts:

- Pledge commitments represent approximately 77% of the FRS annual income.
- The average pledge for the past church year was \$1,900.
- Inflation for the last year has increased the church's operational costs by 6.7%.

Our goal for this year is to raise \$550,000 in pledges and add 24 new or returning households to the 266 currently making an annual pledge.

Caring for the gardens of peace in our church, our community, and the wider world calls on us all to contribute the best we have.

Please join us in this effort.

## Thank You



## *We Need Everyone's Participation*

Every pledge, in any amount, matters, and it matters even more if you choose to make it a continuous gift, as described on your pledge form.

### How to Make Your Pledge



Online at [www.frsuu.org/pledge](http://www.frsuu.org/pledge)



Email your pledge amount to Diane Carroll at [diane.carroll@frsuu.org](mailto:diane.carroll@frsuu.org)



Mail your completed pledge form to FRS  
at 26 Pleasant Street in Newburyport, Massachusetts 01950



Call Diane Carroll at **978.465.0602 x401**

*“We are grateful to have been asked to lead the FRS Annual Giving Campaign for the coming year. Like so many, we share the love of this special place and its role in our lives. As our congregation approaches its 300th anniversary, it seems important to both of us to do our part to support the resources and programs this church offers within our walls and to the broader community. We are thankful for the generations that have sustained this church and hopeful for those who will continue to grow into their future lives here at FRS.”*

*—With appreciation and love,  
Mary McDonald & Jim Supple*

