

Leaning In – A Reflection for Annual Meeting Sunday
by Mary Beaulieu
Sunday May 31, 2020

So, it is spring– A time for renewal and rebirth ... for shedding our winter coats, basking in the warmth of the sun ... anticipating the promise of summer – the beautiful summer that comes to our very special community by the sea. And yet, this year, in this time, everything is more than just a little bit different.

Things are upside-down for all of us ... scary, frustrating, sad, lonely, too busy, not nearly busy enough ... As a First Parish community, we are disconnected in many ways, including from one another at services, catching up at our traditional coffee hour, and meeting in other group gatherings at the church. And then just this week, with the lives lost to the pandemic topping 100,000 in our country alone, and with the suffering of so many so plainly and painfully on display, it may be hard to embrace that renewal and rebirth, and to find joy in the gift of this new season.

For those of us on the Parish Committee, who care deeply about this church and all of you, this dichotomy of light and darkness, of energy and exhaustion, has caused us to pause and consider how the church can and should move forward in this very different time. What is the “new normal” for a community like ours? How will we continue in the COVID and post-COVID world to hold onto and nurture what makes First Parish so special? Who will do what is needed to move us forward? What have we learned in these long weeks of challenge about what really matters for us as a church? What do we need to hold onto as a community? Are there things we need to let go of? How can we best harness everyone’s help in this thinking and planning and doing?

But, we wondered, is this the time to ask for your help? Or are people just too overwhelmed to join, to lead, to create, to connect, to give. Are we all simply too drained from the days of homeschooling and Zoom calling and general worrying to be active in church organizing and activities? Should we invite new members now? Should we ask people to assume new roles as leaders in the church? Should we move forward with plans to renovate our building and raise money to support that? These are important questions as we seek to be sensitive to a community of people we care deeply about.

But then, we thought, what if coming together and creating the “new normal” First Parish might help people cope? What if the joy of exploring shared values and a common commitment to a better world could lift us up and quiet the noise that drains us? Maybe now, more than ever, is the time to ask. Maybe now, more than ever, is the time to lean into our church community.

For me, this attitude of leaning in has already paid great dividends. It has caused me to explore my heart-centered connection to this community and our shared faith.

To see what I need to focus on and what I can let go of. To be tolerant of my fears but not ruled by them. To live with an open heart. To love and share love. To express gratitude. To ask others what matters to them. To ask others for help.

At a recent conversation about membership in First Parish with many of you, I listened as you shared what has drawn you to this community and the ways that your experience in the church feeds your soul. That conversation was yet another gift from First Parish. I left it with a full heart, so deeply grateful for a community of people who understand the essence of spirituality as I do – as love and service and truth ... as tolerance; as peace.

Today, we lean in and celebrate together! In a few minutes, we will welcome new members. After the service, at our annual meeting, we will vote on a slate of new leaders and on an exciting plan for renovations of our church home.

We have much to do this year to shape what will be the “new normal” of First Parish. I invite all of you to lean into that work. To explore all the ways that, rather than further draining you, doing so can feed and nurture you. Join, ask, share your ideas, your time, your talents and your treasure. Let’s see if, together, we can create an even better First Parish in the years to come.