

Charge to the Reverend Leslie Becknell Marx

Ordination Service, June 14, 2009

Rev. Martha Niebanck

First Parish in Brookline

Beloved colleague, Rev. Leslie, I am so glad we choose each other for the good work of deep intimacy that listening for a call evokes. It wasn't always easy going since both of us were new to the work.

More than once we overestimated our power and control. And yet we arrived today at this place— both of us more humble.

More than once we underestimated our power and learned what wounds a lack of awareness of our power can cause. And still, we are both here, with an awareness of the power we hold that is not our own but borrowed from a lineage of discerning congregations and courageous ministers who have chosen to say “Yes. I am here. Send me.”

In our conversations about your call, I have heard you speak of a yearning to be a “an instrument of peace” who “seeks more to understand than to be understood, and to love more than to be loved” (St. Frances of Assisi).

I've watched you try to learn the way to trusting that *you will be filled by emptying* — to know that *you have always belonged* even though you are set apart.

And I know that learning trust and surrender to the larger love that holds me, and you, and of all will be a spiritual practice for you.

I know for sure that someday, well into your ministry, you will notice that you finally know that you neither need to earn love nor belonging. In giving your full attention to others, you will not disappear into neglect. Love has been beholding you from the beginning. You will never be separate from the fellowship of ongoing life.

And so today I wanted to “charge” you with a powerful metaphor that you might carry along the way to that day when you are fully grounded in a faith and trust in a larger love.

I waited for a metaphor that did not require stillness or solitude (my way) for I know that you prefer to leap into the thick of things. Finally, I discovered a metaphor in a story told by Henri Nouwen: I believe *trapeze flying* is the metaphor fits you just right! Here's Nouwen's story:

In his travels he became friendly with group of circus performers, trapeze artists. One day Nouwen and the star of the troupe, Rodleigh, were talking about the art of flying. Rodleigh told him: 'As a flyer, I must have complete trust in my catcher. The public might think that I am the great star of the trapeze, but the real star is my catcher. The catcher has to be there for me with split-second precision and grab me out of the air. ... The secret is that the flyer does nothing and the catcher does everything. When I fly I simply have to stretch out my arms and hands and wait for him to catch me.’

So Leslie, my charge you on this day of your ordination is: *Do not be afraid*. Remember that you are a beloved child of Life. Don't try to grab at Life; let *Being* grab you. Just stretch out your arms and hands and trust, trust, trust.