

WE ARE THE CHURCH-Ensuring Financial Sustainability- A DEPARTING GIFT TO REV. REBECCA

A living and breathing testimony of the Brownell family

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Church this is Canvas Month!

As we bid Rev. Rebecca good bye and welcome our new pastor, what financial health do we want Rev.Rebecca to pass on to our new pastor.

Can we “reduce the endowment draw from 7.5% to a sustainable 4.5%? Can we “raise an additional \$60,000 of annual revenue” to meet a pledge goal of \$450,000 for this upcoming fiscal year—July 1, 2018 to June 30, 2019?

Can we first Parish? Can we? Can We? CAN WE!

In the words of one of your former Presidents. YES we can!

Ok, let’s now turn to the focus of my testimony!

In the winter of December 2016 on the 18th day, along with my wife (Bessie)and two kids (Konah and Alfred jr) we bravely walked in front of the First Parish Brookline Church , introduced ourselves and expressed our joy for a safe arrival after a long journey from West Africa to the United States.

It was a journey to seek refuge along with my kids and family after escaping a planned assassination attempt on my life, a massive man hunt by the police and state security and a warrant to have me arrested and imprisoned .

My only crime was offering legal services and defending poor rural communities and indigenous people who were struggling to protect their customary land and West Africa largest remaining tropical rain forest under seize from two of the world’s largest oil palm corporations.

We left Liberia with nothing except the clothes on our back. I was at a funeral of my mother - in- law the day plain clothes men who appeared drunk attacked my office and attempted arresting me and all my office colleagues. I had not seen my office neither my home since that day.

On that Sunday in December 2016, we walked into this Church with a burden. We were total strangers. Had no idea what Unitarian Universalist meant. We were in search of a community and finding a way to connect.

A lot has changed since that day. One year and three months later. Bessie and I are full members. Both Kids are in RE programs!

We made new friends and interacted with a lot of other folks. I am a member of the Racial Justice Action Committee which was formerly the Diversity Caucus. I joined the Membership committee and currently served as one of the greeters!

My most joyful time is standing at the door to greet and getting those yummy, yummy warm bearly hugs and the infectious smiles that sometimes try to throw me off my feet!

My kids and wife are now fully integrated into the Church. Last Easter, we were guest of Jodi and her family.

During the summer of last year, after we could not find an organization to accept our daughter for her summer program, Karla interceded and Konah was accepted at the Urban Ministry.

Alfred Jr now teaches himself to plays the guitar by observing video on YouTube, thanks to Paul Mclean, who donated a guitar to Alfred.

Last November, Paul Matthew and his wife Sonia invited us to their homes and organized a birthday party for konah's 16th Birthday.

In December of 2017 we had the luxury of a Christmas dinner at Alice Mark's home and walked down to Jodi's family home for dessert! Before that Barbra and Charles invited us for the Yankee swap!

My wife has also been busy trying to teach a couple of the women about Liberia food and how to cook it. She's been invited by Eliza to doing some cooking and training at her home along with Elena and Liz while Jodi, Kathryn and others have been involved in teaching Bessie how to make American pastry while learning the Liberian cuisine at Jodi home. This is now turning into a regular women fellowship.

That action from the women probably inspired me Charles, Paul, Rob and a number of men and we are set next Sunday, March 31st at 8: 30 AM up to 10 :30 AM to begin a Men fellowship- We are planning on making breakfast and pancakes. We are going to prepare and eat breakfast. We are taking over the Kitchen at First Parish! All men are welcome!

I could write a New York best seller about how this church has accepted us! How this church has made us family- Grandfathers, Grandmothers, Mothers, Father, Aunties, uncles, cousins, Brothers and sisters. Each of you have played these roles in our life permitting us to settle, integrate and feel love and accepted in this community. We know we do not need a rocket scientist to tell us that we are "The CHURCH!"

But please permit me to say this one! Last December, We needed funding to close our funding gap or we would have faced the non-renewal of our visas. We faced the risk of returning back to Liberia. This would have placed me and my family in danger. This Church rally in one day and raise more than the required amount. It was stunning.

Rev. Rebecca made the request on a Sunday morning during our regular Sunday service by late evening she called to tell us the good news. We had generated actual donations more than what we had projected for. In fact, others were still calling to still offer help even though she said the Church had exceeded the request

YES! THIS IS FIRST PARISH BROOKLINE! This is what First Parish Brookline looks like. We are the church - "We give ourselves one unto another, covenanting to walk together as a congregation, promising faithfully to watch over one another and to delight for love to abide in our midst".

Rev. Rebecca and the church made this possible. What an amazing person she is! A RARE GEM!

However, Rev. Rebecca will be leaving us in a few months. In also a few months, a new pastor is coming! Given the really amazing work she has done, how are we going to send her off?

I know there is nothing more that would make her happy but knowing that we are going to ensure that this Church in her absence would continue to sustain the programs, the love and reform she introduced.

Rev. Rebecca, WE will miss you. YES, in fact, we are already missing you!

Let's however come back to the theme of this month and the reason why I am here talking to you. **"Generosity and Giving"**

Church! This is canvas month! Our very hard working Canvass Team and Finance Committee have informed us that this is only possible if we continue to "give our time, talent, and treasure. According to the Canvas team "We are the reason this congregation recently celebrated its three--hundred--year anniversary. And we will ensure the church's next three hundred years."

According to the Canvass Team and Finance Committee “we can achieve our long--held vision of fiscal sustainability that will permit us to further “reduce the endowment draw from 7.5% to a sustainable 4.5%.

To do this, the Team says, “We must raise an additional \$60,000 of annual revenue” to meet a pledge goal of \$450,000 for this upcoming fiscal year— July 1, 2018 to June 30, 2019

Church, Rev. Rebecca along with the team has asked us to do this. She wants to leave the Church financially healthy! So that our new pastor would start the job not just running but sprinting to the finish line. Can we do this? Yes we can!

Me and my family are living and breathing testimonies to what this church can do! Last December in one Day, YES IN ONE DAY! You came to the rescue and went beyond the call of our request.

You made us to have faith in you in this community, in this search for the truth, in this quest for humanity, in this diversity, in this authenticity ,in this eternal energy connecting all of us in this web of love, justice, joy, happiness and love. YES, WE ARE THE CHURCH!

Last year Bessie and I offered our “widow’s mite”. This canvas year we are committing to increase our pledge amount by not less than 30 percent.

According to the Canvas Team, “if pledges increase by 5% to \$450,000, we can raise 1/3 of the new income from pledges. However, “If pledges increase by 14% to \$490,000, we can raise ALL the new income from pledges.”

First Parish Brookline, can we do this? According to the Canvas team “Every gift, of every size, matters and is deeply appreciated”. Yes we can!

We must always remember that “We extinguished the flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community and the fire of commitment. These we carry with us and offer as gifts unto the world.”

Thanks, and God love you!