

TESTIMONY GIVEN MARCH 10, 2018

I first drifted into this church while a student at Andover Newton. I was looking for a place to apply for an internship - preferably part time, as I had my mother to care for.

I came from a small white wooden church with boxed-in pews, clear windows to let in the sky, and purposely devoid of all ornamentation.

The contrast with this big puddingstone hulk of a building was forbidding. Walking into the darkened entry to be confronted by all this space - the ceilings so high, the many stained glass windows, the long, long walk from the back to the pulpit. The sound of the organ resonating in all this space. It didn't look like a good fit to me.

But a small woman approached me - asked if I was new, introduced herself and - really took me under her wing, introducing me to everyone. "This is Mary, she's new" said Jan Childs as she walked me around coffee hour. Jan let the people here win me over, and FPB went from forbidding to welcoming. I applied for the job and got it. My supervision committee took over taking care of me. They even helped me take care of Mom, making trips all the way out to Lincoln to visit. And when she died, there were many first Parish Brookline faces in those little white boxed pews. I never forgot.

Much later, when I was ill, the people of this church called, offered to bring food and run errands. They did things that I would never ask for - I was too much a Puritan to ask for help. . . . Perhaps some of you can relate to that?

Over the years, I came to understand that these unasked for kindnesses were not chores - they were gifts to me given my people who knew that to be able to give, to be of service to others is a great source of happiness - one of the greatest. And it gets better the more you practice.

What First Parish Brookline has given to me - what it gives to all of us - is the chance to give of ourselves. Its not a requirement, no more than a generous financial pledge is "required". But this church is family. It is a family we have chosen, and it needs what it needs to pay our staff a living wage, a fair wage, to keep our roof tight and the furnace pumping.

But finding a way to give beyond a financial pledge is good part - its the frosting on the cake. One hour a week won't make FPB your extended family. You need to go deeper to connect.

When I first came, Social Action was most attractive. With like minded parishioners, I could help make the world a kinder gentler place. I met people whose commitment to Social Justice matched mine. I gave my time and was rewarded with deep friendships. And we did make the world a little better place.

I can't sing, or I would have joined the choir. I always thought choir was so tight with each other, caring for each other in sickness and baby raising.

I recommend signing up for a Religious Education team. Teaching our young is a positive high. In Spirit Play, you see 4 & 5 year olds open up like flowers as they tell you their stories. Your heart is touched. Teaching Neighboring Faiths gives you the excuse to see all those other religions at their very best. And as a driver, you become invisible to a carload of preteens - bringing you back to your own teen years when NO ONE, especially parents could understand you. Mentoring a teen as they begin a spiritual journey, confiding in you as perhaps the first adult outside their family is a sacred trust.

Now I am connected through Small Group Ministry, opening up to eight people I didn't know very well, becoming more than just friends. I have lunch once a month with a retired women's group that Barbara Simonetti formed - just because she sensed the need. And Seasoned Souls is a rock solid long standing group exploring and meeting together some of life's great challenges. Its based on the book by the same name by our won Eliza Blanchard.

I've "matured" I guess is the word - onto the Care Team. I serve our wonderful Interim Minister - helping her to extend her ministry. I bring my special chicken dish, I drive, I call and write cards. And when people thank me, I can only respond - I enjoy doing this work, I do it because it warms my heart. So if I have helped another person - that's a bonus. The frosting on the cake. You ARE my family of choice after all.

We will soon be welcoming a new minister, and many people - the curious and the seekers - will walk through those doors into this vast space for the first time. Its time to think about our contributions to FBP for this year and for next. Contributions both financial and emotional What can you give to bring joy to your heart?

May everyone here find the joy that this church, my family of choice has given to me.

Amen and Blessed be