

April 28, 2019
Colossians 3:12-17
First Parish UCC, Brunswick, ME
Mary E. Baard

Pastoral Reflections

INTRO to SCRIPTURE

Today's scripture is from the letter to the Colossians and is good advice about how to follow in the Way of Jesus.

SERMON

A few years ago, someone asked me about something that was happening in the congregation. I asked if he had read the newsletter article. He replied that if I didn't say it from the pulpit, it wasn't important. I'm still not sure what to say about that. But today, I want to share some pastoral reflections about things that I think are important – the construction projects, sabbatical plans and staffing for the fall.

Construction projects:

The elevator is in progress and will soon be up and running, greatly improving access to Fellowship Hall. Over the summer we will be refurbishing the basement for church school and a couple of offices. There will be a ribbon cutting celebration after church on Sept. 8 and a chance to explore the building.

I am very pleased with the ways we have been able to make the front of the sanctuary more flexible. It not only connects to the original intent of multiple uses for this space, it also recognizes that we worship differently than in 1846, especially with regards to the many ways music is part of our life together.

Last month, when I came into the sanctuary for the Spirituals concert, I took a big sigh of relief. There was no skyscraper platform, which some of us can remember. We didn't even need portable risers. All we needed were discreet extensions to the bottom step. It looked wonderful and worked well.

One of the things that makes me smile is the number of people, who have not been here each week, who think we've haven't done anything.

Now, of course, I admit I still don't like the look of the steel guardrail. I must chuckle though that so many of us who were distraught at its unpainted rust colored appearance, find ourselves now saying, "I can live with it." But most importantly, it is being used and used a lot. That's the whole point, isn't it?

Sabbatical:

Tomorrow begins my sabbatical. Thank you for this opportunity and thank you to all the people who are helping to fill in while I am gone. Sabbaticals provide a time for sabbath, for rest. They also provide a time for deeper reflection, in ways that the regular pace of congregational life doesn't facilitate.

Last month's Celtic series a result of my previous sabbaticals. On my first sabbatical we went to Iona in Scotland. On my last sabbatical we went to Ireland. After these

two trips, I had the feeling I ought to explore the North Atlantic more on this side of the ocean. So, this time we're going on a pilgrimage to Newfoundland. I'm hoping to learn the correct way to say it.

I'm enjoying learning more about the North Atlantic in America. Two years ago, Ron and I went to Prince Edward Island. Last year we went to Cape Breton Island. This year Newfoundland. I'm both excited and embarrassed at how these explorations are changing my perception of the northeast. When I was in school it seems the maps of North America we used were only of the U.S. and I developed the impression that the world ended at the eastern border of Maine, even though I knew better. Now I really know better.

As I've shared before, what led me to Celtic spirituality was my exposure to Native American spirituality, while I was living in the Southwest. In this era of climate crisis, I was struck by the creation-focused nature of that tradition. I wondered where there were similar threads in Christian tradition. Someone pointed me in the direction of Celtic traditions, and I'm so glad they did. Both of these traditions are centered in creation spirituality – that all creation is of God.

On this sabbatical I will continue to explore Native American traditions, visiting the National Museum of the American Indian in New York and the Abbe Museum in Bar Harbor.

Plans for next fall:

When I return in August, we will be adding pastoral staff, as I have described in the May newsletter.

When Geoff Parker moved to the Foreside Church in Falmouth last fall, it presented us with an opportunity to evaluate our staffing configuration. In fact, just about the time he left, the Alban weekly email article advised people to not simply fill an empty staff position, but to use the opportunity to evaluate.

The Church Council had a conversation with the congregation. I've also spoken with a number of people in the conference and talked with Larry Peers, our strategic planning consultant. In the midst of all this conversation an opportunity began to arise that was intriguing.

Ever since I came to First Parish, I've sensed the possibility of us serving as a Teaching Church. In many respects that's what we did with Geoff. We gave a new seminary graduate a place to grow and develop his own pastoral identity and then sent him off with our blessing.

I remember the first congregation in which I served. They were good to me. I had only been there six months when the senior pastor suddenly resigned at a council meeting. They invited me to be the interim pastor for the next year. Interim ministry was just beginning at that time. I knew so little and yet they gave me room to grow and support along the way.

Cindy and Bill and their two small children were members of that church. In my weekly visits with Cindy as she was dying of breast cancer, she taught me so much. That was thirty-five years ago. Just this past winter out of the blue I heard from Bill with words of thanks. The threads of our lives are woven together in ways that reverberate over the years.

Here at First Parish, we now have the unique opportunity to help others grow in ministry. We potentially have three Members in Discernment among us next fall. Members in Discernment are people who are exploring the possibility of ordination.

Danielle Keller has already been an MID for several years as she attends Boston University School of Theology.

Jessie Crabtree and Francesco Marshall recently met with our own Discernment team and have been recommended to the Cumberland Association Committee on Ministry and will meet with them in August.

Jessie, our Office Administrator, who was a religion major as an undergraduate is taking on-line classes with Chicago School of Theology and in person classes with the Maine School of Ministry.

Francesco, who moved to Maine a couple of years ago, and officially joined our congregation a couple of weeks ago, has been working as a chaplain in hospitals and retirement communities over the last twenty years. Francesco already has a Master of Divinity degree but has not worked in a local church and has not been ordained.

Each of these people has gifts for serving and desires to learn.

- Francesco will be our Assistant Minister with a focus on pastoral care and worship.
- Danielle will be our Ministerial Intern with a focus on Outreach.
- Jessie will continue as our Office Administrator and will expand her

work as assistant to all our ministries.

I am excited to be working with all three of them. There will be one more person helping us with this teaching church ministry. Danielle is required to have a supervisor who meets certain criteria of having been approved and trained by Bangor Seminary, Andover Newton Seminary, or Boston University. I don't meet that criteria. Fortunately, we have someone in our midst who has all those credentials – Ron Baard. Ron has agreed to be the weekly theological supervisor for our trio. Thanks, Ron.

This is amazing! If I had set out to make this happen, I couldn't have. I'm grateful for the ways the Spirit has been moving in all these lives to bring us together in this time and this place.

There are many more on whom this ministry depends – that is all of us. We need your prayers and your support. We, at First Parish, have a calling to be a teaching church – to provide support, guidance, and challenge as people discern and develop their pastoral identities. I'm looking forward to it.