

Flowers, Vegetables, and Herbs.

Gaining Clarity and Discernment in a Full and Busy World



Sermon by Reverend Rebecca M. Bryan

March 5, 2023

I want to start by talking with the children this morning. Children and youth, please raise your hand so I can see you.

How many of you children have ever walked past the church and thought to yourself, *That's my church!?*

Or maybe your grandparents or friends were visiting from out of town, and you drove by the church to show them our beautiful steeple.

It's a good feeling, isn't it, to see this place and think "*That's my church.*" I know it makes me feel good. I feel proud, happy, and warm inside.

Let's all say it, shall we? Let's all say *This is my church!*

This is my church!

Now look around you at the people, the windows, the building next door, and let's say it one more time. This time let's say,

This is our Church!

This is our church!

Guess what!?

When you think *that's my church*, you're right. It really is your church!

The members of this church own this building. NO ONE else. It is ours, to care for and love. The members and friends also pay the staff who work here—Justin who plays the organ, Mara who you all know, and even me, your minister. We pay to keep the lights on in the sanctuary, tune the organ so it makes a beautiful sound, and install technology that lets people participate in the service online.

No one else pays for those things. Just us.

That's special, isn't it!

It's a big responsibility and it's a privilege. Because in our church, the congregation—our members, friends, and supporters—are the church.

Every year around this time we take time to talk about how we take care of our church. That care includes the people and programming, Young

Church, the building, and much more. There's a lot that goes into making this place hum!

It costs \$2,100 keep the church open for one day. You might think that's a lot of money, or you might think it's a bargain. I think it's a pretty good deal when we consider all that \$2,100 covers, including repair and maintenance of the buildings, adult faith formation programming, Young Church, salaries, contributions to social justice causes, AV equipment, music, and more. Some say we run a lean machine, or something like that.

Our campaign theme this year is "Growing the Gardens of Peace...together." I love that. It captures the richness, diversity, complexity, beauty, and spirituality of *us*...the First Religious Society. I like how the image of gardens reflects our commitment to climate justice and caring for our Earth. How growing and caring for gardens depends upon many people each with different skills and interests.

Our gardens of peace include the wide welcome and warm embrace we seek to offer all people and the peace that comes as we respect and learn from each other and our differences. Our gardens of peace include sanctuary. This beautiful sanctuary we are gathered in today, in person and online, and the sanctuaries in our minds and hearts, which are essential for all of us.

Our gardens of peace include how we love and support one another. How we listen to each other in chalice circles and in Young Church, write each other notes when we are sad, and work together on the business of the church, which is just as spiritual as other things.

Our gardens of peace also include everything happening beyond these walls in the partnerships we have with others working for justice. It's a lot to keep up, a lot to enjoy, and these gardens provide deep nourishment. There is something for everyone.

Like any garden, caring for this church and our community requires willingness, commitment, and giving. This year's Annual Giving Campaign

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goal is \$550,000, which represents 80% of our total annual budget. The other monies come from building and steeple rentals, special event fundraising, and interest on our endowment. Everyone, including members and friends, is being asked to participate by making a pledge or a promise to give what you can to help reach that goal.

Last year, pledges ranged in amounts between \$100 to over \$25,000. The average pledge was \$1,900. Every single one of those pledges matters a lot. We're asking you to make a promise or pledge today, or sometime this month, and then pay it next year, which begins on July 1st. You can fulfill your pledge by paying monthly, quarterly, or however works best for you.

I invite you to consider a weekly or monthly amount and then extrapolate that to an annual pledge. Often the whole number feels "too big" until we consider what it means for a weekly or monthly gift. The other thing to remember is that our Sunday collection is not the same as your pledge unless you put a check in the basket and mark it clearly as a pledge payment.

The Board needs to know now what members and friends can commit to so they can plan next year and bring that budget to our members to vote on at the annual meeting on June 11th.

This month's ministry theme is discernment. Discernment is a critical skill and is a spiritual practice. We are more intentional and less reactive when we live from a place of discernment. We do our best to make our decisions based on what we value.

Discernment helps us balance our competing concerns and hopes. It allows us to be more present in our days and slow down. None of us are perfect in this skill, nor should that be our goal; that is a setup for frustration and a return to reactivity. When we act from a discerning place, it feels right, even when it is scary or unsettling. There is often a feeling of conviction or empowerment. It can feel a bit like we are taking a step off a cliff, only to find the freedom and way forward that comes with the commitment.

We will be exploring discernment this month in

several ways. Today, with the pledge drive, we are asking you to discern what this church means to you and what you can contribute financially. Next week, Julie Parker Amery will be preaching about listening to the calls of our soul. The following week I'll be preaching a sermon entitled "What's a Man to Do?" This is the sermon the men's group won in last year's auction. And the last week in March I'll be preaching about trends in religion in our country.

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Let's start with discerning your financial support of FRS for next year. There are many ways to support FRS in addition to money. We support with our participation and sharing our talents and time, to name just a few. Those ways of supporting are also critical.

For this moment, I'm asking you to think about your financial support. Ask yourself, what does this church mean to me? What gardens have I helped to plant? In which gardens do I apricate? What does a meaningful gift mean to me and my family?

Can I pay for a day or a week of keeping the church open?

Can I give \$5 a day, which if we all did, would allow us to meet our goal?

Can I give more than I did last year, even by a little bit?

Can I make a first time promise to this place.

Sit with that for a minute.

We are now moving into our community ritual.

There are two things you are invited to do. One is to bring your completed pledge card forward if you are ready. You hopefully received our beautiful campaign materials in the mail, though we've heard that the weather last week may have delayed delivery. There are also cards in your pews and the ushers can bring one to you. It's also fine if you need more time to discern your gift. We will be inviting folks forward every week this month, and you can always send your pledge card to the office or do it through the website.

Everyone is also invited to come forward with

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the flower you were given when you came into the sanctuary. You can write your name on it, or a message of peace. We will be taking all the flowers and creating a mosaic representing our FRS gardens of peace.

For those of you online, please write your name in the chat and one of our volunteers will come forward on your behalf.

What is your gift, and what is your message?

Amen.