

Who Would You Like to Be Today?

Rev. Adam Lawrence Dyer – May 2, 2021

There is so much ahead for First Parish in Cambridge. You might be excited, or confused or anxious. There are changes happening with the building; there are changes happening for worship as we wish our long time Music Director Jonathan well and embark on a search for new leadership in music; we will be figuring out a plan to have ways to come back together in person and we will explore how our Sundays may be different to how they have been in the past based on some of what we've learned through this time. The Governing Board has already been hard at work, as have the Worship Team and Religious Education and Pastoral Care teams. We will be looking for more people to help us figure out all of the many pieces. For these reasons and more a dedicated team of folks have come together to help with the process of developing a strategic plan.

Organizations of all kinds go through the process of strategic planning. First Parish has been through this in the past as well. But don't be fooled. This is not a rote process just duplicated from a past agenda. This is not the same thing you experienced before. Nor is it an exercise in simply "making the donuts" as it were...its not just some recommended steps on paper. This team has come together to create an invitation for the community to ask questions, provide options and answers and most of all to help us grow into what we want to be and to figure out how we can do this on an ongoing basis.

For some of you who have worked in corporate settings, or nonprofits or academia, you may hear "strategic plan" and immediately think of something that is very technical...very dry. It will of course have some of those elements and the expectation is that it will all be very well organized and incredibly intentional. As it should be. We will want to be working toward some very clear goals.

But part of my job is to remind us of the ways in which we are not a corporation, non-profit or standard institution. We're a church. We are a faith community. We are not here so much to "work" as we are here to share in each other's energy and common

aspirations and lives. There is a part of what we do here, that is deliberately NOT a non-profit. You don't go home at 5 pm. We live with what we create as community.

And so my reminder to you all as we think about strategic planning is to remember that we are different and that difference gives us access to something pretty incredible. If you ask me, the most important thing we get to do here at First Parish in Cambridge is dream. We get to let our wildest fantasies about what the world can be and how we exist in that world run wild. Because we are the community we are, there are no limits to what we can dream and aspire to. Because there are no limits to who we want to be, we can be a community for everyone, if we try.

After dreaming, the next most important thing we do is imagine. Slightly different than dreaming which may or may not be anchored to lived real world experience, what we imagine comes from the concrete way that we are existing in a very real world. Yet, our imaginations take that concrete and make amazing things with it. Why just Tuesday Meals? Why not feed people every day? Why not share our glorious space with another faith tradition...or two? Why not look at Sunday as more than an hour of worship and make it into a time for magic and connection?

Yes, Strategic Plan...but with a healthy dose of dreaming because we are so much more than a corporation. We get the privilege that no no-profit ever got of being able to bring into our Strategic Planning process things that no CEO would ever dare to bring in. We get to bring in our emotions, laughter, tears, joy, shock, awe...nothing is off the table. As organized as we will be, we also have to be chaotic and disorganized and disorderly if it is called for. For every intention we bring to the process, we also get to accept and invite the happy accidents that will happen along the way. And for every goal we achieve, we will arrive at unexpected eventualities that we couldn't begin to predict. We need to both plan and dream. That is strategic planning for a spiritual community.

And there are other basics. Another important aspect of any process of discovery is to recognize who and what you're undertaking the process for. In the case of a church, we are doing it for the people. Ideally, we are doing it as a reflection of the people we are as our best selves. When we think about what it means to be our best selves, certainly we think about values and priorities and ambitions. Well, that's all well and good, but just like the whole "planning" process needs to be balanced with dreaming, none of us is

a simple list of values, priorities and ambitions. No, we're a mess...we are needy, selfish, imperfect, ignorant, fearful and too often lack the humility to admit it. We are people. Human beings.

A church, a faith community is above everything else, a place for people and people are freakin' messy. A church is a reflection of our best selves yes, but it is also a reflection of our growing selves...the parts we wish would stay hidden, the parts we are ashamed of, the parts we wish would just go away or not happen, as much as we are the parts that are proud and present and vibrant and public.

So, I ask, who would you like to be today? Really, that is the question we have to ask. Whether it is looking at the building, or programs, or worship or the Strategic Plan. We must be given the freedom to ask this question boldly and openly so that we can answer it with that same spirit. You may never have asked that question of yourself before. It may be uncomfortable to give yourself that freedom. That's okay. There's room for that here. Not just in the Strategic Plan, but in this community. And that's the difference. That's why any process of planning our future has to be different. This is the place where you get to say, "I want to be my most me". And this is the place where we get to say back to everyone who brings that desire "yes, you can be that." No commentary, no question, no judgement. Our job is to be the container, the unconditional love that allows the impossible to happen, and the possible to happen better.

Who would you like to be today? Plan, dream, be your best self, be your growing self. Don't hold back. What we create together can only be complete if it includes the reflection and resonance of you, as your whole you, as part of the equation.

May it be so.