

## **“Finding Your Way”**

*A Homily by the Rev. Dr. Stephanie May*

*First Parish in Wayland*

*September 12, 2021*

At the beginning of a new school year, there can be a lot of “orientations.” There’s student orientation, teacher orientation, parent orientation. Even for new jobs, there is often an employee orientation. I’m guessing most of us whether we are 6 or 66 have been to at least one “orientation.” Am I right?!

This started me thinking about the start of a new year here at First Parish. Especially at the start of *this* year where we’ll be trying new ways of gathering in multiplatform or hybrid ways, perhaps we too might benefit from a bit of orientation.

Hmmm, what might a First Parish Fall 2021 Orientation include?

Let’s start with the WHO—the most important “who” is you. At its core, First Parish is the people. I encourage each of you to take advantage of the weekly Community Time, online and in-person, to learn more about one another.

WHAT we plan to do is host multiplatform Services and Spiritual and Ethical Exploration programs on Sundays. We plan to continue online offerings, such as MidWeek Check-in, as well as consider how we might safely gather in-person in small groups for making music, holding meetings, and all matter of fun and engaging activities for all ages.

Thus WHERE we will be gathering is a bit up in the air—except that we know that we will continue to provide online access to all services. The gift of access across distance and difficulty is one we plan to hold on to.

But WHEN will we know what we can and cannot do safely in-person? Well, there is no clear path forward amidst the shifting levels of risk as well as the absence of vaccinations for young kids. Indeed, for eighteen months now, we have been without a map or established trails to follow.

Have you ever gone hiking in the woods and either lost the trail or, perhaps, even chose to go off the trail? Have you ever used a compass to help you find your way?

Several years ago, I took a seminar to learn how to use a compass. What surprised me is that

you do not simply pick a direction “North” and start walking. Rather, you take a bearing. You say ok, I want to head North at 55 degrees which is about that tree over there. Then, you walk to that tree and pull out your compass again. Checking where 55 degrees north will take you, you find another tree or stone or other landmark in the distance along that 55 degree north line and start walking. Again and again, you stop, take your bearing, look ahead for the next landmark, and move again.

When I think about this year, I imagine it may be something like this where we move in small sections as we head together in a general direction while following a bearing. In a few moments, Kate will share more about this year’s backpack blessing. We’ve chosen to give everyone a little compass. Our hope is that this compass will remind everyone that even if we’re not sure where we are going, we know we are not alone in the journey, but supported by this community.

You might say that we are explorers charting a path through unknown territory. While this may sound like an inviting adventure to some, I suspect others may be shaking their head and muttering, I did not sign up for this adventure. I feel conscripted against my will! But . . . here we are and I wonder what shifts for us if we reimagine the uncertainty as adventure of possibilities? Does it help to imagine yourself with tools like a compass and a community to hike along with you? Perhaps we are not certain about what we will encounter in the steps along the way, but in my mind we *do* have a bearing of where we are headed. We head out in the direction of love, seeking the way that will enable a just flourishing of life for all—a life of relative safety from the virus, yes, but also a life of economic and racial justice, a life that brings families and friends together, a life that feels full and meaningful. Knowing where one is headed—the bearing on the compass—can help us to find our way, even when there is no established trail.

May it be so.

Amen.