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Anne Lewis

Good morning! I am Anne Lewis and I serve as the co-chair of the Membership Committee along with Susan White.

This morning, I am pleased to contribute to this segment, A Story of Belonging, and share some reflections about my journey to this wonderful church community in Charleston.

I was reminded by my older brother, Ben, whom some of you met last week while he visited me, that our religious background is rather unusual in that we are **3rd generation** Unitarians. Growing up, my family belonged to the Arlington Street Church in Boston. Church at that time was more of a one-day-a-week ritual with my family, followed by breakfast out. My brothers and I, separated by just a year or two, would trade stories about our R. E. classes on the ride home. Especially during our junior high years!

Fast forward through raising two daughters on my own where Saturdays and Sundays consisted of traveling Soccer and Basketball. Going to church was more of an occasional event, mostly on holidays. As my daughters chose different paths in the world, I started to think about life after they moved away.

My youngest, Molly, attended College of Charleston. I loved coming to see her and would make the 8-hour drive south from Alexandria, Virginia several times a year. During those trips, I started to imagine myself living in Charleston. I wanted to embark on a new chapter which would also include devoting more time to finding a church. I was fortunate that I could move my business anywhere. That is what I did in August of 2014 with a new plan for a life in Charleston.

In September of 2014, I started visiting the Unitarian Church of Charleston. After several times wearing a Visitor's Name tag, picking up a red mug and chatting with people in Gage Hall, I felt that the rhythm of this congregation fit well with this chapter in my life of self-exploration. I was at a place where I wanted to contribute to a larger goal that was in sync with my values and interests. Listening to the weekly homilies as well as interesting, heartfelt talks by church members sharing similar perspectives, I knew I wanted to join.

After speaking with Carol Oates, the Membership Coordinator, I signed up for the Pathways Class where I was mentored by Susan White and found new friends. In early

2015, I became a member. Looking back at those initial months, I realize how helpful it was that someone was following up with me to gauge my interest in the church, to see if I had questions, in turn, supporting that phase of my search. I was so grateful for the welcoming outreach.

Several weeks later, I met Sue Weller for lunch and she encouraged me to consider joining the Membership Committee. She described the various activities of this Committee and how it might be a good way to get to know the Church as well as meet people. I began signing up to be a Greeter and Usher. It turns out to have been a great fit for me and has helped me to feel a part of the larger community. There are many other activities available but for now, working full time and caring for my parents, I have had to schedule around other priorities.

A lot has happened in the 3 years since joining the Church. In particular, I had not anticipated the need for emergency pastoral support for my 87 and 90 year-old parents. I moved them to Charleston last year to be close by me. Moving them from their home of 33 years was disruptive enough when my brother, Mark, suddenly passed away leaving us all in shock. His funeral was going to be held where he lived in Orlando. My parents were unable to travel that distance. I could not imagine leaving them alone in an unfamiliar location without the support of friends or family while I attended my brother's funeral.

I contacted Carol Oates who facilitated a plan so that they would not be alone. Reverend Danny would come and visit with my parents at the same time as the funeral was taking place – 3:00 PM. He stayed for nearly 2 hours, providing comfort and support. I will always be grateful for his compassion towards my family during that heartbreaking time. Earlier this month, I hosted the Membership Committee meeting at my home. Enjoying a delicious potluck dinner, learning more about my fellow committee members outside of church, sharing stories from our daily lives – to me these are the hallmarks of belonging.

Finally, as I was setting my serving dishes out for Thanksgiving, I was reminded of another sign that I belonged here. It was during my FIRST Silent Auction. I was talking to someone about a kayak/sightseeing trip along one of the local rivers when across the table lined with various items, I spotted the unique blue and gray pattern on a serving dish – the same as one of my favorite casserole dishes – a Concord Pottery original that I was given over 30 years ago when I lived in Boston. I put my bid down and won!

For these and many other reasons, I am thankful to have found this church community and for the way it has enriched my life.