Following a Leading: Running for Elected Office

I worship with the Quakers, who practice deep listening. On Sunday morning, we sit in a circle and listen for the Spirit's revealed message and when we "quake" with it, we speak it as vocal ministry. In some meetings, no one speaks at all. We can feel our deep listening washing over us. It nurtures us. In this deep listening, we can inquire about our leadings – or as some would say, our callings. In 2013, I asked what was next for me. I heard that it was to help my community by running for local office. I was well supported by others in discerning this.

The Quakers, my faith community, offered me a Clearness Committee. This was composed of individuals who met regularly with me over a series of weeks and used queries to help me discern my leading. They posed questions and I responded. This led to additional questions based on my responses that moved me toward clarity. No advice was given. I determined that my calling was to run for public office, even though my employment and family matters at the time were quite turbulent. I knew that I was held by my faith community. Later, I would return to the Clearness Committee to discern other matters, and I have served on Committees for others. I hope you find some beautiful, sacred equivalent for supporting you in your major decisions.

My Middlebury sisterhood also supported me. Women often hesitate to run for office, feeling that they don't have the time or resources to

manage it. Knowing this, a group of Middlebury women began to meet in 2012 to encourage more women to run for elected offices. We recognized the shortage of women on the Middlebury Selectboard, where for years there were none or only one, even though women are a significant portion of the voters. We believed that women's voices at the table could encourage more public engagement and greater inclusion. We called ourselves "Women for Democracy" and met in each other's living rooms to think about who might run for various state and local offices. We pledged that we had each other's backs in whatever we each needed—child care, fundraising, campaigning, dinner, a shoulder to lean on. We vowed to attend meetings to show our presence and support for those who ran and those who were elected. This commitment from fellow women encouraged me profoundly. At such moments, I hope you have supportive friends wrapping their arms around you.

I ran for the Select Board in 2013, at a time when our town was polarized over the question of what to do with our deteriorating town office and gym. We weighed the option of renovating the existing building, which had been the old high school and sat at the gateway to Middlebury College. The college was offering a handsome gift toward building a new office at the site of the former Steeles gas station next to our library. That meant moving the Osborne House to the vacated site of our former CVUUS sanctuary at the corner of Cross and Water Streets. The gym would be built at another location, off Creek Road, less central

but with better parking. In exchange, the existing town office and gym would be deeded to the college, where they would create a park accessible to all. Discussion became heated, with some resenting the college's power and suspecting backroom deals. I listened deeply, trying to find the common ground.

Seeking and finding common ground is a long Quaker tradition, as it is for other faith practices. That's why so many Quakers can be found in diplomacy. I felt led to offer diplomacy a decade earlier when I was living in Bridport. At that time the town was polarized over what to do with its 7th and 8th graders. Some wanted them to stay in Bridport, while others wanted them to join their Addison County peers at the regional middle school, so they could transition together to high school. A group of 3rd and 4th grade parents formed and met at each other's houses to try to resolve the divide. Marnie Wood was my daughter's 3rd and 4th grade teacher and well recalls the conflict. Could the upper grades be strengthened while staying local? Could the middle school offer academic and athletic opportunities in a scale that the local school couldn't? Should one or more of us run for school board? We did. Should we organize community meetings and tours of the middle school? We did. Should we vote? We did. The motion to send the kids to MUMS passed narrowly. Then it got appealed and rejected. Back and forth this went for two more years before Bridport finally settled on sending its older students to Middlebury. While people didn't all agree,

they did come closer to understanding each other and speaking civilly, while sharing pie at Town Meeting and celebrating the community in what became Bridport Day, a project of my parent group.

Before this got resolved, I moved into Middlebury in 2003 so our daughter could attend MUMS. My civic life pivoted to addressing climate change, where I felt led to found and serve on our town's energy committee, while working full time in high schools and forming environmental clubs there. I wrote many letters to the editor and attended plenty of selectboard meetings to speak up in public comments and on agenda items related to energy use so was know to our community. I watched the town struggle over building the Cross Street Bridge, and then the deeper conflict over the town office and gym. I wondered if I could help encourage the future project to be carbon neutral, which it did become, mostly.

My life during my selectboard years presented many challenges. I was elected in March 2014 and received large packets of information to digest before each meeting. In April my daughter needed to leave college. Again. A high achieving student and athlete from kindergarten to 12th grade, she had difficulty hitting her stride after graduation as our family continued to struggle with chronic addiction and mental health concerns. In May I lost a job. Again. And gained a new one working for CVUUS as your administrator. As I faced another learning curve and

pressing family matters, I wondered if I needed to resign my new seat. I requested another Clearness Committee and discerned how to navigate my challenges. I felt led to run again in 2017 as we prepared for the enormously complex and contentious downtown rail construction project.

I rotated off Selectboard after two terms, to encourage new voices to come to the table. And to rest. I feel led to continue recruiting women and new voices to office, and will stay on our Public Health and Safety Committee, which I currently chair. I'm led to help with our carbon-reduced transportation transformation from the bottom up, by supporting kids in walking and biking to school. Running for elected office became an extension of my larger leading of protecting the health of each other and our planet. I'll be listening for what's next and asking for support from my faith community and others. May you be as supported as I have been, in hearing and following your own calling with passion and joy.