

When I was a young mother in my twenties, I was trying to figure out what it meant to be grown up. I thought I should have it figured out if I was going to be raising children – even though I was barely out of childhood myself.

I looked around and I found women that made an impression on me. Whose wisdom I could follow. These were my Aunt Dot, my exes' Aunt Anne, a cousin named Jan, a family friend named Annie.

Each exemplified some aspect of womanhood that I admired and wanted to bring forth in my life.

Aunt Dot personified joy in living. She was the member of my family who passed on the family stories and even now, the picture I have of her is of twinkling eyes and a big smile. She lived to her mid 90's and was still volunteering in a hospital when they celebrated her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. She had a lot of tragedy in her life, losing her husband at an early age and one of her sons from a heart attack in his 30's. But you'd never know it from being with her – she relished life and made me want to do so as well.

Aunt Anne was a little more severe, but the thing she modeled was welcome. I was a brand-new member of her extended family but when we went to visit in Pennsylvania, I felt as if I had always belonged. She made a home that was open and accepting of everyone who came through her door – and I wanted to carry that forward in my life.

Jan was another person who modeled hospitality well. When we visited her, she always gave a young and awkward me some tasks to do in her kitchen, so I wasn't just standing around twiddling my thumbs. By including me in the meal prep, I felt more at ease and vowed to remember that behavior and make my guests feel included by allowing them to help me if they wanted to.

Annie was a career woman who laughed easily but used her life to make a difference in the world. Annie had been stricken with polio in her childhood and couldn't use her legs – but boy could she get around. I first met her when she came to stay at our house when my dad was running the Carter presidential campaign in northern Ohio in 1976. She was the organizer from Washington DC who was working from our area.

Our house was not even close to ADA compliant and when my folks said we could put someone from the campaign up at our house, they had no idea that Annie couldn't walk, so my mom planned on her staying up in the attic – two flights up. And Annie did it. She scooted all over our house with her long blond hair dragging on the floor behind her. Annie taught me that limitations were what we let them be – and that I could do whatever I set my mind to do.

Each of these people were ordinary folks – people who found a passion in life and through their generous example, offered me a guide to living my life in a positive and life affirming way.

Today we're talking about leadership – about what it means to be a leader – and what it takes to set an example for the world around us.

Now when you think of leaders – you might not originally think of folks like Aunt Dot or Annie – people living ordinary lives outside of any spotlight.

We think about leaders as being people who make a really big difference in the world. People like Dr Martin Luther King, Jr, who we celebrated last week.

I looked up a bunch of top ten leaders lists, and many composed some of the same folks: Mahatma Gandhi, Winston Churchill, Nelson Mandela, Albert Einstein, Stephen Hawking, Oprah Winfrey, Geta Thunberg, Thurgood Marshall, Rosa Parks, Malcom X and more.

Slides

But each of these folks are inspiring but it's not because they were famous. It's because they did what they did with passion and integrity.

Anyone can be a leader – because anyone can care deeply.

An article about Greta Thunberg listed her leadership skills and said:

“Being a leader is not about where you sit, your title, or how much money you make. Being a leader is about defining your vision and your purpose—and then deciding what you're going to do with it.<sup>i</sup>

Defining your vision and purpose – and deciding what you're going to do.

Any one of us can do that.

Each of my models of successful womanhood did that. They knew what was important and lived by that.

They listened to their inner voice- their own call to purpose – and offered a beautiful example of how I might live my life.

Who are the people that have inspired you?

Take a moment and find one or two people to talk with. Share someone who's been a role model or leader – and what you learned from them. How they inspired you in some way in your life.

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Any one willing to share?

Do you hear any common elements in the folks we've mentioned?

Passion, compassion, integrity, joy?

Greta Thunberg has a clear sense of purpose. She is passionate about saving this planet refused to accept the common wisdom that as a child she couldn't do anything about it.

For those of you not aware of Greta – she's the young person who has traveled around the world inspiring young people to combat our global climate crisis.

Every Friday since August of 2018, Greta has walked out of school to go sit outside, often by herself, of the Swedish Parliament with a homemade sign, in order to raise awareness about climate change and the urgency of the crisis. Her words—and her actions—have inspired others around the world to act as well. Just a year from her first school strike... she inspired millions of young people to lead and participate in [a global climate strike](#) in 150 countries around the world... Her vision for the future... is powerful and clear; If we don't do something now, it will be too late.

Greta isn't hampered by outside limitations. She believes in herself and has inspired millions. An article titled "Leadership Insights: What Greta Thunberg Can Teach Us About Purposeful Leaders" says:

Above all, Greta forces others to look inside themselves, to become more self-aware in their ability to transform the way things are done and to influence the people around them.<sup>ii</sup>

What do you see when you look inside? What inspires you? Where is your passion?

So often we sit back and wait for other people to fix what's broken; someone else will volunteer for the undone task; to show up and do the work that is always needed.

We tell ourselves that other people are smarter, or stronger, or have more time.

But do you really believe that's true? I don't.

For six years now and I've seen dozens of people come and really like it here. They start coming regularly.

They say they like the people and the ethos of the church – but they leave right after the service.

And eventually we stop seeing them. Something else comes up – maybe swim meets or soccer practice; maybe an ill parent or relatives taking up more time.

Many of us have these obligations which may make us take a break. But these folks never come back.

But I think the main reason is that they didn't make those connections which made the church their own.

Those connections don't happen in coffee hour – as lovely as it is (or terrifying or you're the introverted folks!)

They happen when you roll up your sleeves and get involved.

When you show up for your hospitality team regularly – when you offer an event for Harvest Home – or attend a Harvest Home dinner.

When you sit at a table with someone else taking tickets. When you help cook or clean up the kitchen.

Anytime you see a need in the church and show up.

That's where the rubber hits the road – where you have time to talk about your kids or hear the amazing thing that someone is doing at their work.

That's when you take ownership of this place and it stops being the place I go and becomes my church.

Another story from my twenties: we had just moved to Avon, Ohio and started attending St Mary of the Immaculate Conception church.

Fr Egan was great & I really liked the place but it was a small tightly knit farm community and I definitely didn't feel like I belonged.

My kids were little and I worked from home so I didn't have a lot of time to be able to attend meetings or volunteer for stuff.

But one Sunday as I sat in the choir loft (to keep the kids quiet) I noticed how dusty and dirty it was up there. The following Saturday, I called the office and asked if I could clean it.

They said “um... sure.” So I brought my kids and my buckets and polishing cloths and cleaned the dickens out of that choir loft. It shone.

I felt so good about it – it lasted a really long time. And it became my church.

The lady in the office made a point to get to know this odd young woman who asked to clean and little by little I started to feel more empowered to take on other tasks.

Teaching Sunday school, becoming what they called a Lector on Sunday mornings, running the food at the annual Oktoberfest and eventually becoming board president.

I'm not sure that's a leadership story – no one else took on the task of cleaning the choir loft and I have to admit I think I only did it one more time.

But it is a story of bringing what I had to offer – and by offering that small gift finding my way into community.

Each and every one of us can be leaders in ways small and large.

We can lead by example, by showing up and bringing the gifts we have.

We can lead by following the passion we have – by sharing that enthusiasm with other people and inspiring them to act in ways they may not have imagined.

We can lead by listening people into their truth,

by really paying attention to what is true for ourselves,

by not being afraid to share that truth even when it's challenging or uncomfortable.

You don't have to be the person at the podium to be a leader. Sometimes it's as small as saying "I see it differently."

Just making space for a different opinion in a world where we all want to get along with our peer group can be an enormous leadership moment.

When I served as the board president at St Mary's we had a different priest who was ... challenging. He and I butted heads because I tried to begin a sense of spiritual connection to our meetings – to remember that we were doing God's work in the minutiae of budget discussions and church year planning.

I asked if we could say a simple prayer before our meetings and he responded by bringing this page long – incredibly boring prayer that he droned on until everyone's eyes glazed over. Then he looked at me and smiled – very clearly saying "are you happy now?"

It was shortly after that that I got divorced and left the church and the area but years later I ran into the school principal at a convenience store, a woman I didn't know very well at all.

She was delighted to see me – which surprised me – and told me that I had been the best board president she'd ever seen at the church – another big surprise.

It wasn't because I didn't do anything big or flashy or garnered a huge amount of power. I really didn't.

It was because I brought my convictions, my passion to the mundane – and inspired others to do the same.

Each and every one of us can do that.

Each of us can live fully into this moment – and lead by living our own lives in accordance with our values and principles.

I hope you will consider staying after the service to enjoy our “leap into leadership” luncheon. Try saying that 5 times fast!

There will be really good food made by our own Tim Dvorak – one of our amazing leaders who usually has a kitchen full of folks helping him prepare delicious meals. A leader who brings his passion and talent and inspires others to contribute in very yummy ways!

Our current leaders will be talking about how this church works.

What different positions look like, what they entail. How you can step in on a small level and become a part of the workings of this great little community.

No one will be asking you to do anything today – just giving you information on how you things work. Sometimes you have to know what the niches are before you can offer to fill one.

One of the big paradoxes of life is that we receive more than we give, when we offer our passion, our time, our talents, to a community, we are filled up in ways we never imagined.

It will not always be easy or smooth – humans are humans and people are funny – but it will be a way to transform UCH from “that place I go on Sundays” to “my church.”

I look forward to seeing you all at lunch!

**Amen & blessed be.**

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.linkageinc.com/leadership-insights/what-greta-thunberg-can-teach-us-about-purposeful-leadership/>

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