Reflections on 10 Years in Leadership at St. Columba’s

I was elected to the vestry 10 years ago. I served on the vestry for six years, and then as warden for four years. This is my last chance to stand up here as warden so I'll give you my reflections from 10 years in leadership at St. Columba’s.

I found a song that captures pretty well what I want to say: [Music played]

“Can I have a Hallelujah; can I have an Amen ... This is My Church.”

Full disclosure – the singer was talking about her Car – but I actually want to talk about My Church – rather Our Church.

Ten years ago, St. Columba’s was not a happy place. We were upset with leadership; we were upset with each other. People we cared about left and went to worship somewhere else. Others of us stayed – we dug in because, we said – This is Our Church. We aren’t going to let go of Our Church. That was something of a desperate declaration of Our Church.

We made our way through the hard times and then we came together when we were calling a new rector – we met in small groups to describe what someone should know about Our Church – a more hopeful, but still pretty needy place.

We called Ledlie. Things began to brighten. But we had been through tough financial times and the plaster was crumbling in our lovely Church Nave. So many of you said – THIS is Our Church now? Really?? And you stepped up to pay to fix the plaster – not perfectly but we can be proud again to show our friends Our Church.

I am so grateful for the response we have received since we told you that we need to increase our pledges considerably this year; in order to keep all of our staff, fix the roof, remove the Columba Oak and everything else that requires money. So many of you have said, “Thank you for telling us what we need. This IS our church and we are taking responsibility for it!”

We are increasingly aware that people don’t go to church automatically any more. That if we want people to come to St. C’s, we have to think about what makes St. Columba’s different than a community service organization or a neighborhood chorus. Do we know what we want our friends to understand when we say this is our CHURCH. Our work on the Five Practices grew out of a conversation like this. We have a lot to continue to think about. What brings us here? What are we offering to a troubled world and a needy city and to individuals who lead hectic lives and are increasingly looking to mindfulness apps to help them slow down and get grounded for a few minutes. When we invite them to our Church, what are we offering them?

We are living in extraordinarily divisive times in our country. St. Columba’s must be a place where we can set those divisions aside. This is OUR church, democrats and republicans, conservatives and liberals. We don’t need to agree on everything and we can’t be afraid to speak out – for what we believe in and against injustice where we see it – but we must be able to listen to and honor each other. So St. Columba’s will continue to be OUR church.

Now is an exciting time to be at St. Columba’s. We will be celebrating our 150th anniversary soon. We are looking upward and outward ... thinking and dreaming about how we can make the most difference
in the lives of those of us who gather inside these walls, how we raise up our children to be strong and hopeful in a challenging world, and how we open our hearts and hands to those outside of our walls who need us. We will do this together because this is Our Church!

Can I have a hallelujah; can I have an Amen!

Elizabeth Taylor