IMPORTANT MESSAGE FROM A NEW MEMBER:

I'm Larissa Cartwright. My family and I moved to Marblehead less than a year ago.

And I've come to understand that being new to Marblehead is a relatively rare thing. Many of you have known each other for decades. And by decades, I mean generations. Just like this congregation, some of your families were here before the Revolution.

That all said, maybe not everyone here remembers what it's like to start over somewhere completely new.

But I can tell you, moving from Texas to coastal Massachusetts is actually pretty doable. Even in a place like Marblehead.

You find a house. You find doctors. You find the youth sports leagues. You figure out the best way to get through Salem in October. You find your favorite coffee at Mookie's and your favorite croissants at Farine.

That's the easy part. You can Google most of that.

But there's a difference between having a mailing address in a community and actually putting down roots.

How do you build a life somewhere new? How do you, in your mid-40s, start a whole new chapter and begin to make a place feel like home?

Well, for the first time in my adult life, I decided maybe we should find a church.

I wasn't particularly concerned about denomination. I just thought we'd visit a few and see if one felt right.

So I made a list of local churches, and on January 18, we started with church number one.

The church so close to our house that we can practically touch it from our bedroom window.

Old North.

As it turns out, I didn't need the rest of the list.

It was a freezing January morning when my daughter Aviana and I bundled up and stumbled through these doors.

It wasn't a particularly crowded Sunday. But almost immediately, we were greeted and welcomed by so many of you, including Lindsey and Christine.

And somewhere during the service, between the sermon and the music, I remember turning to Avi, getting a little teary-eyed, and saying, "This is it."

The next week, we returned, and we already had name tags! Which I loved. Honestly, the name tags are brilliant.

We went downstairs for coffee, met more people, and started to feel like we belonged.

In the weeks that followed, Christine encouraged Avi to join what I am convinced is the most amazing choir in Massachusetts.

We've witnessed baptisms, experienced the most beautiful series of summer services, which honestly felt like something out of a movie, and week after week, I've found myself inspired by the enthusiasm, thoughtfulness, and peace that each service brings.

And I've been equally inspired by Lindsay and Christine's vision for the future of this church while honoring its remarkable history.

Because I think it's that history and all the stories held within these walls that make Old North so special.

For generations, people have walked through these doors looking for many of the same things we look for today. Faith. Comfort. Connection. A place to raise their children. A place to turn when life gets hard. A place to feel small. A place to hear God.

And here's what I've been thinking about lately.

Every one of us is just a small chapter in the story of this church.

Some of you have been part of this congregation for decades. Some of us have been here for less than a year.

But none of us owns this story. We inherited it from the people who came before us.

People who gave their time, their energy, their talents, and their donations to make sure these doors stayed open.

They had no idea that one day, a family would move here from Texas, walk through these doors on a freezing January morning, and find exactly what they needed.

We don't know who will walk through these doors a hundred years from now.

But I'm happy to contribute what I can to make sure that during our little chapter, we have a place for the family who just moved to town. For someone going through a difficult time. For those of us who need a little hope when we turn on the news. For a child who grows up knowing they belong to a community that loves and accepts them, even on those Sunday mornings when getting them out of bed feels like a minor miracle.

And as Christine says every week, it's a place you can always come home to.

Because Old North isn't still here just because it has stood for centuries. It's here because, generation after generation, people have decided it matters enough to give something of themselves to keep its story going.

When I think back to that freezing January morning, I realize that what Avi and I experienced wasn't just a warm welcome. It was the result of generations of people choosing to embody God's love, even for people they would never meet.