

Vestry Check-In June 11 Minutes

Highlights:

*Vestry discussed the Bishop's "A Letter on Race" – which members and others are encouraged to read, sign, and share – as well as other resources for learning about this issue, and agreed to have Vestry members share excerpts from readings with each other at future meetings.

*Senior Warden Lisa Jones shared her experience at work, where people opened up and spoke more honestly with each other after senior executives modeled a willingness to be honest and to listen, suggesting that Vestry needs to model what it would like to see from Christ Church members.

*We shortly will be getting a Blessing Box on our property, from which those in need can take food and other items. Meanwhile, in recognition of the ongoing need for aid during the pandemic, we continue to collect food and personal-hygiene products for Crossroads.

Present: Lisa Jones, Emily Williams Guffey, Chuck Atwater, Christine Galli, Howard Matthews, Betty Warner, Anthony Estes, Denise Crenshaw, Desmond Jones, Carolyn Maher, and Roger Basse.

Absent/Excused: Desmond Jones and Phil Brown.

Action items underlined.

The meeting opened at 6:06 with Emily offering the Prayer for Cities from the Book of Common Prayer. Minutes from the June 4 meeting were **approved**.

Old Business/Action items from the previous meeting

Treasurer George Port, with B&G Vestry representative Desmond Jones' assistance, will begin the process, previously approved in principle by Vestry, of applying to the diocese for a loan of up to \$400,000 for the Bell Tower project. This is in progress and should be completed this evening. We have reduced the amount we're asking for, to \$300K, at Mark Miliotto's advice, to avoid asking for more than has even been granted. Two other churches also are asking for \$300K – and starting capital campaigns in the fall. If all three requests are granted, that would about tap out the fund. George passed along some questions to Emily that he needs answered for the application.

Emily will ask the Bishop's office whether work could begin using a locked port-o-potty to ensure construction workers don't enter the building. She didn't ask, having heard that we might be allowed to start at end-June or thereabouts.

We will talk about this {reopening} in future meetings so we have a consistent message.

Christine will track down Vestry members who have not yet signed up to be Rep at Sunday service. All but a couple of holdouts have signed up.

New business

A Vestry member reported receiving a bogus email supposedly from Emily. In fact, several church members recently received a similar one. Emily urged people who question an email from her to look at the sender's email address, which will never be Emily's actual one.

Emily has been barely able to access emails over the last 24 hours, due to a power outage. She called into the meeting from her car, parked in a lot with Wi-Fi access. She apologized for any inconvenience due to slow email replies.

Finance – Notes from the June 3 meeting Finance Committee meeting were distributed.

Continued Dialogue and Reflections on the national discussion about race, policing, and more.

Anthony, commenting on Bishop Bonnie's weekly meeting on the topic, said he likes that it begins with Bible Study. Everything we're praying and responding is grounded in Scriptures. That's the solid foundation we'll use to build, after tearing down any structures that need to be discarded.

The Bishop's meeting included a collection of ideas presented at the first meeting. The list on the diocesan website of resources and ideas has been updated. For example, take the question of where

to start. If you're just starting, here's where to start. If you've been doing this for a little while, here's something more. And if you've been doing this a long time, here's additional material. We're trying to put forth a more systematic way of doing this work, noting that a lot of us have focused in the last few years of Bishop's Gibbs' bishopric on racism and inclusion. Do what works for you. Don't just read a book and say, "Check—I'm done."

Bishop Bonnie's meeting was capped with an open letter from the three Bishops in the state of Michigan. Great letter, which people are asked to sign and share, say through social media. Put our names and our beliefs out in public. It also highlighted the importance of whatever you're doing, do it slowly. Read a book? Or watch a movie? – a few times, not just once.

Anthony: I'd like to write something about how sometimes God says something, but you may need to hear it a few times before you really understand it. Let it steep in your bones. I think it might be really helpful for us [at Christ Church] to find a more systematic, structured way to have conversations. Readings/movies are fine. We might want to find ways to host and facilitate broader discussions. People need to see it modeled: that you can have some hard conversations and not feel icky about it – and if you do, know that you're held in love.

Bishop Perry made it clear that this letter is just one thing of many that will be coming. I don't get the sense that she's going to be content with our writing one letter.

Chuck: Can we post this letter on our Christ Church Facebook page? Emily: I believe so. I can't connect to social media right now, so I've not been able to read or share the letter.

Anthony: If you go to the diocesan website and sign it, there's an option right there to share it to your own Facebook page. Already signed by 480+ individuals, in less than 24 hours. (It was presented last night at 8 p.m., but not sure it was live then.)

Emily: This letter could be a step towards community organizing – by showing the number of people who want to move in this direction. It then would allow the diocese to work with other civic partners. I was in a meeting with the Bishop on Tuesday, and asked if there was a specific action or organization that she imagines us rallying the diocese behind in a certain way. She said no, but with a diocese, one approach is developing power with money, as she did with raising money via the Bishop's fund for food security. She also knows about our work with Partners for Sacred Places, aiming to tell our story in a way that appeals to civic and other partners. Whether the goal is to raise money, or consider policing in Detroit, or work for equality in any way, then we can build power with our neighborhood partners and associations.

Emily continued, agreeing with Anthony that there are manifold ways we could and should be moving. The bishop would favor anything that a parish wants to do. So that's what's before us: What are we, as Christ Church, called to do in this moment? Outreach also is discerning a path forward, trying to move boldly, but not so quickly that we fail to really know what we're doing.

One possibility: creating some virtual space for conversations. Emily cited Sacred Ground, an Episcopalian program, recommended by the Race and Reconciliation arm of the Episcopal church. It takes the baptismal covenant as a starting point. "Respecting the dignity of every human being"—what does that look like in your neighborhood? Guides us in looking at our local history as well. The face to face can be so meaningful, even if awkward sometimes.

Vestry members were then asked what's on their minds and in their hearts now.

Lisa: I've been involved, since we last met, with Comerica's diversity conversation, which gathered 2,000 employees on a Zoom-like platform. About 8-10 panelists talked about their experiences, including some very senior leaders, some from middle management, both white and black. She was pleasantly surprised by how raw and genuine that dialog was, and that it inspired more of the same. It seemed that before the company's leadership spoke, people didn't speak loudly. But after the leadership spoke, others couldn't stop talking. If there's a way that we [as the church's leaders] can present our hearts to a broader audience, it'll facilitate others feeling like they're in a safe space to talk as well.

Chuck: I'm finding people are speaking more casually and openly to me. Maybe it's the beard... It used to be people wouldn't see you, or would see through you. But now I sense a desire to open a more casual pleasantry. I see it as a sign of hopefulness.

George: We can't remain silence. Silence is killing. It reinforces negative behavior. It's time to stand up and be heard. We'll be ignored if we let ourselves be ignored.

Christine: I read Fa. Anthony's blog twice. I'm always looking for insight, or to share a common thread. Read it twice, in the same format that we use for the African Bible study. Could we have a short quote or passage to reflect on? A common resource that all of us are reading, to enable deeper conversations. Maybe start with Anthony?

Lisa: You've been nominated, F. Anthony. Anthony: So... a book or material that the Vestry and clergy read together to generate some conversations? Or should we all find something, and everyone shares their thoughts?

Lisa: I envision the latter, so that we all pull from our resources something to share in advance of the Vestry meeting, so everyone can review and reflect on it in advance. Have everyone pick a piece or article that speaks to them. What speaks to you? It's telling what you pick. I think that'll give us even more insights into one another.

For Vestry's next Check-in meeting, Anthony will share an excerpt from a book. Lisa: Another possibility is to share a photo or image, rather than words, and be ready to explain why and how it moved you. Betty will help Lisa to share those images with the entire Vestry.

Carolyn: We thought we were doing a good job in the schools in Troy, which actually are quite diverse. But some of the conversations that came out, showed that we clearly were not.

Lisa: I've been impressed by how, amid all of the regular protests, we're not seeing the same level of violence.

Jim: And yet, I've been talking with a brother-in-law who has a very different view of the news – and news feed – and sees Detroit as far more unsafe and violence-plagued than I do. We need at some point to talk about how to talk with those who we strongly disagree with. George: Sometimes people are just wrong, and you need to tell them that.

Christine: A wonderful suggestion I picked up from NPR awhile back is that if you want to have a conversation with an absolutely opposing faction: both parties have to be able to say: "The one strength I can say about your message is X, and the one weakness about my message is Y."

Lisa: That's an interesting approach, particularly when you start with their strength. Because you start with a level of comfort, because you start by praising them. Likewise, in performance evaluations, you never start with what their problems are, but with what their strengths are.

Other business

Each Vestry member was asked if they had something else to bring to the group. Here are the points raised.

Emily: We're getting a Blessing Box tomorrow afternoon. It's coming pre-stocked. Christine: Don't forget your donations to Crossroads. Keep at that. Jim: I walked by the church today, and despite the storm, the bell tower is still standing. Denise: A question for Emily—do you have many requests that you can fill with your discretionary fund? Do you need more in that fund? And does Anthony have a discretionary fund? Emily: We need to start one for Anthony. Maybe next week. Contributions can be made to it. I have not received as many requests for financial support as I had anticipated when the crisis began.

George: How's the bank balance look? Christine: Last month's pledges and gifts received were short of our revised budget, but there's such a lack of postal cooperation [i.e., late deliveries] that I really feel like June's going to make up for it. Emily: I get calls that we're behind on utility-bill payments, but we haven't received the invoices. The mail problem is working both ways. George: Can we receive our bills electronically, too? Christine: Or at least have logins for all of our utilities, and be diligent about checking on certain days?

Emily, responding to a point raised by Lisa, said she expects to meet next Thursday about our reading initiative, the alternative to our former Reading Camp.

Adjourned at 7:25.

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Treece, secretary