

St. Aidan's Episcopal Church
Vestry Regular Meeting – 23 June 2009
Minutes

Attendees:

Mary Kate Schroeder+, Rector
Kay Cook+, Priest Associate
Don Burt, diaconal candidate
Karen DeSousa, Senior Warden
Matt Clark, Junior Warden
Lisa Autry
Joe Bowers
Anne Doyle
John Moore
Diane Perry
Sue Sassano
William Sweeney, Parish Clerk

Absent

Dustin Berg+, Chaplain
Reynolds Crawford, Treasurer
Kandace Einbeck
John Moore
Carol Rasmussen

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM by Mother Mary Kate Schroeder, and a quorum was present.

FORMATION

Don Burt presented the attached Reflections on Hospitality and led a discussion that centered on questions 2 and 5.

INFORMATION

Mother Mary Kate discussed her planned July and August personal schedule (including General Convention and personal leave) and the planned schedule of parish and Canterbury activities for July, August and September. The single services are generally well received and will be extended to August 30.

As far as staff goes, Mother Kay will begin part-time paid employment emphasizing pastoral care and spiritual formation while Mother Mary Kate increases her concentration on Canterbury. It is likely that additional student administrative help will be engaged. Don Burt will be assigned to the parish after his diaconal ordination.

The property at 2700 University heights will be leased for one year while we consider our long term strategic plan for the property, which is owned by Canterbury and managed by St. Aidan's.

Safeguarding God's Children will be offered in July at St. Aidan's. It is strongly recommended that all people take the course, and it required for those who work with youth.

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The Faith Alive program has been scheduled for the last weekend of January, 2010, and a weekend leader has been appointed. Plans are underway to meet with the leader in August. Many vestry members have leadership roles in Faith Alive.

Anne Doyle is leading a regular Monday afternoon meditation time, initially focusing on responses to the reading of Eyes of the Heart recently led by Mother Mary Kate. Another session of the Eyes of the Heart course is scheduled for Monday evenings in August.

The 2419 (Canterbury House) demolition and temporary use committee has begun meeting and will file papers soon to challenge the designation of 2419 as an historic landmark.

The vestry and the Canterbury board of stewards will have joint dinner and vision/planning meeting on the evening of August 18.

DECISION

The minutes for the meeting of 26 May and 9 June were adopted in the form presented as draft.

Mother Mary Kate adjourned the meeting at 8:30 PM.

Respectfully Submitted

William Sweeney
Parish Clerk

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Some reflections on Hospitality
Don Burt at St. Aidan's Episcopal Church
June, 2009

The word hospitality probably brings to mind one of two visions: either entertaining at home or the hospitality industry. These secular meanings are the last residue of a rich and transforming tradition that was once identified by this word.

Biblically, hospitality comprised the welcoming of strangers, usually travelers, into one's home and family. Among the many examples are Abraham and the three men (Gen 18:1-17), Elijah and the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:8-16), and Paul's request on behalf of Phoebe (Rom 16:1-2). All of these were a response to the need for shelter, food, and protection, but were also a fundamental recognition of the worth of humanity. They involved invitation into private space, which in early Christian times was offered from the overlap of household and church.

John Chrysostom in 4th century wrote that this hospitality was to be “face to face, gracious, unassuming, nearly indiscriminate, and always enthusiastic.” He also condemned delegating the responsibility for hospitality to others: “If another man prays, does it follow that you are not bound to pray?” One might even say “does it follow you will not benefit from prayer?” His view is foundational for Christians: all are guests; all are strangers in a land not our own; all receive unmerited welcome as children of God.

The development of specialized structures in the church and culture gradually usurped this ancient practice. John Calvin, in mid-16th century said the loss of ancient hospitality was a sign of the depravity of the era. Actually, beginning in about John Chrysostom's time, it had gradually become dispersed into various social institutions. This is still true, although there have been occasional successful returns to apostolic practice.

Social or government institutions normally provide specialized care reflecting some single facet of the tradition. Because they are specialized and staffed by experts, they provide their specific service far better than would a home or other generalist environment. However, the very “standardization” and asymmetric power roles that enable the higher standard of care also preclude ministry to the worth and dignity of the individuals. Consequently there is still a great need for traditional hospitality as a compassionate and wholesome environment in which specialized care can operate. This is true for all those in need of shelter, food, protection, or recognition, both within our church family and outside it.

However, it is nowhere more true than for those most vulnerable; those who are “without a place”; detached from family, work, social and religious organizations. They are detached from a network of relationships which we scarcely acknowledge, but that serves in time of need to protect our interests and sometimes even our very being. Those without a place might include the unemployed, refugees, legal or illegal aliens, the mentally ill, or perhaps just students who are estranged from their families.

Hospitality that welcomes “the least” and grants them recognition and equal value can be an act of resistance and defiance, a challenge to the larger community which risks alienating the hosts

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from the established centers of power and privilege. However, it can also initiate a journey toward visibility and respect. Equality, human rights, and recognition have deep roots in Christian and Hebrew tradition and practice. While these labels have acquired secular trappings that might cause us distraction or discomfort, again and again, from Deuteronomy through the New Testament they are both defined for us and required of us as Christ's body.

Western theology acknowledges a sinner's need for forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation. A component of Asian Liberation Theology is the idea of 'han', a word capturing the corresponding "anger, resentment, and bitterness of victims who have been unjustly treated". Han recognizes that these consequences for a victim of sinful acts lead to the same kind of separation from God and the need for God's ministry, especially in healing from anger and resentment. When we engage victims of violence, rejection, or oppression, we should expect to be recipients of that anger and resentment. If we are prepared, we can choose to accept it in the same way we would accept unjustly directed anger from a friend who is numbed by tragedy.

Although Christianity judges men and women without regard to social standing, both religious doctrine and religious institutions tend to reinforce existing power structures and hierarchies. We must resist that, because recognition and the protection of individual worth and rights are essential values derived from our shared identity as children of God. If we are to be the church in the name of Jesus Christ we cannot accept anything less.

Reflection questions:

- 1) What are some of the reasons for providing hospitality, and what should our goals be in doing so?
- 2) What are some of our fears of welcoming strangers, and how reasonable might they actually be?
- 3) What are some factors that make the traditional biblical version of hospitality difficult today? What are some that make that service still necessary.
- 4) Are we all responsible to offer some level of hospitality? If so, to whom, or why? If not, why not?
- 5) Can we name any individuals or institutions that still attempt to provide the ancient practice of hospitality? In what environment do they operate?
- 6) What are some of the special risks and rewards of providing hospitality to those "without a place"? How and where might that be done?