



Clergy Webinar, July 14, 2020

NOTES: Questions relating to worship and regathering are referred to your Area Coaches. Please do touch base with them to find answers – that’s what they have been trained to do. To find the Coach for your area, click [here](#).

In future calls sessions, please make sure that you identify yourself rather than simply posting questions as “Anonymous Attendee.” We know that often your questions are shaped by your particular context, and when we know who is asking a question, it helps us give an answer that is truly responsive. Many thanks!

Bishop Goff opened the meeting with prayer and her reflection.

She noted that the focus of this webinar was on the work of dismantling racism and healing the wounds of that great sin, and how four different parishes have engaged in this work. She also offered an update on the topic of Holy Eucharist, noting that some dioceses are now permitting the distribution of consecrated wafers under certain guidelines. “The question of when and how we might share Eucharist is close to the hearts of many of us, particularly as this time of fasting from the sacrament continues. We are working actively and intentionally on this. The House of Bishops meets virtually later this month to engage together our Eucharistic theology and practice. We anticipate that a written word to the church will come out of that meeting. Soon after that, a written word will be coming from us, your bishops.”

Bishop Goff then introduced the four presenters on the day’s topic:

I. The Rev. Kim Coleman, Trinity, Arlington

Kim described her parish’s experience of the Sacred Ground curriculum

(<https://episcopalchurch.org/sacred-ground>.) This curriculum, developed by a team led by

Katrina Brown, who created “Traces of the Trade,”¹, was one she found very different from prior trainings because it was not only limited to the experience of racism for Black persons, it also addressed the racism under which other Persons of Color have suffered. Although it was originally written for white persons, it has morphed into something that can be used by congregations that are multicultural and multiracial. It is, in her view, more inclusive. She described a program of ten sessions, then moving into action. She said there were fresh new materials. New movies, new books. Kim noted that this curriculum was NOT about pretending we can have a space where no one’s feelings might be hurt. Instead, it was an invitation into vulnerability. It was a way into the energy and the hope we gain when we engage in the work. It requires the work of learning, of educational info to read, but also experiential work to do – they all come together to move people to action. She strongly encouraged her colleagues to consider this curriculum, because it produces genuine results.

II. The Rev. Charlie Dupree, St Paul’s, Richmond

The word “Graffiti” finds its home in a Greek word meaning “to scratch, draw, or write.” You might think of the suffixes in the words *typography*, *topography*, or *cartography*. Over the centuries, graffiti has come to be known as something that is scratched or scribbled on walls – a message that is meant to be both seen and heard.

When I woke up on that Sunday morning – the Day of Pentecost - a day of spirit and breath – my phone buzzed, first thing, with pictures of our front steps. The images captured the words in orange and black spray paint, “I can’t breathe.” Other names were spray painted – George Floyd, Treyvon Martin, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery.

During that Pentecost sermon, as our very clean and proper liturgy unrolled, I could hear the crowds outside of our doors shouting, “I can’t breathe. I can’t breathe.” It was then that I decided – the Spirit decided – that those names on the steps are not graffiti – they are not something scratched or scribbled. They are intentional – God-created human beings with voices – voices of the past and voices of the present – voices that have shouted, but have not been

¹ “Traces of the Trade” was Brown’s documentary reflection on the history of her forebears in the Triangle Trade enslaving persons from Africa and bringing them to serve as captive peoples in America.

heard. On the day when we celebrate the breath of God animating all of life and the breath of God creating the church – how could we possibly wash away the names of the people whose breath had been taken from them.

The people chanted outside and the psalmists' voices came to mind – How long, O Lord? How Long?

So, an important consideration: “I can’t breathe” is not graffiti. I don’t consider George Floyd, Trayvon Martin, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor graffiti – they are not scratched or scribbled. Instead, I imagine a psalmist’s hand writing them down on the place where God might finally hear them – the front steps of a house of worship. How long, O Lord? How long? (Psalm 13).

Considering the years-long conversations St. Paul’s has had about memorial plaques, how could I not see these names as memorials? And, considering how the Episcopal Church has long overlooked the part that we have played in upholding the architecture of white supremacy, how could I just scrub these names away? To do so would be to avoid a conversation we have long avoided.

Instead, we leave the names in place as a way of saying, “We hear you.”

I’ve always been taught that the Gospel is meant to confront us with God’s radical presence in the person of Jesus, and I believe these names confront us with the image of Christ – the Christ who incarnates not only love and compassion, but justice. Sure, we could power-wash the names away, but I can’t help but believe that in doing so, we’d be further sanitizing and white-washing our already too-white, wounded Lord. The Gospel confronts us with truths about ourselves and how we are or are not creating the kingdom that God has imagined, and these names call us to be honest and real about the question that Marvin Gaye asked in 1971, “What’s going on?”

And when I wander over just to see those names on those steps, and I see flowers that have been placed on top of the hearts of those names. When I see cards that have been placed, I am

reminded that we can grieve/need to grieve, even as I, but others more than I, ask, “What’s going on?”

Since that Pentecost morning, the St. Paul’s vestry decided to remove seven of the plaques in our church that are most connected to maintaining and upholding white supremacy. Those plaques are gone from our church . . . boxed and put in our Indiana Jones-like storage rooms, but the emotional and spiritual imprints of those seven plaques and the history of our church will not soon fade. Which is why I maintain that this Gospel-work is about more than our buildings and idols. This Gospel-work is about people – people who have names, and lives, and parents, and children, and siblings, and breath. People who aren’t scribbled, but intentionally and permanently written onto the heart of God.

I can’t tell you how long the names will remain on our front steps – but for now, these saints join our Lord in confronting me – in confronting us. They have something to say to St. Paul’s, our churches, and to our neighborhoods. So, we leave them, not as scratches or scribbles to be erased, but as signals of Christ’s mandate to love others as he loved us - that all people should have life, and breath, and the opportunity to flourish.”

III. The Rev. Weston Matthews, Grace, The Plains

Weston’s work for environmental justice, particularly as it has affected communities of color, is something that has grown out of relationships he has built in the Diocese of Southwest Virginia where he was a layperson and where he was ordained, and here in the Diocese of Virginia. His work to protest the Atlantic Coast Pipeline was not a solo effort: it was a coalition of many. This pipeline project would have impacted a wide swath of communities, all the way to the Diocese of East Carolina. The coalition that protested this included the Lumbee Nation in NC as well as an historic Freedman Community in Union Hill, in the Diocese of SW Virginia. Relationships amongst the people who would be affected and their allies amplified peoples’ voices.

“There was a lot of pushback in various places, and for me as a priest. Not everyone at Stephen’s Richmond, where I served for several years, was on board. When I made the transition to serve as Rector at Grace, the Plains, I worried that my passion for this work, for

care for God's creation and for those whose lives might be most affected by purely economic decisions, might be challenged. But I was given the opportunity to realize that there are environmentalists in many places.

<https://www.episcopalcafe.com/episcopal-priest-among-those-arrested-in-virginia-environmental-protest/>

One of the great gifts of my time at St Stephen's was the friendship I developed with Robert Dilday, whom I met as a layperson with a passion of his own for these issues, and who eventually was ordained a priest. We brainstormed together about ways to move this work forward. We decided to create a vehicle – a trans-communal network that can mesh through different environmental, community, racial groups, that can deliver to families who are on the fenceline. It was funded by grassroots donors, plus a couple of very generous angel donors. I miss my dear friend Robert, who died suddenly a week after his ordination.

He was a powerful and gifted voice on these issues:

http://www.thediocese.net/Customer-Content/www/CMS/files/Virginia_Episcopalian/VE-Spring-2019-hires-web.pdf

Bishop Susan, Aisha Huertas, Robert Dilday and I went out to Buckingham County, one of the hubs of particular concern. We visited Union Hill and met with the community there. We went to Yogaville, which is in the same area. We were a part of a number of conversations there and in Richmond. It felt like we faced a long a difficult slog.

<https://www.episcopalnewsservice.org/2019/02/22/movement-against-proposed-gas-pipeline-inspires-virginia-episcopalians-environmental-advocacy/>

And then something happened, in the midst of racial anguish, in the midst of the pandemic. Two pipelines got totally cancelled and the Dakota Access pipeline got paused. The protest against the Dakota Access pipeline drew many of us to Standing Rock to pray, to protest, to witness for God's creation and for God's people.

<https://newrepublic.com/article/158368/people-killed-pipelines>

While we joined together to defend the sacred in God's creation. Much healing needs to be done once the cameras go away. Racial healing for those in places like Union Hill, and there it looks like continuing raise funds to give the folks in Union Hill for health care and EMT support. They're ravaged by COVID-19.

The learning from all of this is that racial justice and environmental justice are inextricably linked. Building coalitions matter to get voices heard and to get change to happen. Prayer is the starting point, without a doubt. But if we don't build on our prayers, we're not living into the fullness of God's [expectations for God's people and God's Creation.](#)"

IV. Ms. Ellyn Crawford, St. George's Arlington

Hi, Everyone. After Aisha called me with Bishop's Susan's request to talk about our recent Juneteenth Zoom Conference at Saint George's you today, I realized that I view our experience through the lens of the abiding presence of the *Holy Spirit* and the *Divine Grace of Relationship*. It is with that in mind that I share with you **Why it was done? -- How was it done? - - and How was it received.**

Why was it done?

The Conference was done in response to the death of George Floyd.

First a bit of background about our Social Justice Ministry at Saint George's. It is comprised of three initiatives supporting *NOVA Friends of Refugees*, *VOICE* -- Virginians Organized for Interfaith Community Engagement and the *Saint George's Race and Reconciliation Committee*. I'd note that our Juneteenth Zoom Conference was initiated and implemented by the Race and Reconciliation Committee.

Since then the Committee has offered summer forums and interactive programs intended to move us toward being anti-racist. Then came this year. While mired in all the fear, anxiety and separation imposed with this global pandemic we watched came the horrific murder on May 25th of George Floyd and the demonstrations in reaction to long pent up anger about deaths of

Black people at the hands of police. On Saturday, May 30, right after Mr. Floyd's death, my rector, Rev Shearon Sykes Williams, contacted me as Convenor of the Social Justice Ministries and leader of the R and R Committee. She said she was praying that we could focus our Social Justice efforts this summer on racial justice.

Now, as you know, immediately after Mr. Floyd's murder, we saw demonstrations first in Minneapolis, and then spreading to other major cities. And remarkably, white people were seen joining hand in hand with Black demonstrators. *What could we, at Saint George's, do?*

How was it done?

On Tuesday, June 2nd, the Race and Reconciliation Committee had a meeting. Our purpose was to develop a way to support the Saint George's Community as we processed the horror of George Floyd's death and absorbed the implications of the protests that were taking place around the world in reaction both to his death and the wider issue of police brutality against people of color.

At that meeting we came up with several proposals:

- 2 summer forums --
- Explore the possibility of engaging with the Arlington County Police
- Seek funding to bring eminent speaker to Arlington 1st quarter 2021 to address Struggle for Racial Justice
- We talked about having a Zoom event soon, but did not make a plan at that time

All during this time, demonstrations and marches had spread to cities and towns, large and small, and not just in the US, but in Europe, the UK, New Zealand, even Iceland. *And a major difference from past expressions of outrage at racial injustice was noted. This time, people of all races – and white people, lots of white people, were marching with us. George Floyd's death had triggered a change.*

Then, On Saturday, June 5, the Saint George's Men's Group met for its regular bi-weekly Zoom. Their discussion was all about the death of George Floyd and the marches in support of Racial

Justice. One of the African American participants described how his experience with police had changed him forever. What happened at this meeting pointed at a new possibility for our Race and Reconciliation Committee.

By the time we met again on June 13th, we knew that we needed an urgent response to the *sea change* that seemed to be happening in the US and around the world. Support for major changes in policing in communities of color and cries for racial justice were growing wider and deeper by the day.

And because three members of our small Committee regularly attend that amazing Men's Group, they told the rest of us of the impact of the discussion at the June 5th meeting group meeting and especially when one of its African American members told his story. Our current proposals were okay, but they lacked a sense of urgency. Shearon wanted to do something soon that would respond specifically to what we were living through in real time. We agreed.

We would do a Zoom Conference featuring the stories of our own Saint George's African American members about their experiences with policing. We were able to put the conference together because two of our members were experienced Zoom hosts and we had the unmatched support of our own Ben Keseley, Minister of Music and video and streaming guru.

As it happened, also prominent in the news at that time, along with the continuing media coverage of the worldwide demonstrations, and continuing instances of violent policing, were extensive reports about a little-known holiday – Juneteenth. Most people had never heard of it or its place in our US history and its importance as an honored day celebrated by the Black community.

As we were trying to figure out when in the next few days we could broadcast our Conference, there seemed to be something wrong with each date suggested. Then, in a moment of stunning clarity, the Holy Spirit led us to June 19th, Juneteenth. Yes. Of course.

- Shearon would moderate an hour-long broadcast
- Five African Americans Saint Georgians would speak
- Questions and answers would follow

- Two committee members would administer the broadcast
- Ben would make sure we could preserve the broadcast via video and post it for us.

A formal invitation would be sent, by email, to the Congregation. We sent it the invitation two days later on June 15th. It said, in part:

Join us to hear how members of the St. George's congregation have personally experienced incidents with police, and how those interactions have affected them throughout their lives. Five African American members of St. Georges have agreed to share their stories about encounters with law enforcement.

How was it received?

More than 70 people joined the Juneteenth Zoom Conference broadcast.

The next day, the Men's Group had their bi-weekly meeting. The white members of the group spoke at length about the stories they had heard. They said that thought they had understood the struggle that Black people had been waging for all those years. But, hearing their fellow group member describe his own experience deeply affected the entire group.

On Sunday, June 21st, Ben uploaded the video on our Livestream Internet Page. *As of July 1*, it had been viewed 57 more times by people from 12 states and France. Members of the committee report receiving many messages of thanks and support.

Here I quote two responses from listeners:

“After the event, I joined a zoom call with non-church friends and told them all about it; it helped start a discussion that we haven't really had before.

This next quote sums up the gist of the comments that we have received:

“I can only offer my own, personal thoughts as someone watching and listening, but I found it to be one of the most powerful experiences I've had at St. George's. To hear

from people with whom I've had extensive interactions and conversations and to learn for the first time about the deeply indelible incidents they've carried, the fear for their loved ones, and the regular acts of caution they undertake left me feeling raw. It was a stark reminder of my own privilege, of how much I don't have to think about or worry about on a daily basis due solely to the color of my skin.”

When I started, I spoke of the presence of the *Holy Spirit* as we navigated these last few weeks, emails flying, seeking ways to help us process this heartache we face as a society. I truly believe we were led to commemorate Juneteenth in this way by the Holy Spirit.

I also spoke of the *divine grace of relationship*. The relationships among the members of our Race and Reconciliation Committee are fond and trusting. The relationships among that great Men’s Group who meet every other week to discuss current and sometimes difficult topics, those relationships are accepting and caring. The relationships among the members of Saint George’s, those who spoke and those who listened to us, allowed the speakers to have the courage to tell their stories, and the listeners to hear anew.

Thank you, Bishop Susan, for the opportunity to tell everyone about our Juneteenth Zoom Conference.

To see the Zoom Conference, go to <https://boxcast.tv/view/forum-policing-and-african-americans-go4h8eqsi6ynfeaspqni>

Begin Q & A

I. Questions Re Sacred Ground

Will that curriculum work with an all-white congregation? *It was originally designed for all-white congregations, and has now evolved to be useful in any context.*

I'm not sure I understand what you mean. Is this curriculum then not useful for a parish like mine that is bilingual and multicultural? *It would work well in such a context.*

Knowing that Sacred Ground is geared toward our white brothers and sisters, how did the People of Color involved navigate this curriculum? How did the group manage not looking to People of Color in explaining racism or asking them to hold their load of work in Anti-Racism? **It is clear as this evolved that it incorporated work focused on naming of reality and emotional response, and it is very clear that this curriculum does not require the people of color to be the instructors or saviors or comforters – each does their own work.**

From Kim: For more info about Sacred Ground, feel free to contact me at rector@tecarl.org.

II. Questions Re: St Paul's and its History

Charlie, in addition to the spray-painted names remaining, the Confederate stained glass windows also remain. What does it mean that the stained glass windows are to be “rededicated”? What drove making that choice among the many options? **The windows you name have been referred to as the Lee and Davis windows. We have a talented team of historians and over the past three years they've excavated our history so we have accurate history. The end result was to be a book detailing our story accurately and honestly. That book has just come out. It's important to look honestly at our racial past. Although there have been beliefs that the windows represent Lee and Davis, we now know that is untrue. We are in conversation for the proper way to approach this, as with all things in our space that have been attributed to that history. We are rededicating the windows toward the narrative of what we want to be as beloved community.**

Charlie, any plans to remount the plaques now boxed to another location on the church campus (e.g., an area showing historical items)? I ask in part because my church has a plaque on the exterior of the 178 year-old church building in memory of the 12 members of this parish who served as officers in the CSA, eight of them members of two families who are still very active here. The Vestry has been in conversation about this plaque on and off since last October. My ministry began here in June, 2019. The plaque dedicating the church to the glory of God when it was built in 1842 is a third the size of the CSA plaque, by the way. **It's a long conversation that your leadership needs to have. This isn't a new conversation for us – we've been at it for quite some time. There have been many discussions of how we might proceed.**

You have to be strategic about these things. We are required to keep ours for five years. We got them removed and are continuing our conversation about what will happen to them next.

III. Other Questions re Dismantling Racism

What might be done with historic past of Mayo House? It is an issue of which we are well aware, and it is a topic of discussion among the Bishops and the senior leadership team.