

Easter 6
Beyond the Commons
May 26, 2019

**In the name of the God of all Creation,
The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,
And the Power of God known in the Spirit.
Amen.**

I want to begin by thanking Pastor Deena Galanotwicz for filling in for me these past two Sundays ... I have heard many good things happening while I was gone.

As many of you know, I was away attending a clergy conference in North Carolina. The conference ... called CREDO ... is sponsored by the Episcopal Church's Pension Fund, and is a self-reflective retreat for priests. The process is to assess your own personal core values, then evaluate where one needs to re-align their life to those core values. It looks at this in the areas of health ... physical, mental, and spiritual health ... personal finances, and vocational goals. It is a very intensive conference/retreat with plenary sessions, workshops, small groups, one-on-one consultations, and significant introspective time.

What is interesting is that this is essentially the same process that the people of St. Cyprian's undertook back in 2008. In late 2006 there was a schism in the congregation. Following the split, Pastor Deena provided crisis management for several months, and then another priest ... Perry Smith ... was assigned to lead Sunday services here. However, when I came to St. Cyprian's in 2007 looking for a place to worship in my retirement, it felt like the congregation was stuck ... it didn't seem to have a vision for its future. Since Caren and I were trained in this work we offered our help, and the small group of people here at that time discerned what they felt were the core values of this worshipping community. This was ... and is ... the people's church ... the Body of Christ at St. Cyprian's. From those core values the small congregation created a mission statement, and then a vision for the future of St. Cyprian's was shaped. The group that left St. Cyprian's in 2006 ... and left the Episcopal Church ... defined themselves by whom they excluded from the full life and leadership of the church, specifically the LGBTQ community. So, the first of the core values that the people of St. Cyprian's expressed was we "proclaim [our] Christian faith as a community that is welcoming, diverse and inclusive." You have heard me speak of that core value from the pulpit as "radical hospitality."

I borrowed the phrase "radical hospitality" from a book by Lonni Collins Pratt and Father Daniel Homan, "Radical Hospitality: Benedict's Way of Love." The book expounds the rule of life of the Order of St. Benedict, an ancient monastic order. (St. Benedict lived in Italy 480 to 543AD.) Deep within the heart of Benedictine spirituality lies a remedy to hatred, fear, and suspicion ... and that remedy is hospitality. True Benedictine hospitality is at once deeply comforting and, at the same time, sharply challenging. It requires that we welcome the stranger ... every stranger ... not only into our homes, but into our hearts.

That core value of radical, transforming hospitality has been a hallmark of this community of St. Cyprian's since it was identified, and it undergirds our ministry in this congregation, to this neighborhood, and the world around us. This congregation was formed when Blacks could not worship at the white Episcopal Church downtown. The first priest to serve St. Cyprian's, the Rev. Fr. Peter Williams Cassey, was known for his inclusion of those who were excluded elsewhere, even as he was denied ordination to the priesthood in this Diocese because he was a person of color in the Jim Crow South. And, the church's namesake, Cyprian of Carthage, who was martyred in 252AD, was known for including those who had wandered from the church, but wanted to return. We stand on the shoulders of those whose radical and transforming hospitality shaped the greater church as well as this congregation.

In 2013 ... just six years after the schism that tore this congregation apart, the people of St. Cyprian's replaced an unattractive old playground between the church and the Mission House with the Commons. It includes a labyrinth for personal reflection and small group worship; an outdoor chapel for weddings, baptisms, and Blessing of the Animals; and a Prayer Wall where anyone ... of any faith ... can offer their prayers and intentions to a divine source of healing. The Commons has exceeded its goal and our expectations, especially in the area of hospitality. Not only have we had wedding receptions and Friends & Family days under a large tent on the Commons, we have also hosted Earth Day and the Universal Day of Peace concerts. We have heard bagpipes on the Commons, people have danced on the Commons, and just last Sunday there were over 165 people listening to the wonderful music of Mama Blue. For several years the Commons has been the site of a Women's Respite Day for homeless and unsheltered women where they received spa treatments, medical exams, food and music, and connections to many of the community resources available to them. It was a "safe" place for these women ... no men allowed ... perhaps the only time we have intentionally excluded a class of people. And just this past December and January the Commons was the site for Dining With Dignity on Friday and Saturday evenings showing dignified hospitality to our homeless brothers and sisters in the area. All of this has been this congregation's commitment to its faith and a transforming radical hospitality.

So, today the leadership of St. Cyprian's ... the clergy and Mission Board ... is announcing a new venture: ***Beyond the Commons: Transforming Hospitality for the Community and Beyond.*** ***Beyond the Commons*** will provide for a program of transforming hospitality to those outside our congregational boundaries. ***Beyond the Commons*** will expand and enhance the hospitality that we can show to the greater community around us. And, ***Beyond the Commons*** will secure the infrastructure of our campus for years to come.

Achieving this opportunity to enhance our commitment to transformational and radical hospitality requires stewardship of what we have; specifically by maintaining and improving our facilities, all while remaining true to our historical obligations. With that in mind, the Mission Board has identified three areas of emphasis.

Beyond The Commons – Transforming a Community Treasure ... this sanctuary. Over a century of faithful service has taken a toll on our beloved Carpenter Gothic building, the flagship

of our campus. Twenty years ago, as the building approached its century mark, major renovations were needed to save the roof from pushing the walls out of plumb. At the time, these tension rods were installed, as was an air conditioning system, new lighting, widow renovations, and a sound system. Repairs to many of those systems have been made during the two decades since, but ***Beyond the Commons*** will specifically focus on two areas in the sanctuary ... new flooring and new seating.

Samples of the new seating are here in the first row in front of the organ. They are both more comfortable and more flexible. There are three sample pieces, each accessorized differently so that we might see the various options. I encourage you to take a look ... take a seat ... but please wait until AFTER the service is over.

Secondly, ***Beyond The Commons*** will be Transforming a Unique Asset ... our Mission House. The Mission House was the historic church provided home for the vicar and his family ... and it is an indispensable facility. As such, the Mission House is not only in need of restoration, but also renovations to meet the needs of the transforming hospitality made possible by the ***Beyond The Commons*** initiative. Currently, the Mission House serves this worshipping community for our Coffee Hour, pot luck suppers, and parish meetings. However, the space is also used by a half dozen recovery groups, Compassionate St. Augustine Advisory Community meetings, and board meetings of several other non-profits in town. Just last week it was used for a Compassionate Women's luncheon, a graduation ceremony for the Pioneer School, a yoga class, and more. That is part of our commitment to transforming and radical hospitality.

The ***Beyond the Commons*** plans include a reconfiguration of the internal space of the Mission House with a new and enlarged kitchen at the back of the building where I once had an office, removing the current kitchen to enlarge the meeting space, an additional rest room, new tables and chairs, and an audio-visual system connected to the church so overflow crowds can participate in our worship.

Beyond the Commons also seeks to secure the infrastructure needed to support our transforming hospitality. Numerous enhancements are called for from renovated access ramps, to lighting, painting, new roofs, and improved signage.

Finally, ***Beyond the Commons*** will provide this community with the resources to extend out hospitality to others outside our campus. What this will look like we do not yet know. Twenty years ago Dr. Dorothy Israel and others discerned a need for a free medical and dental clinic in our area, and Good Samaritan Health Clinic was born here at St. Cyprian's. The Good Samaritan Health Clinic lived in what is now the church's office for fifteen of those twenty years, and is now known as the Wildflower Clinic on Herbert Street in West Augustine. The Cyprian Center for Expressive Arts, which, by the way, will receive another State of the Art grant this Thursday, was created at St. Cyprian's. And Compassionate St. Augustine has its roots in this worshipping community.

So, what is the next thing that this community will give birth to meet the needs of our community? Can we be a significant player in assisting that need being met? ***Beyond the Commons*** will go a long way to providing the financial resources to support such a program.

As you might have guessed, in heralding this new initiative today, we are also announcing a fundraising campaign to pay for ***Beyond the Commons***.

Yes, ***Beyond the Commons*** will cost us. Our estimate of the total of the various improvements and enhancements, along with the funds allocated for a new transforming hospitality program beyond out campus, is \$164,000.

A significant portion of the funds necessary to bring the project to fruition has already been achieved, made possible through a generous gift from the estate of Elsa Brader, a devoted member of St. Cyprian's who died in 2018. Other funds will be allocated from the financial reserves the congregational leadership has accumulated over the past few years. Therefore, our ***Beyond the Commons*** campaign goal is \$100,000. And, the Mission Board, clergy leadership and the fundraising campaign team is so committed to the objectives of ***Beyond the Commons*** that I can announce that they have already pledged \$48,500 towards that \$100,000 goal.

Today marks the official kick-off of ***Beyond the Commons***. There are copies of the ***Beyond the Commons*** campaign booklets available as you leave this morning. We'll be rolling-out the campaign to the congregation in stages, allowing you plenty of time for you to look things over, request clarity where needed, and have questions answered before you will be invited to consider your pledge in support of ***Beyond the Commons***.

I want to end this NOT A SERMON with a short story. As most of you have heard, Clerene Romeo-Jackson has been accepted by Bishop Howard into the process for ordination to the priesthood. This is a wonderful ... albeit scary ... time for her. But it is also an awesome time for this congregation.

Clerene and I went to see Bishop Howard on Wednesday. While we were waiting we were introduced to Aaron Smith, the new Diocesan Canon for Evangelism and Growth. When I said I was Ted Voorhees, his response was "Ted Voorhees! Wow! I am so glad to meet you. I want to come to St. Cyprian's and see what you are doing down there. I've heard all kinds of great things." Then we were ushered to the Bishop's office and he said something about St. Cyprian's being the fastest growing congregation in the Diocese of Florida. After our meeting, Clerene had to meet some other people and get some paperwork taken care of, and Allison deFoor ... Canon to the Ordinary (which is Episcopal language for the Bishops righthand staff person) ... came out of his office and gushed about St. Cyprian's being the fastest growing congregation in the Diocese.

It really was nice to hear all those compliments ... it seems that the Bishop actually praised St. Cyprian's at a Diocesan Council meeting recently. I appreciate all those compliments. But there

is an interesting irony here ... we have been the fastest growing congregation in the Diocese for at least five years ... it has just taken them this long to noticing it.

Beyond the Commons is not just a fundraising campaign attached to increasing our size with brick and mortar additions. ***Beyond the Commons*** is grounded in our core values. It is an extension of who we are, and what we do. This is not about me, or the Mission Board. It is about you. You are the Church. You are the Body of Christ in this place, at this time. It is your church, and I will be reminding you of that over and over again in the months to come.

With God's help, you are making a difference. With God's help, your faith is making a difference. We come here week by week to celebrate this liturgy together ... and remember "liturgy" means "works of the people." We come here week by week to celebrate the liturgy, so that we can go out into the world transformed by God's unconditional hospitality and extend that transforming and radical hospitality to others in the world around us. That is what ***Beyond the Commons*** is about. We seek your participation and your enthusiastic support.

Amen.