

Life at Cokesbury

July 30, 2020

A Word from the Pastor: Some New Ideas

As we continue to adapt to Covid-19 crisis and the numerous challenges it presents, we have discovered some new opportunities, too. We've gotten to know our neighbors through trying to meet some of their needs, we've gotten to know new people, and we have seen miraculous pathways open up for us. What we see as miracles are just ordinary when God acts. One of the joys of being a follower of Jesus is getting to see the miracles that Jesus performs—often those miracles take shape through us! It's exciting and fun and adventurous and daring and fulfilling and worthy of celebrating. It's exciting that the ancestors of Cokesbury passed on 9.5 acres to be used to share Christ.

With the collaboration with New City Church, the tent at the church will give us some opportunities to see what's possible for getting together, offering ourselves as a family home for our neighbors, and sharing Christ with old and new friends alike. Knowing that the Covid-19 crisis could affect our church life for a long time, I have had numerous conversations with church members about ways we can adapt so that we meet the real needs of our neighborhood and what we hope will be our growing congregation for a long time. One idea is that we need to see ourselves as a "community center," but we aren't all that visible and we need better open-air, social distancing spaces. That idea prompted the Ministry Board to ask a small group of members to explore the possibility of us building an outdoor "pavilion" (think Camp Tekoa) where we could host open air events and gatherings, while still being able to stay somewhat sheltered from the elements. This could be one way that we could meet the immediate need to have outdoor gathering space with an eye towards being a center for our community in the future.

As we have served hotdogs almost every Saturday since March, we've found that we can share a lot of joy with people with just a little effort. Vic the Chili Man has brought a wonderful new energy to the deep spirit of giving that is already a part of the Cokesbury identity. But, as Vic is recently retired, he had to sell all of his equipment, including the cart. This has prompted a conversation that not only do we need to continue our momentum of outreach with our neighbors, but maybe we need to be able to take that goodness on the road down the street, across the road, across town, and in partnership with other organizations who have a compatible mission. In looking back and looking forward, isn't it fun that hotdogs would be Cokesbury's version of the "feeding of the 5000?"

With the new ministries we've started we are realizing that we have needed support and maybe that support just needed us to admit we need the help. When Kathryn Vandiver showed up, I had no idea that she would be able to help as much as she has. But having her here to speak Spanish and to help organize our tent worship is a huge blessing. Before she came, we also got to know neighbors whose first language is Spanish. They have provided tremendous support for many of our food events and they have expressed a deep desire to help us reach out to their friends and neighbors. God has provided the support we needed, we just had to ask. Looking to the immediate and long-range future, it is apparent that God can truly use us as a place for those in our neighborhood to belong—and we can no longer say that language is a barrier (it's not a barrier for God, so why should we think God would let us use that as an excuse?)

In the wake of the recent protests for racial justice and equity, our different food distribution ministries have shown me that our neighborhood is beautifully diverse. This is a call from God, not necessarily to be activists in politics, but to demonstrate “on the ground” what God has in mind for unity in the name of Jesus. That means that we do “resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves,” as we promise in our United Methodist membership vows. We owe it to Jesus, himself discarded by his own society, to let our neighbors know that they matter, and sometimes we have to do that by saying it for a particular person or group by name. Our neighbors have black skin, brown skin, and white skin and at any given time, Christ may call upon the church tell any group of people and any individual that they matter to God and to God’s people. Our responsibility as God’s people is to learn to love as deeply and graciously as God loves. If someone matters to God, then we get to proclaim that they matter to us, too.

In our time in history, God has given us the tremendous gift, blessing, beauty, challenge, and responsibility to show Charlotte what’s possible with God. Our job is to trust the leading of the Holy Spirit and follow where Christ leads us, because the 9.5 acres handed down to us by the ancestors of Cokesbury is a gift from God that can show everyone just how powerful and good God really is. That’s a vision I’m thrilled to be a part of.

Grace and peace,
Jonathan

Cokesbury Sharing Fresh Produce with the Neighborhood

On Mondays and Thursdays from 4pm - 6pm, CUMC is able to give out fresh fruit and vegetables (and sometimes farm fresh eggs) from farmers’ markets and grocery stores. On Mondays the produce comes from Uptown Farmers’ Market and on Thursdays it comes from The Bulb. These are valuable partnerships that, along with outreach through Idlewild Elementary School, are helping to introduce us to neighbors who might not have known our heart for service. Those who have come through to pick up a bag have been tremendously grateful, many giving donations, but all sharing deeply heartfelt thanks. This ministry has the potential to continue in some form for a long time at CUMC. In addition, anyone is welcome to pick up a bag for your family as we are accepting donations.

If you are interested in volunteering to help pack bags or hand out food, we would be happy to add you to the rotation (as we are practicing appropriate social distancing in part by having only a few people present at a time). Please contact the church office (jgillis@cokeburyumc.net).

Thank You for Your Continued Giving

As we have weathered the Covid-19 since March, CUMC has managed to thrive and try new ways to meet the needs of those who live around the church campus. This is thanks to the generosity of members and friends of the congregation. Your generosity with your prayers, your socially distanced presence, your gifts, and your creativity have enabled us to serve in amazing ways. You’ve enabled us to meet some basic food needs, to live stream our worship services, to continue to share our building with Urban Promise, and operate during a highly unusual set of circumstances. Thank you and please continue to pray about how God is leading you to give of yourself to the Kingdom of God.

We have some necessary and anticipated expense upcoming related to dated air conditioning units, our outdated website, a desire to continue our momentum with welcoming our neighborhood, and new ways to live out our mission at 6701 Idlewild Rd. Your prayers, referrals, gifts, and efforts will make all the difference as we move forward.

Sharing Our Campus with New City Church

New City Church, a local congregation with three campuses, has been working to launch a new campus on Idlewild Rd. Until the Covid-19 crisis, they were meeting at Idlewild Elementary School. In honoring Jesus's prayer for unity in John 17:21—"I pray they will be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you"—we have invited New City to use part of our campus for worship. With supervision from our board of Trustees, New City has installed a tent on our lawn for their worship services on Sunday evenings, for Urban Promise to use during their summer programming, and for CUMC to use for special services and programs when needed (see more about that below). We are hopeful that our two congregations might forge a relationship built around serving the Idlewild Rd. community, sharing ministry, and most importantly demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ for our whole city by showing what is possible when we break down divisions.

Special Outdoor Worship Services on Sunday Mornings

Think of it as summer camp meeting! Beginning Sunday, August 2, at 9am, Cokesbury will host outdoor worship services in the tent located on the parking lot. Indeed it is sort of an experiment to see how this goes, but it gives us a way to gather in a relatively safe way as long as everyone follows the guidelines of social distancing and wearing their mask. The Western NC Conference of the United Methodist Church has authorized outdoor worship for UM congregations as long as those guidelines are followed. While everyone is invited to attend, it is by no means an expectation that everyone should attend—in fact, for some of our congregation, staying home due to health concerns may be the most responsible choice. We will still provide a livestream worship experience via social media.

The details: (1.) everyone who attends should bring your own chair; (2.) wear your mask (if you forget, we will have some disposable masks for your use); (3.) stay six feet apart from others unless they live in your household; (4.) use the restroom before you come to Cokesbury as the restrooms will not be open to the public (Conference guidelines); (5.) Communion at the August 2 service will use individual, pre-packaged elements; (6) parking will have a different flow from what you might be used to, so be cautious and patient with others when driving at the church; (7.) bring some water with you to be prepared for the normal summer heat; (8.) dress comfortably for the summer heat; (9.) don't come if you don't feel good—we love you and understand, so protect yourself and others and watch the livestream.

The services will be in both English and Spanish, as a way of welcoming neighbors to join us. Sianai Kotay and Kathryn Vandiver (our summer intern) will assist Pastor Jonathan on August 2 and 9 (at 9am). Please be in prayer for what God has in store for us and for our neighborhood as we worship together.

Note of Thanks

Thank you to Mary Freeman, Kay Dumas, and Pat McKenzie for providing all the food for the Winkler clan. We all appreciate their thoughtfulness. Enjoyed by all!

Paul & Faith Levering

Please Keep These People in Your Prayers

Serét Dinkler

Pam Betts

Dan Dumas

Deanna Long

Jan Penland

The family of Ray Saito

Ann Dinkler (family member losses)

Flo Sowell (death of her sister, Lillian Pilkington)

Ed & Diane Bolster (death of niece and sister)

JoAnne Gunter's god-daughter, Jeanelle

UMAR members who are traveling to the beach for vacation this week

August Birthdays

David Maconi - 4th

Barbara Easton - 7th

Gwen Coulter - 16th

Helen Fleming - 16th

Cooper Angel - 17th

Judy Sims - 21st

Anne Closson - 22nd

Bert Proctor - 23rd

Jakelyn Marhelis - 24th

Cori Fowler - 30th

Wayne Chappell - 31st