

## Life at Cokesbury

September 10, 2020

### A Word from the Pastor

September is possibly the month that annually has more cultural transitions than any other. Football season starts, television networks begin their new seasons, seasons change (who doesn't love saying the phrase, "autumnal equinox"?), it begins the home stretch to election day, and for the church we start thinking about our committee nominations, annual budget for the next year, and preparations for Advent and Christmas. September is when we point ourselves in a direction—hopefully a direction to which we are called—for our future. That's more true in 2020 than ever.

I think we are all aware of the transitions we are facing as a church family: coming to terms with our decreasing size as a congregation over the last few years, understanding our neighborhood as a place for expanded vision for ministry and discipleship, finding our place in the changes in the United Methodist Church, continuing to follow and serve Christ during and after Covid-19, and so many other things. The fact is that nothing is the same now as it was even way back in August! We can't try to operate and function the same ways we have in the past because everything is different now. While we've talked about this ever since I was appointed to be your pastor, it's become even more true than ever.

My role has become almost unrecognizable compared to what I thought it was a year ago. The roles of every staff member will have to change and evolve, and the roles of our church leadership will have to evolve, too. In fact, we will have to recalibrate our vision for the new spiritual climate of our community because there are new realities to be faced. For example, I'm trying to put together verbiage for redesigning our website, but everything is different compared to where we were when it was first posted. I'm different and so are you—and Jesus has led us on this journey.

None of those changes, evolutions, or circumstances change why we exist as a church. Our most essential reason for being remains to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. We are here to demonstrate what a life centered on Jesus looks like. We are called to embody the courage of discipleship—which means the courage to transform, grow, learn, and journey in our discipleship. Jesus meets us where we are but he never leaves us there. Even as I say that, I am keenly aware (and want you to be keenly aware) that Jesus has already begun shaping us and has already begun a powerful mission in us. So, the question we need to consider in times of transition is this: who is Jesus in this congregation?

As your pastor, I need to hear you tell stories about the times when Cokesbury was at its best. You need to tell each other those stories, too. Is it the sense of family that makes Cokesbury so meaningful to you? Is it the virtuous selflessness that gave purpose to working together? When were the times when you knew that being part of Cokesbury made you part of something bigger than yourself, and even bigger than a congregation in east Charlotte? What kind of disciples has Cokesbury made? Where have we been as a congregation? Why? Talk. You have to talk to one another. You have to tell the story. Knowing and recognizing Jesus is as much about telling stories, maybe more about telling stories than it is asserting what you believe. In fact, I would encourage you to affirm what you believe about Jesus and church by reflecting on what activities and

missions and projects pointed to those beliefs. Maybe a different way of getting at the same point would be to say that does me no good to say what I believe unless I can show where that belief becomes real in the actions of my life—the stories you and I tell.

So tell stories. Talk a lot about the past and the present, but don't stop at that. Make the connections and look for the obvious or the sneaky ways Jesus calls us and speaks into our experiences. There's wisdom in knowing who Jesus is among us. There's wisdom in knowing why we do what we do. Those connections will guide us through these transitions.

Peace,  
*Jonathan*

### **Jesus in the Parking Lot**

Every Sunday at 9 a.m., weather permitting, we have live, in-person worship under the tent in the parking lot. It's a simple and uncomplicated service but full of spirit and Cokesbury faith—that means we love Jesus, who welcomes everyone into discipleship, and we love each other. If you feel healthy and comfortable getting together, bring a chair, a mask, and yourself Sunday morning at 9 a.m.

### **Audio-Visual Equipment Update**

Hopefully all of you have been able to experience one of our livestream worship services on Sunday mornings at 10:45a.m. We are able to do that thanks to our congregation's generosity that enabled us to purchase a video camera and the necessary components to make high quality live-streaming and recording possible. So far, we have been able to pay for all but \$1000 of the \$8500 total cost. Cokesbury always finds a way...

### **An Idea for Short and Long Term Needs**

The Cokesbury Ministry Board has set up a task force to explore the possibility of building an open-air pavilion on our property that would empower us to have larger outdoor gatherings. Ever since the tent was set up this summer in our parking lot, we have seen some of the ways that having an open-air shelter can benefit us (we've already used it for worship, Music at Cokesbury, and small group gatherings and conversations). In the short-term season facing the Covid-19 pandemic, an open air pavilion (think about Camp Tekoa) could make it possible for us to have less risky, social-distanced gatherings larger than we could have indoors in our sanctuary or fellowship hall. Over time, however, this idea could give us an attractive place for special worship services, for concerts, for community activities, for community meals, for our fish fries and barbecues, for weddings, reunions, for projects we haven't imagined yet, and for a "retreat oasis."

Recognizing the potential for engaging our community in mission and service, the Ministry Board asked Jenny Cox, Diane Holmes, Jim Dinkler, Marta Cox, and Bruce Fowler be the task force. They will have conversations with Ben Montgomery (who is a long-standing part of the Cokesbury family and the architect who designed our last building addition project) exploring the design and layout needs and possibilities. The task force already has met and discussed various concept drawings, but only as a preliminary step to see what might be possible. This is where you (whoever is reading this) come in.

The task force, Ministry Board, and pastor need your input and ideas. Please share your

hopes, aspirations for your church, concerns, suggestions, advice, and ideas. It's necessary for any project like this to involve the whole church family, so don't be shy to share your heart when it comes to this. Hopefully, there will be lots of conversation about the pavilion, so get to the talking, dreaming dreams, and deep praying.

### **Re-opening Update**

As you are likely aware, the Governor has issued a revised set of gathering guidelines for North Carolina. This resulted in the Conference and bishop issuing revised guidelines for churches' worship and gatherings. These new guidelines allow for larger gatherings than was previously suggested; however, that isn't large enough to allow us to change our current worship schedule. There will be some minor changes but in general, we will continue to have Tent Worship at 9a.m. and livestream worship on Facebook at 10:45a.m. (or whenever you log on). As always, if you come to the church building for whatever reason, make sure to go to the bathroom before you leave home, bring your mask (and wear it!), and bring your own chair if it's something outdoors.

### **Music at Cokesbury**

We will have *Scarlet Lemonade* perform for us September 17 under the "Big Tent". They are a duo that plays songs from the 60's through today and they performed for us last year, you will remember them. See attached flyer.

### **Please Keep These People in Your Prayers**

Serét Dinkler

Pam Betts

Dan Dumas

Doug Hargett

Deanna Long

Randy Pitcock & his sister, Cindy

Teachers, staff, parents, and students going back to school

The extroverts in our church