

Life at Cokesbury

October 22, 2020

A Note from the Pastor

“At Home at Cokesbury”

On Monday we held our yearly charge conference to accomplish some necessary business of the congregation. In that meeting, I referred to the book of Haggai chapter 1. That chapter is set just after the people of Israel had returned from their captivity in Babylon (the Exile) and now there is a great question about whether or not they are ready to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. It was like they had just woken up after a long dream only to find that their most important location was in ruins. Some didn't want to go to the trouble of rebuilding the Temple. Perhaps they were feeling that their financial resources were as low as their personal energies. Maybe they were finding it difficult to feel connected to the community of Jews after the Exile, and maybe it was just easier only to worry about their own families instead of the effort that it would have taken to operate as a connected group. It sounds kind of familiar, especially during the coronavirus pandemic.

For us at Cokesbury, perhaps we look at the remnant of the active membership that our congregation once had and wonder if we are anything more than a ruin of a congregation. We know that's not true because we know how important our church family is to us, but right now it's easy to feel disconnected. Our congregation's financial resources and human energies aren't as great as they once were. Our programming isn't as broad and well-attended as it once was. Add the pandemic on top of all of that and we could easily feel like we're in our own kind of exile—or maybe we've just come through it.

When the Exile of the people of Israel ended, they faced the need to ask themselves some hard questions about what really mattered the most to them, who they were, and who God was calling them to be. These questions involved happy remembrance and gratitude, as well as honest assessment of their missteps, unfortunate coincidences, and prideful misdirection. Their thanksgiving and repentance went together, and God remained their God. They took honest account of what had happened and the time came for them to hear from God about what came next.

More than a year ago, the leadership at Cokesbury took stock of our circumstances and realized that our energies and finances were fast depleting. Their assessments were good-faith, honest, and largely correct. One of the most obvious places to look for relief was our United Methodist connection and the possible ways it could have helped. Merging with another church was a necessary possibility to explore and it had to be explored seriously. For all of the implications of that exploration and how we asked those questions, the leaders were courageous to ask those questions because they weren't universally popular. Those leaders were, and are, deeply in love with Cokesbury, making any risks for criticism worth the cost because they sought, and seek, to maintain Cokesbury's legacy of faithfulness. Even though the merger was not to be, the reasons for asking those questions in the first place didn't change—our human and financial resources have limitations. There is still no avoiding those realities, but your work during the pandemic has proven that there is also tremendous reason for us to hope.

Ultimately, God spoke through Haggai and called Israel to rebuild the Temple. While some felt that it was better to remain more isolated with their faith as a people, Haggai spoke God's words to get to work rebuilding. The past glory had been destroyed, but now it was time to get to work with the resources they had on hand. Elsewhere in the Bible, namely in Isaiah, we realize that God had a new vision for the Temple Mount to be a "light for all the nations", a blessing for all people and a sign that God is the God of all people. Israel was back home, but now they had to make it home for themselves as well as anyone who sought to connect to God.

When I look at Cokesbury, that's what I see: a place for everyone in our community to be blessed. I see a place where everyone is invited to join up with Jesus. I see a place where God's love is known. I see a place where our most essential resources, our grace and love, can be shared with strangers and friends alike. I see a place where our pride is in the work that Christ does through us making anyone who meets us feel that they are finally at the place that feels like home ought to feel.

I'm grateful to be at Cokesbury, a place where I feel home because that's how you've made me feel. Now it's time for us to get busy offering a connection with God for all who seek it and a home for all who need it.

Grace,
Jonathan

A Message from Joan

Ever since I began working from home in March, I thought retirement won't be so bad. I can find lots of things and chores to amuse myself and my lazy and spoiled dog, Hank, likes me being home and especially all the extra treats and walks he gets. So, after several months, I decided I would retire as of January 1, 2021, but my last day working will be November 19.

I can't begin to tell you how much I have appreciated working at Cokesbury and how much you all mean to me. In the past 22 years, I have seen many changes and many members and pastors come and go. You have always made me feel welcome and I love you all and will miss you. I wish nothing but the best for Cokesbury Church and all of you and hope we can stay in touch.

(I feel confident that I speak for Cokesbury in thanking Joan for her ministry work among us at Cokesbury. She has been an invaluable and inseparable part of our congregation's life. Over the next few weeks I know you'll want to connect with Joan to thank her for her hard work, her sincerity, her kindness and compassion, and her friendship. She will always be a part of Cokesbury. You'll be hearing more in the coming days from the Ministry Board/Staff-Parish Relations Committee, and from me, about ways that we will thank Joan for her work, as well as how we will move forward with our ministry.) Pastor Jonathan

In-Person Worship

This past Sunday we had about 30 people, including worship leadership, in attendance for our first Sunday of in-person worship. It was great to be together! Because the attendance was low, it wasn't very uncomfortable, but we are attentive to how safely we can gather together indoors. Everyone maintained social distance, wore their masks, washed their hands, and displayed a gracious patience. We will continue to monitor local rates of infection in addition to new guidelines issued by Mecklenburg County and the N.C. departments of Health in determining our

worship plans moving forward. For now, we plan to worship in person in the sanctuary with the services broadcast on Facebook Live and posted on YouTube. With that said, if you feel uneasy about coming or if you experience any of the Covid symptoms, you should feel encouraged about staying home. Thank you for your patience and grace under these circumstances.

Blood Drive October 31 from 9am-3pm

Our young people have organized a blood drive to take place at the church on Halloween. If you are interested in donating, go to oneblood.org/donate-now and enter the sponsor code 62542. You can also contact the church office for assistance. We hope to see you that day!

New City Church Fall Festival October 25

New City Church will be hosting a Fall Festival for families from 3:30pm - 5pm on Sunday. This will be a lot of fun for kids and families. Social distancing procedures, including masking, will be part of the experience, so bring friends and family out for a little while.

Please Keep These People in Your Prayers

Dan & Kay Dumas

Deanna Long

Diane Bolster (going to Royal Park Rehab. today)

Randy Pitcock

Karen Glazer

Katie Postel (grandniece of Mary Freeman, needs kidney)

Owen Henley (tested positive for Covid-19. Still at Appalachian State in quarantine)

Upcoming national, state, and local elections