



October 26, 2017

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Earlier this summer, the Vestry began to consider whether the George Washington and Robert E. Lee memorial plaques should remain in or be moved from the worship space in Christ Church. The Vestry also began to consider how Christ Church can better understand and present our significant history, which dates back to 1773. This was not a discussion we entered into lightly, but rather a sincere attempt to have a family conversation about our worship space, our larger history, and our future.

We spent the month of September listening to the parish: seven listening sessions, many emails, numerous phone calls, countless informal conversations, and many one-on-one meetings and discussions with parishioners. The passion, respect, and thoughtfulness of the people of this parish were evident throughout the listening sessions, conversations, and emails.

We are especially thankful for those who prayed daily for both the parish and Vestry, which has been prayerfully discerning where God is calling Christ Church.

The plaques were erected in 1870, just two months after Robert E. Lee's death, by parishioners eager to memorialize two men who had impact within our parish and an outsized impact on our nation. We recognize that our church was present at the center of two of the most important events in our nation's history.

Washington is unique in our nation's history: the leader of the Revolution, the visionary who not only refused to be king but also gave up power after eight years, and a symbol of our democracy. He regularly worshiped in our pews and helped shape our city's character.

Lee was a longtime parishioner, whose family had a significant presence in our church. From "Light-Horse Harry" Lee's membership in our parish at the time he memorialized George Washington as "first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen," to Mary Custis Lee's gift of \$10,000 to begin the Christ Church endowment, the Lee family was a prominent part of the Christ Church family.

We understand that both Washington and Lee lived in times much different than our own, and that each man, in addition to his public persona, was a complicated human being, and like all of us, a child of God.

Today, the legacy of slavery and of the Confederacy is understood differently than it was in 1870. For some, Lee symbolizes the attempt to overthrow the Union and to preserve slavery. Today our country is trying once again to come to grips with the history of slavery and the subsequent disenfranchisement of people of color.

Hebrews 13:2 says, "*Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.*" Christ Church lives into this call, feeding the hungry with our Lazarus ministry, welcoming the stranger in our refugee ministry, and inviting all to worship with us. The plaques in our sanctuary make some in our presence feel unsafe or unwelcome. Some visitors and guests who worship with us choose not to return because they receive an unintended message from the prominent presence of the plaques.

Christ Church embodies God's unbounded love by embracing, liberating, and empowering people, whoever they are and wherever they find themselves on their journeys of faith.

Many in our congregation feel a strong need for the church to stand clearly on the side of “*All are welcome—no exceptions.*”

Because the sanctuary is a worship space, not a museum, there is no appropriate way to inform visitors about the history of the plaques or to provide additional context except for the in-person tours provided by our docents.

The Vestry believes that the memorial plaques to George Washington and Robert E. Lee should be considered together. The plaques were erected at the same time. They visually balance each other, maintaining the symmetry of our sanctuary. The men they memorialize are giants in our nation’s history and were members of this parish. Robert E. Lee has taken on outsized symbolism in the national conversation about race and inclusion.

The Vestry has unanimously decided that the plaques create a distraction in our worship space and may create an obstacle to our identity as a welcoming church, and an impediment to our growth and to full community with our neighbors. Accordingly, the plaques will be relocated no later than the summer of 2018.

This decision is a beginning, not an end.

First, this decision is the beginning of a parish-wide process for discerning an appropriate new home for the memorial plaques. The Vestry will create a committee of parishioners to explore options for displaying the plaques prominently and with appropriate historical context on our campus. This committee will work over the coming months to explore the options and engage the parish in the discernment process, and will make a recommendation to the Vestry for the plaques’ new home by April 15.

It is important to understand that the plaques will not be moved to a storage area. Rather, they will remain in the church until they can be relocated to a place of respectful prominence where they will be fully visible to parishioners and tourists alike. And ultimately, they will be incorporated into a more complete presentation of our long and many-faceted history.

Second, this decision is the beginning of a parish-wide process to take ownership of our history. The Vestry will create a committee of parishioners to better define how we tell our story. This project will involve developing a narrative for Christ Church that spotlights many of the parishioners and experiences that give us our identity: men and women such as George Washington, David Griffith, Robert E. Lee, Armistead Boothe, Sallie Stuart, Henry & Trudye Fowler, and many more.

We envision that this work will result in a presentation of our history, a gift to the parish that will allow Clergy, docents, and members of Christ Church to clearly articulate our common story as we approach our 250th anniversary. Parishioners will be invited to help shape this important work throughout the process. This committee will launch in January 2018.

Third, this decision is the beginning of a parish-wide process for identifying and developing locations to tell our story across the entire campus. The Vestry will create a committee of parishioners tasked with working with parish members to identify ways we can highlight not only the plaques, but many other materials and objects from our past. This will allow visitors and researchers to more fully understand the role Christ Church has played in our community and our nation since 1773.

This work will result in a recommendation to the Vestry for changes to how we interpret our history across the campus, which could include a museum or interpretive center. This committee will also launch in January 2018.

This decision is the beginning of a prayerful, parish-wide effort to come together. The discussion about the appropriateness of the plaques in our worship space caused friction in our parish family. We understand that the discernment process has felt confusing and exclusive. We hope all parishioners will be more fully involved as we move forward.

To succeed, the committees must reflect the full range of perspectives and concerns of the parish. We invite you to share your hopes for this process and to nominate yourself or other parishioners to serve on these important committees. Reflections and nominations can be sent to wardens@cCALEX.org.

Additionally, the Clergy, Vestry and other lay leaders will be actively seeking opportunities to bring parishioners together. We invite parishioners to reach out with ideas and recommendations. Vestry members will host a forum on November 5 and will also be available at the coffee hours every Sunday in November for conversation and comments.

As always, we begin this new journey with a prayer:

God of compassion, you have reconciled us in Jesus Christ who is our peace: Enable us to live as Jesus lived, breaking down walls of hostility and healing enmity. Give us grace to make peace with those from whom we are divided, that, forgiven and forgiving, we may ever be one in Christ; who with you and the Holy Spirit reigns for ever, one holy and undivided Trinity. Amen.



Emily Bryan
Senior Warden



Dave Riggs
Junior Warden



The Rev. Dr. Noelle York-Simmons
Rector



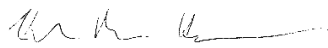
Nancy Carson



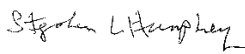
Geoffrey Giovanetti



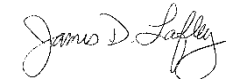
Susan Hahn



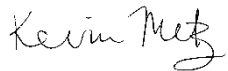
Kelley Brooke Hostetler



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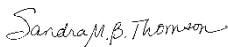
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