

Announcements from Bishop Breidenthal

July 14, 2020

Dear friends in Christ,

I pray this finds you well in this complex time. I am writing to you today about several things:

1. Reparations

As you may recall, I announced my desire to invite us as a diocese to begin a conversation about reparations, that is, ways in which we as the Episcopal Church in Southern Ohio might acknowledge our own historic complicity in institutional and sometimes violent racism. I have received largely positive responses to this call — the more so as recent events have placed the continuing racial divide in our land in sharp relief. So I have begun the process of developing a Reparations Task Force, which will be responsible for guiding us in what I expect will be a slow and sometimes painful, but spiritually powerful, journey.

I could say a lot more, but for now I simply want to announce my appointment of Mrs. Dianne Ebbs as the chair of this task force. She and her husband have been members of Christ Church Cathedral since the Seventies, and she has had a rich and productive career as a teacher and school principal, as well as an acknowledged leader in the African-American community. Let me introduce her to you in her own words:

Dianne A Ebbs

My husband Peter and I moved to Cincinnati in 1979 with our son Charles. We immediately began looking for an Episcopal Church with strong connections with the community through mission and outreach. We met one of the clergy at Christ Church, Michael P.P.G. Randolph, who invited us to what is now Christ Church Cathedral. We have remained here for the past 40 years.

All of my life I have tried to be inspiring, engaging, and a visionary educational and civic leader. I have an unwavering commitment to do what is right and just, in support of what I believe. As a lifelong leader, I have been steadfast in my efforts to support social justice initiatives that uplift our community. I try to live by a phrase originally coined by the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, many years ago. When defining integrity, Dr. King stated. "When your character is built on a spiritual and moral foundation, your contagious way of life influences millions". This statement epitomizes how I attempt to live my life, share my talents and gifts. I am driven by my desire to improve societal conditions for the betterment of everyone. My sense of integrity and moral character, combined with my deep spiritual devotion, has propelled me to be at the forefront of numerous community service efforts designed to positively impact our most marginalized populations. As a racially conscious person, my personal mission continues to be one of empowerment, combined with a steadfast commitment to being a voice for the voiceless.

I have been a part of the following agencies, organizations and programs over the past forty years.

- The Bishop Herbert Thompson Chapter of the Union of Black Episcopalians, Diocese of Southern Ohio
- Center for Closing the Health Gap
- Cincinnati Union Bethel
- Advisory Board for Cincinnati Scholar Houses
- Advisory Board for Assistance League of Cincinnati
- Executive Director: Summer Camp Reading
- Minority Empowerment Initiative Trust
- Lawrence Home Scholarships
- Former Board Member of Seven Hills Neighborhood Houses
- Former Senior Warden and Vestry Member of Christ Church Cathedral
- Chair of the William Howard Taft Lecture Series

- Co-Chair Next Century Visioning / Christ Church Cathedral
- Retired Principal and Superintendent

Dianne and I will be working closely together as we move toward the creation of the task force. We will keep you updated as that develops. In the meantime, please know that the trustees of the diocese have made a formal commitment to supporting the work of reparation, as its goals emerge.

For now, the main thing to keep in mind is that this is slow work, because it is about learning how to talk about hard things. I am grateful for what the Becoming Beloved Community team is already doing to provide opportunities and guidance for talking circles around the diocese. For information on that front, please go to the Becoming Beloved Community website: <http://dsobeloved.org/>

2. Visitations

All visitations will be virtual, at least until the end of this calendar year. Here is the schedule from August through December.

As always, I am grateful to Bishops Price and Rivera for helping me to ensure that all our congregations have an episcopal visit sooner rather than later. If you are scheduled for a visit from one of us, I urge your clergy or other leadership please to be in contact with any of us directly, but also with Ann Sabo in my office, to talk about what a virtual visitation will look like, given your particular capacity for remote worship and for a meeting with your vestry or mission council. Speaking just for myself, I would, if nothing else were possible, appreciate a meeting with the vestry or mission council, perhaps via a conference call, if Zoom were not possible. My office can easily set up a conference call at any time.

3. Confirmations and Receptions

There is a growing list of young people and adults waiting to be confirmed or received. I want you to know that I am well aware of this, but am not yet aware of a way to provide these rites safely and/or regionally. My friend and colleague, Mark Hollingsworth, Bishop of Ohio, reminded me that confirmation and reception are affirmations of a commitment that has already been made. That commitment is already known to God, and all that is left to us is to acknowledge it publicly and invite the initiative and leadership the commitment calls each of us to. So I invite our clergy and lay teachers and mentors to use this time of delay to draw your charges into the next level of engagement with Jesus and his church.

4. Outdoor Worship

A number of people have asked me if outdoor Sunday services of Morning Prayer or Liturgy of the Word (or baptisms, weddings and funerals on Sundays or at other times) might be permissible, even for congregations who are back in Phase 1, owing to the red status of their county. I have come to the conclusion that this is permissible, as long as masks are worn, and the number of participants is such that social distancing can be strictly observed. This would normally mean no more than fifty people, including worship leaders, no singing, and no preaching or reading of lessons within 20 feet of anyone. I would suggest starting with a small congregation of 20 (this includes clergy and other worship leaders) and work up to the maximum you can safely fit with distancing requirements.

If you go this route, I am counting on you to exercise extreme care and discipline. In the meantime, all the protocols for Phase 1 and 2, as applicable, remain in place for any gatherings indoors.

5. Advent and Christmas

It is hard to believe, but before we know it, outdoor worship will not be an option. As fall and winter set in, we will all have to consider how we make our way through Advent and Christmas in the midst of a probably continuing pandemic. It is too early for me to offer directives about that at this point, except to say that we should all be thinking about not being able to gather physically in that holy season, and beginning to plan accordingly. I am convinced that our own uncertainty and longing for renewed life together will open us in new ways to the coming of Christ among us, as refugee and Lord.

That said, we as disciples of Jesus are a people of hope. The troubles of this time are therefore an invitation to the practice of hope. We engage that practice by rising each morning to the challenge of truthfulness, personal responsibility and solemn respect for every soul. That's not always easy. But if we try for it daily, the Holy Spirit will do the rest. We will get through this better than we started.

Faithfully,

The Rt. Rev. Thomas E. Breidenthal
Bishop of Southern Ohio