

THOUGHTS ON THE FUTURE OF OUR BLOCK

As the communication between the Egleston Design Task Force and the Friends of Egleston continues, along with the more general process concerning the Future of Our Block, I have a number of thoughts that some might find helpful.

For me, the place to start is by asking: What is the ministry? What is the mission? An historical perspective can be helpful. In a very early stage of our church's history, that central space on the second floor of Egleston was in fact completely open, so that the second floor ring provided balcony seating for a seating and a stage on the first floor. The focus of an earlier rector's ministry was productions of Shakespeare.

Matthew Warren was the Rector of All Saints from 1945-1952, and the focus of his ministry was education, which continues, for both adults and children, to this day. In the 1970's what are now offices ringing the second floor of Egleston Hall served that ministry as classrooms, enclosed on only three sides, open to the open floor in the center.

In 1959 Milton Wood (Rector from 1952-1960) and his Assistant Rector, Frank Ross, along with other Atlanta clergy, signed a Ministers' Manifesto in response to the efforts to desegregate Atlanta schools. There were numerous spiritual issues at stake, but for me two elements of the Manifesto stand out. One is the acknowledgement: We do not know what the future will bring. The other is the same simple, direct message we hear from Jesus in the New Testament: Do not be afraid. Of course, many were afraid, but the signers of that letter were challenging people to take on that fear, take it on with the form of faith that is courage.

It is difficult for those of us who were not present for these events to appreciate the conflict, hatred and danger involved. I was one of those white Northerners who, believing the North was more integrated than it actually was, simply wondered why those white segregationists could be so benighted. But I have read enough and heard enough from those who were in Atlanta and at All Saints at that time to have more understanding of what it was like then. The Cathedral of St. Phillip owned Lovett School, which was refusing to integrate, and, in response, some All Saints parishioners picketed the Cathedral. Ralph McGill, publisher of the Atlanta Journal Constitution, was one of the members of the Cathedral who left and joined All Saints. It was his decision not just to print the Ministers' Manifesto in the Atlanta Journal Constitution but to place it prominently on the first page. Because of this and his regular newspaper columns on race and civil rights his life was threatened. Elbert Tuttle, judge of the federal Circuit Court of the Fifth District, also moved to All Saints. He made several decisions overturning or thwarting attempts to avoid or delay school desegregation. Non-Christians who risked their lives helping Jews during the Holocaust are called 'The Righteous Among the Nations.' Elbert Tuttle, Ralph McGill, the signers of the Ministers' Manifesto and other white Southern leaders played a similar role in the civil rights movement.

This ministry and mission were an important part of the background, and sometimes the foreground, when Frank Ross served as Rector from 1961 to 1980. (I was his Assistant Rector in the 1970's and am most familiar with this period of All Saints' history.) The congregation included many lawyers, corporate leaders, doctors and others who were focused on moving beyond a segregated South. On this and other issues Frank Ross' sermons often boiled down to that simple but spiritually profound message: Do not be afraid. Another issue then that raised fear was suburban growth, which caused the membership of in town churches to decline. All Saints considered and consciously decided not to move to a suburban location. A concrete example of what it means to be In the City, For the City.

In the 1970's we wanted to expand our community ministry and engaged in a Parish Self-study. Parishioners drove around the neighborhood, five blocks in each direction, two parishioners per car, one driver and one observer and note taker. We noticed the number of hospitals in our community, which led to the creation of the Atlanta Hospital Hospitality House. All Saints gave birth to this ministry which is now an independent organization, providing free housing for relatives of hospital patients from out of town. We also talked about the number of office workers in the area around All Saints and this led to the Tuesday Lunchtime Speakers in Ellis Hall, who reflected our local community and beyond. Across the downtown connector was Techwood Homes, the country's first public housing project, dedicated in 1935 by President Franklin Roosevelt. Our conversations about that led to the revival of, from decades earlier, Boy Scout Troop 42, which included boys from Techwood Homes, poor and mostly black, with boys from All Saints and elsewhere, mostly white and not poor. Each of these ministries required some building space, but they happened because of the commitment of All Saints and required the work, time, opportunities granted and the engagement of people who were All Saints parishioners.

During the tenure of Harry Pritchett as Rector (1981-1997) a homeless man died outdoors on the church property. All Saints opened a night shelter to address the issue of homelessness in our community. Many of the residents were addicts, affected especially by the crack cocaine epidemic among African American males, and the Church decided to address this underlying cause of homelessness. The night shelter was succeeded by Covenant Community, a residential program for homeless, male substance abusers. The Rev. Martha Sterne played a significant role in both the night shelter and the creation of Covenant Community, and Covenant's three quarters house, The Sterne House, is named after her. Imagine asking any church like All Saints, middle and upper class and predominantly white, this question: Will you let eighteen men who are drug addicts, unemployed, some with criminal records, mostly black live on your property? The fact that All Saints had answered Yes deeply impressed me. Covenant Community came into being because it happened organically and because people of All Saints had the form of faith that is vision and worked to make that vision a reality.

When I was an assistant rector again at All Saints, in the late 1990's and early 2000's (half-time), Denni Moss and I joined the staff on the staff of Covenant Community. Parishioners often had dinner at Covenant Community with the residents. The alumni of Covenant Community, the Men of Hope, cooked the Sunday morning breakfast in Ellis Hall, interacting with parishioners, and, as an added benefit, the residents, knowledgeable of what happened when our church buildings were closed for the day, improved the overall security of our block. This ministry required a separate building but also mutual engagement between parishioners and Covenant Community staff and residents. I am not

knowledgeable about Covenant Community currently, but my impression is that All Saints provides the space for it now, there is less engagement, through people, between the church and Covenant Community. I would be happy to be proved wrong on this.

Those ministries were one force behind the vitality and growth of All Saints during Harry Pritchett's tenure. That growth meant more children for Church School, which required more space, and, after the construction of the Pritchett Center, our Church School is now located there. The Pritchett Center does not hide the fact that it is a newer building on our campus. However, its facades are of stone block which is identical to the color and the size of the block found in the two other buildings, creating another attractive, complimentary blend of the traditional and the contemporary.

Prior to the Pritchett Center, the Parish House had been built in 1955. It may not be an architectural gem, but it is a functional, background building, its brick the same color as the church and Egleston Hall. It strikes me as a suitable background building. It also seems to me there is interior space that could be used more effectively and efficiently, in a building we already have.

Fifty years ago, sitting in Ellis Hall, I first looked at the very large windows with their metal frames and single thickness glass and wondered how much those windows (and all the others in the Parish House) add to the cost of heating and heating. How much would we have saved over the decades since then if those windows had been replaced with energy efficient windows? A significant short term expenditure with more significant long term savings, for a building we already have.

After the construction of the Pritchett Center, a private day care program for children, Bright Horizons, began renting space there. In the early 2000's the Rev. Beth Royalty worked with a group of parishioners and representatives of Bright Horizons to see if the relationship between the church and Bright Horizon could become more meaningful, so that it would be more a part of the ministry and mission of All Saints (in practice, if not in name). Both she and I thought that was both desirable and possible, but it has not happened.

During the tenure of Geoffrey Hoare as Rector, I was able to observe closely the Refugee Ministry. The space requirement for this ministry was simply one small office on the second floor of Egleston, but the engagement of people made that ministry what it was. Sonya Wu, a full time staff person, led this program and became an important and loving presence in the congregation. She connected a significant number of parishioners with the refugee families who settled here, primarily in Clarkston, where a refugee congregation gathered. We, people of All Saints, were involved in that congregation and also worked with some Sudanese volunteers, earlier refugees who were by then working and living independently. Again, I know very little about our current Refugee Ministry. It appears that parishioners continue to carry out that vital ministry, but it does not seem to have the level of visibility, the number of connections between parishioners and refugee families, or the depth of those connections it once had. I would be happy to be proven wrong about this, also.

For a number of years All Saints has been proud to claim the Midtown Assistance Center as one of our ministries, but, again, I am not clear about the level of engagement between parishioner and MAC. I

may be wrong about this, as well, but the point remains: Parishioners engaging significantly in a ministry is very different from their church simply housing a ministry.

An old drawing of the church, facing West Peachtree Street, shows the walkway between Egleston and the church in stone, architecturally matching and completely the continuity of the two buildings. Parishioners might find a traditional walkway attractive, but for our neighbors who work and live and play in the area it would make our current courtyard feel less accessible and more like a private garden. It would no longer be the oasis in the city which Ed Dougherty designed both for parishioners and for those in our neighborhood, that is, For the City. The color of the archway we have is made of Corten steel, the color of which blends with the buildings it connects. The lines of the arches are contemporary, while complementing the traditional architecture of the two buildings it connects. I once heard Frank Ross say that the font and style used for the church's letterhead and publication during his tenure were chosen with the same idea in mind, to be both contemporary and traditional. I usually walk through the courtyard while going to the Parish House and talking with people. On a recent weekday I spent time there, when it was empty. I recommend others do the same. It is truly beautiful and sets a very high standard in our neighborhood for what landscaping can do.

I am told that the Midtown Alliance envisions the intersection of Ponce de Leon and W. Peachtree Street, along with 10th Street and Peachtree and 14th Street and Peachtree, as three significant intersections for Midtown, visually attractive and people oriented. They see the intersection of Ponce de Leon and W. Peachtree as a southern, welcoming entrance to Midtown. When I visited the courtyard, I also walked around all four corners of this intersection. Tom Weyandt knows more about the Midtown Alliance's vision than I do, but it was easy for me to see that the possibilities are exciting. A Second Front Door, integrated into this intersection, would be even more welcoming. When the North Avenue Marta station was being built, we had ongoing conversations with MARTA. If it has not happened already, I strongly encourage the Steering Committee to have in-depth conversation with the Midtown Alliance.

Sheffield Hale has talked about Egleston Hall as a sacred space. Building are an opportunity to have a sacred space. What makes them sacred is what happens inside of them, the worship and sermons in the church, the issues confronted and decision made in the church and Egleston Hall. I think of those two buildings as the anchor of our block. A new building would not have the history that Egleston has. It is hard for me to imagine a building, however well integrated, that would be a suitable replacement.

I am generally familiar with the engineering issues or the projected costs for what is being talked about. They are daunting. And I have been in enough Vestry meetings to know that caring for a church's buildings and its finances can be very challenging, very hard, and at times very painful. I hope these thoughts will be helpful as we move through this process. And I hope keeping our ministry and mission in mind, as our starting point and our goal, both in general and specifically, will be helpful.

Paul Thim

7.27.26