

Task Force on Theology of Social Justice Advocacy Meeting
Minutes
November 8, 2019

Meeting via Zoom videoconference

Present: Sarah Lawton, Dora Mbuwayesango, Lallie Lloyd, Susanne Watson Epting, Anne Hodges-Copple, Prince Singh, Guy Leemhuis

Absent: Brant Lee, Andrew Dietsche, Ruth Frey, Brant Lee, Jose Rodriguez-Sanjuro, Reuben Varghese

Susanne opened us with a prayer.

Anne Hodges-Copple gave a reflection:

(very much paraphrased)

Born in Austin, TX in 1957, raised in Dallas – very different parts of the state. Parents read a lot – literate family background (postmaster/mistress in several family branches). Eventually family became Episcopalian—found the Episcopal Church to be a centered spiritual space compared to some other church options in the area.

The late 1960s and 1970s were a time of disruption and that was apparent to Anne as a teenager – assassinations, war, racial injustice, chaos. Parents responded by organizing sharing circles of friends that were ecumenical, interfaith, and interracial. This was an experience of sharing stories in a way that revealed systemic oppression Stories that moved from the human level to the communal to a vision of solidarity. Stories that gave her the lenses to reveal the brokenness of the system without losing the hope.

Anne attended a privileged downtown church, but which was active in social service – including a year-round education program for children from the local housing projects. Anne worked as a camp counselor in their summer program. In 1972, two boys from the program were picked up by the local police. They were brothers ages 10 and 12. In the police car, one of the officers waved his gun at the youngest boy and the gun discharged, killing the child. This horrifying incident was eye-opening to the church community because this was one of their children.

This event, and her parents formative work, led Anne to work for years in the non-profit world for fair housing – and eventually in community organizing in the Boston area. The work was secular, but the experience of working with the working-class residents of Chelsea, Mass., with their stories and their resilient faith, led Anne to explore liberation theologies, and eventually to pursue theological studies at PSR in Berkeley. Continued work in the political / community during that period—notably, a women’s shelter—and continued listening to stories, informed an emerging theology that is incarnational and subversive, challenging empire, and midwifing something new (like Zipporah and Pua).

Also remembers some memorable challenges along this journey from ordained men—e.g., from one priest: if women are ordained, and the church is the bride and the priest is representing the bridegroom, then the Eucharist with women priests will mean “cosmic lesbianism.” Happily these challenges spurred on the vocation rather than stifled it.

Responses:

Dora: The phrase “having the lens to reveal the brokenness without losing the hope” is a good way to define the theology of social justice advocacy.

Sarah: Struck by the reference to the people in Chelsea – God is always already there, and we are about finding the theology in the stories.

Susanne: The image of the child being shot by the officer takes our breath away. Are we listening to the prophetic voice in this story, this lament? (Also, the cosmic lesbianism phrase will now enter our phrasebook forever)

Lallie: Impatience with the transition of the institutional church to being a prophetic church. Are we called to healing the world or healing our institution?

Anne: Our institution is infected with white, male supremacy. To return to the lens metaphor, and to words that Dora used a couple of months ago, we have a distorted vision. Yet the Episcopal Church has also inherited an architecture of liturgy that offers a compelling and liberating vision of hope in our worship. How to reveal the brokenness and preach the hope.

Framing discussion:

for our in-person meeting, beyond these reflections? Lallie notes we have been doing / modelling contextual theology from our various locations and perspectives. Ideas for moving forward, to discuss next time:

- 1) Prepare an executive summary of our reflections and work so far, that can pull together the common themes and throughlines, without losing the specificity of the stories;
- 2) Readings – several books, articles, videos we can all agree to read/watch?
- 3) Prepare a draft statement ahead of the meeting?
- 4) A toolkit (discussion of pros/cons of this Our purpose is maybe not to set forth a specific curriculum, but principles for embodied, relational storytelling that points the way to prophetic social justice advocacy.

For further discussion.

Next steps: Ruth will offer reflection in December; Dora will offer prayers.

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Notes taken by Sarah Lawton.