

St. Paul's Episcopal Church

Congregational Conversations

Summary Report

"Prayerful Conversations"

SUMMARY:

The St. Paul's Episcopal Church Congregational Conversations – also called *Prayerful Conversations* – were Initiated to explore the issue of confederate symbols representative within the church. Two sessions of congregational conversations were held on two separate Sundays – August 2, 2015 and August 23, 2015.

In preparation for the conversations, members of the church volunteered to be small group facilitators and scribes. Orientations were held to prepare the volunteers for the role. The process for the small group discussions included 8 – 10 participants, a facilitator to guide the process and a scribe to capture the highlights of the conversations.

Each session was one hour in length and two questions were asked of the participants:

- 1) What do you think/feel?
- 2) What should be done?

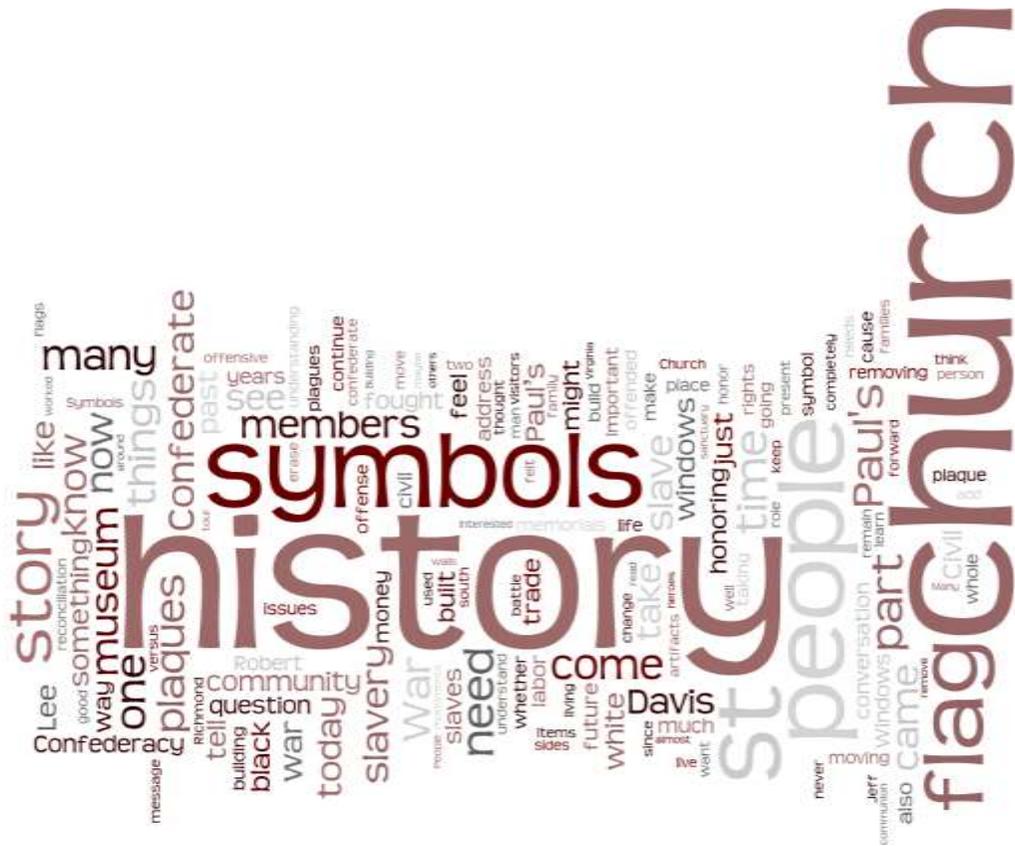
There were 18 small group conversations held:

- Sunday, August 2, 2015: There were 11 small group conversations.
- Sunday, August 23, 2015: There were seven small group conversations.

A VISUAL OF THE DISCUSSIONS – WORD CLOUDS:

Word clouds have been created from the unedited raw data to provide a visual representation of the raw data discussions. The clouds give greater prominence to words that appear more frequently from the raw data. Consistent themes emerged across the conversations.

Question One: What do you think/feel? – Word Clouds:



Emerging Themes – What do you think/feel? Themes centered on the history of the church and the symbols perceived and documented as representative of the confederacy. Although the second question was focused on possible next steps, suggestions were made in the context of Question One as well.

History of Church

- Aligns with the Civil War but not so deep with slavery
- Needing to know more about segregated history
 - Slavery
 - Who built the church
 - Tell the story of enslaved people
 - Is the confederate flag about slavery
- Needing to know more about history
- Needing to not overlook the family ties and donations
- Recognized for its community outreach
- Recognition of the heroes and heritage
- Needing to know more about the original families – who they were and their commitment to community
- Recognition of the traditional strong community voice

Symbols

- Recognizing church as a museum
- How much are the plaques noticed
- Remove or not to remove
- Recognized as memorials
- Recognize as a part of history
- Needing to understand the symbols/plaques
- Needing to know which are offensive
 - How does images make a non-white person feel
 - How do the non-white members of the church feel
- Needing to look beyond the symbols
- Needing to know if people feel included or excluded

Next Steps:

- Needing to recommit to today (purpose)
- Deciding if we can live with our history
- Do we need reconciliation
- Needing to mature past the history

- Needing to let the community know what we have learned about our past
- Needing to emphasize on church tours the work that is being done today as much as the history of the church
- Recognizing that the living breathing members are more important than the history of a building
- Deciding what the real issue is
 - Is it about how the story is told
 - Do we need to remove offensive items
 - Do we need to lose some of our history
 - How do we distinguish between honoring individuals and having symbols that incite fear?

Emerging Themes: What should we do?

History of Church

- Recognition and impact of slavery and racism
- History aligns with history of city and dating back to British influence
- History is disconnected from the present
- Need to add to history, not take away from
- Church has always been a bit on cutting edge
- Church seen as liberal
- We do not need to be ashamed

Symbols

- Any memorial given in memory of family should stay
- Distinguish between private memorials and monuments to “the cause”
- Keep symbols and show love
- Learn from history of symbols rather than removing
- Know more about which are offensive; history
- Need more symbols of who this church is today

People/Congregation

- Legacies, conscious or unconscious that holds/connects members to the past
- Leadership willing to speak about prejudice and discrimination
- Have liberal leadership
- Need to have conversations with the families of the Lee and Davis
- How do we learn if we throw things away
- Recognize and empathize the struggle a white person and legacy families have with this issue
 - This is our family
 - This is our church

Next Steps

- Is reparations a consideration
- Reconciliation
 - What it means – symbolism?
 - Opportunity for more conversation?
- Need to do a better job of articulating what the church is about today
- Move from capital of Confederacy to capital of Reconciliation
- Curate differently
- See church as more than a museum
- Need something more visual to tell all of the story
- How do we continue our journey
- Do we want to move forward