

# King's Chapel Memorial

## Congregational Engagements

### Session IV Message

The meeting began with an introduction by the King's Chapel Memorial Committee after which David Waters gave a brief overview of our journey to date from the initial research through the discussions facilitated by MASS Design to the present before describing the agenda for messaging based discussion in the Zoom Breakout Rooms.

Following the introductory presentation, the 30 attendees were divided into four Zoom Breakout Rooms, each of which included a facilitator who prompted comments and discussion centering on three questions:

1. How has participating in this process changed your thinking regarding our history and our Memorial Project?
2. What message and/or experience would you like to take away from Kings chapel's Memorial?
3. Thinking of another potential visitor to the Memorial, what message and/or experience would you like them to take away from it?

Overall commentaries appeared to focus on:

- The need for a physical memorial created with humility to serve as a permanent reminder of a complex history, one which promotes dialogue, inspires engagement, and enables personal exploration;
- A desire to give voice to the enslaved by including the names of the 219 individuals inscribed in our history - to come to know them and honor their presence as a precursor to the living memorial;
- A sense that we need to tell the whole story in all of its complexity as a step along our spiritual journey as a congregation and that we need to see and feel that journey as part of our growth together;
- A longing for something illustrative, emotional, contemplative, engaging and encouraging which explores the larger meaning of 'freedom'.

That said, participants found the four congregational conversations both painful and promising, taking inspiration and enlightenment from the dialogue while placing a high value on the willingness of their peers to open their minds and spirits to grow, learn and live in this process.

## Individual Group Commentaries

### Group 1:

Group members indicated that they were at first skeptical but have come around to the idea of a memorial. They further indicated that they want the memorial to be created with humility, not at 'virtue signaling' and that they wanted it to be an invitation for dialogue, not didactic. Moreover, they through the listing of names specific to King's Chapel, as in the World War I memorial, was powerful, and that the litany of names we said aloud during several services, with the response a promise to remember, was a good model.

### Group 2:

At the start of the conversation, many of the group members indicated that they were actually more drawn to the concept of the living memorial than the physical memorial; however, as the conversation progressed, perspectives evolved, and they came to see the physical memorial as a 'permanent' reminder of our history and the start of an enlightening educational journey.

One of the points of conversation that prompted this shift was the stated recognition that we need to balance our extensive, complex history as a church seated in an ever changing cultural context. With that, a plethora of comments were generated including:

- A recognition that we haven't come to terms with the hard issues inherent in our story, an insight that is best represented in the fact that we as a congregation are not of one mind on why we're doing this.
- A sense that our initial effort was to recognize the 219 enslaved persons who were baptized, married, and buried as recorded in our church history, e.g., the Holocaust Memorial, and yet we now understand that the inherent issues are complicated, that our voice is not compelling and that it is presumptuous for us to speak for others.
- An understanding that the physical memorial should be everlasting and that it must be accompanied by programming which draws the viewer into the story in an endeavor to engage them and encourage them to explore their own thoughts, experiences, and expectations.
- A further understanding that whatever technology is used in the telling of the story must be contemporized, e.g., anticipating the possibility of moving from video and text to holograms in the future.

Ultimately, the group seemed to settle on the idea that the purpose of the physical memorial is to give voice to the enslaved within a complex historical context; to share our journey through that history as a congregation, and, ultimately, to promote a message of redemption. Moreover, the creation of the physical memorial is only another step on the journey to be followed by the development of the living memorial in which we continue to invest ourselves as a congregation.

## Group 3:

### Important Spiritual Bases for this Project

The group talked about the spiritual underpinning of this project because we are a church.

- Recent Lenten practice during worship services, of naming all the individual enslaved persons connected to King's Chapel, while lighting a candle for each, was very meaningful and in keeping with our liturgical tradition.
- Being transparent about who we are *now*, and “owning” who we *used to be*, is an important spiritual step for us as a church. This “uncomfortable transparency” allows us to recognize that our past has impacted how we act today - especially how wealth can influence moral decisions.
- We should approach the memorial with humility. If we locate it within the church building where we worship we are the primary audience; however, if we locate it outdoors we share our spiritual message among ourselves and with others, publicly acknowledging the past.

### Process by MASS Design

- The organized process led by MASS wonderfully brought us together for full and open discussions, in a way we rarely do.
- We are inspired by the memorials they have shared with us and hope ours will inspire others, too.
- The engagement process was “revelatory” - MASS helped us identify a plethora of issues as we continue to seek consensus.

### Living and Physical Memorial.

- There is enthusiastic support for a living memorial, and we would be proud to have that justice work recognized by others. Perhaps we could establish the living memorial in partnership with the Boston Foundation.
- The physical and living memorials are inextricably linked. That is to engage in repair we must first publicly share our past and acknowledge the value of enslaved persons as individuals; only then can we effectively move toward social justice.

### “Telling the Complex History”

Participants used this phrase with two meanings:

- A more complex view of our history in context will broaden our sense of their actions and their commitment to the sanctuary as a “worshipful” space.
- A more complete view of our history extends beyond the colonial period when our church was built, and the year 1783 when slavery ended in Massachusetts to examine

our church's complicity with slavery between 1783 and the Civil War, when King's Chapel leaders were primarily silent or actually led efforts to enact and enforce the Fugitive Slave Act which effectively forced any escaped slave found in Boston back to the South.

- Most participants were ready to move forward; however for some the story requires more nuance and understanding.

#### **Group 4:**

##### **Thoughts on the Impact of Participation on our Thinking**

- The process has been both more painful and also more promising
- The whole undertaking has been inspiring
- Impressed with everyone's ideas – it makes for a rich collection of ideas
- Much more enlightened by the process, and a deepened understanding of the spiritual disconnect that must have been present
- Appreciative of the effort and willingness of the congregation to open their minds
- Impressed and pleased with the amount of spiritual dimension: "I can feel the congregation growing, learning, and living in this process."
- Appreciate the complexity that invites us to the relationship
- Hope the trustees can be substantial with their effort in creating something significant
- The audience exercise has been helpful, and the hope is that the effort does not go wasted or neglected, but that each audience is truly considered for what they bring.

##### **Thoughts on the Message and Experience of the Memorial**

- Wants to see the public courage of this institution being acknowledged
- Yearning for some type of memorial that acknowledges the hard fact that we have no way of knowing everyone's names, maybe we refer to them as "The unknown soldiers"
- Bring humility as worshippers
- Desire to acknowledge all the other 1000s of people working those plantations beyond even the mere 219 that are tied here
- There is a need to acknowledge the humanity of these enslaved people, beyond even just their name
- Want to see a place/space to pray - Potentially kneelers in the balcony
- Would like a space to leave or write a little prayer
- Longing for something illustrative, emotional, and not just contemplative but also complex.
- Speak not only to what we can be, but also what we are and the foundation we stand upon.

##### **Hopes for the Messages and Experiences others might take from the Memorial**

- There is a powerful opportunity to engage or invite someone from the school street side into the church— one congregant shared a concept they had been considering:
  - Maybe there is a way to "scar" the granite wall on the school street side in a way that symbolizes the wound to be healed within these granite walls - a symbolism of the brokenness within the gauge - or
  - Maybe there is a circle of hands that invites people to come together

- Another congregation expressed desire to have some physical figure in the upper pews where the enslaved and non-white visitors sat to “bear witness” to our past, present, and future.
- Shift the paradigm of coming to Boston to celebrate “American Freedom” and having the courage as a congregation to challenge the face of that notion of what freedom truly is, and its absent nature in many circumstances.
- Others agreed there needs to be a thorough unpacking of the term “freedom”, e.g., Joy spoke of freedom in a memorable sermon and would be wonderful to expand that dialogue through this in some way, demystifying the “freedom trail myth” and an opportunity to ‘complexify’ that approach
- Appeal to an emotion, rather than rehashing what we already know.
- What does everyone identify with and how are we reaching that?
- Hope that the experience is “gripping and gulping”
- Hope to see something educational done with the crypt space.

