



King's Chapel Memorial  
Congregation Engagements

# Engagement Session I - Summary

## **SESSION 1 - CONTEXT: OBJECTIVES**

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The meeting began with a review of the Committee's work, the project and MASS's consultant role. MASS gave a brief slide presentation Contextualizing Memory on the power of memorials in the current cultural context, including a brief floor plan of current memorials at the church. Faye Charpentier presented the context of King's Chapel's history with enslaved persons. MASS then described how discussion would unfold in Zoom Breakout Rooms.

Following the introductory presentation, the 28 attendees were divided into four Zoom Breakout Rooms, each of which included a MASS facilitator and one from the Committee. The facilitators prompted Breakout Room comments and discussions with three questions and took notes, which have been edited for clarity, but not for content. The notes are intended to reflect the full range of opinions expressed in the Breakout Rooms. Following the Breakout Rooms, the meeting reassembled as a whole for brief summary remarks.

Our initial discussions to begin defining the context for this memorial were facilitated by three questions:

1. ***What are the opportunities and challenges in this context for a memorial to enslaved persons?***
2. ***How might a new memorial re-contextualize and enrich our understanding of the existing ones?***
3. ***How might a new memorial provide an opportunity for reflection upon King's Chapel's past, dialogue in its present, and hope for its future?***

The following slides summarizes key points and ideas from that:

**CONTEXT OVERVIEW**

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# Summary Of Key Takeaways

**LOCATION ON FREEDOM TRAIL IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO DEMONSTRATE LEADERSHIP THROUGH GROWTH**

- Larger narrative of slavery in the north - opportunity to tell untold stories
- Church history provides a historical case study, which can offer an opportunity to be a model to other orgs for how to properly address these issues
- Maybe this is the first site along the Freedom Trail to shift the narrative around this history is being told - including Black voices
- Desire to engage Black congregants as well as other Black churches/congregations

**MATERIAL & PROGRAMMATIC CONTRAST TO EXISTING MEMORIALS CAN UNDERScore IMPORTANT DIFFERENCES OF NEW MEMORIAL // ie WHO IS BEING HONORED AND WHY**

- An outdoor location will reach more people
- The memorial should tell/be a story - a living memorial - not just figurative/static, in contrast to what's existing; a desire to breakaway from existing format, materiality, permanence, etc
- Memorial shouldn't just Mark (names, dates, etc) - it should Provoke, Evoke, Educate, etc
  - + A multi-sensory experience
  - + Connections to other resources
  - + Revelation of a broader historical story and connection to current day
- The memorial could, in contrast to existing, provide space for reflection or respite

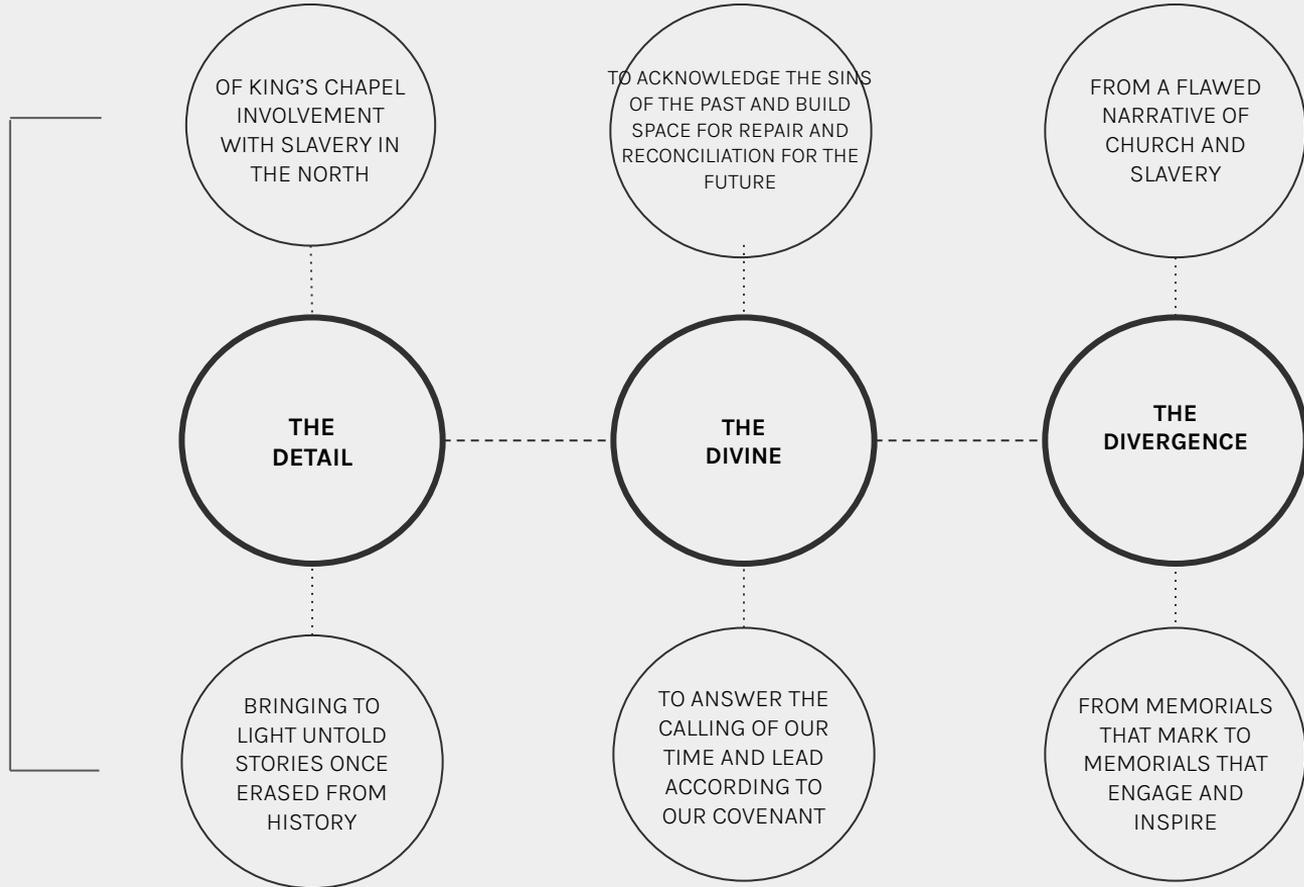
**CONTEXT OF THE CONGREGATION'S SPIRITUAL PRACTICE CAN/SHOULD PROVIDE A FRAMEWORK FOR ONGOING, FUTURE-FACING PROVOCATION**

- This memorial can/should provide an important space for personal and collective provocation: to not be blind/indifferent to injustice.
- This is the process of learning, the conversations necessary to absorb the history
- Critical that the memorial be built according to the values of the church and in response to the "higher calling"

**CONTEXT OVERVIEW**

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CONTEXT ACCORDING TO:



## Group 1 Takeaways: (Morgan & Kathe)

Question 1: What are the opportunities and challenges in this context for a memorial to enslaved persons?

- Opportunities
  - The location of KC on the Freedom Trail provides a tremendous opportunity to impact the public – and an opportunity to **expand discussions of freedom**, by connecting church history to the present
  - This is an opportunity to be in step with that as an example of how we can shape the public discussion - provide leadership
- Challenges
  - Space is a challenge – particularly inside the sanctuary where the memorial speaks primarily to those who visit and worship. **The exterior provides more opportunities for engagement with the public.**
  - There is an element of sorrow in the memorial as we ponder ‘man’s inhumanity to man’

Question 2: How might a new memorial re-contextualize and enrich our understanding of the existing ones?

- The **juxtaposition** of existing memorials and a new memorial is powerful – it demonstrates **a clear shift in the values** of the institution, and a trajectory of growth
- A **memorial to a group/collective** of people will stand in **contrast** to existing memorials to **individuals**.
- We hope the memorial will ‘hold’ us – our attention – and draw us to reflection and change

## Group 1 Takeaways, CONT.: (Morgan & Kathe)

Question 3: How might a new memorial provide an opportunity for reflection upon King's Chapel's past, dialogue in its present, and hope for its future?

- By remembering not only the 219 names, but those on the plantations as well we might honor all of their labors, and **contend with the impact of slavery on American culture writ large**
- We want to encourage people to educate themselves – will need to provide **programming** around the memorial(s) – QR codes, etc...
- Our **spiritual beliefs** should inform the effort
- This memorial can/should provide an important space for **personal and collective provocation: to not be blind/indifferent to injustice.**

## Group 2 Takeaways: (Chris & Joy)

Question 1: What are the opportunities and challenges in this context for a memorial to enslaved persons?

- Opportunities
  - **Confront KC's history, and help others confront their histories.** Opportunity to right historical wrongs. People of color were segregated in the sanctuary. It is fitting that enslaved people be memorialized prominently in pews from which they were once barred. There is an opportunity to re-contextualize our history by including our full story, which, until now, we have only chosen to tell a part of.
  - **Correct the erasure of enslaved people.** Slavery is contrary to everything we believe and say as Christians and Unitarians. Our continued silence would be a continued erasure.
  - **Lead, as an institution truthfully recognizing its own privileged, classist and arrogant history.** Are we being arrogant in doing this, or are we being self-reflective and striving for betterment in the future?
  - **Look to Black Congregations for insight.** If there are current Black congregants who are descendants of enslaved persons associated with the church, then there is an opportunity to look to them for insight.
- Challenges
  - It may be a challenge to avoid offending other non-enslaved groups who also have been persecuted.

## Group 2 Takeaways: (Chris & Joy)

Question 2: How might a new memorial re-contextualize and enrich our understanding of the existing ones?

- What can we do to **empower the descendants of enslaved persons** who worshiped at KC? The physical memorial should be linked to the goals of the living memorial.
- The existing Civil War memorial remembers the great trauma of many lost lives but does not address the deeper issues over which the war was fought - how can we ensure this memorial exists within the right context?

Question 3: How might a new memorial provide an opportunity for reflection upon King's Chapel's past, dialogue in its present, and hope for its future?

- A **multi-sensory memorial** could help communicate and tell stories in multiple ways, and the telling of stories is critical to the memorial's success.
- The inclusion of names can be very powerful, as was done at the Vietnam Veterans Memorials, Unknown names should be included as well.
- We can be justly proud of much of our history, but are getting a reality check which yields a **cognitive dissonance**. A memorial might integrate what is honorable about KC's past as well as what is tragic, and help us form a coherent and whole identity in the present.

### Group 3 Takeaways: (Alejandra & David)

Question 1: What are the opportunities and challenges in this context for a memorial to enslaved persons?

- Opportunities
  - **Rebalance and expand perspectives of the memorials currently @ King's Chapel.** There's an opportunity to provide a window into other types of visual perspectives, however 'imperfect' they may seem.
  - **Engage historical Black congregations in Boston and expand community outreach.** King's Chapel should focus more on these efforts, do it more, and do it better.
  - **Explore different ways to acknowledge enslaved individuals on the interior and exterior walls of King's Chapel.** Consider adding a significant plaque for unnamed and named slaves.
  - **Explore use of crypt.** Consider use of crypt as space to engage congregation in the work of repair; given the complexities of the issues we're addressing, explore the use of the crypt as a 'memorial space' in which to share this history with members and visitors.
- Challenges
  - **There is concern to convince the trustees of the value of having a living memorial that engages with the African-American community in Boston.** How could we get buy-in and how would we use the funds for the living memorial?
  - **A physical memorial is not enough.** A concern is that a list of enslaved individuals is a disservice and a narrow approach to address this issue. A plaque is an easy way out. The team could perhaps consider engaging and naming historical and current anti-slavery, abolitionists, and activists.

## Group 3 Takeaways, CONT.: (Alejandra & David)

Question 2: How might a new memorial re-contextualize and enrich our understanding of the existing ones?

- **The memorial's focus should be on helping people now.** We didn't do it right in the 1700s, but we want to get it right now.
- **This is not a guilt trip, it is about acknowledging the past.** We want to signal to the community and acknowledge we have done wrong and are taking steps.
- **How might we institutionalize truth-telling?** How might we more transparently and more effectively tell the story? The names matter, they are real people. Making space for that truth telling is important.

Question 3: Reflection of King's Chapel's past, present and future

- **King's Chapel is reckoning with the institutional slavery past and its repercussions in the present.** Historically, individual slavers and economic system relied on slaves to build King's Chapel and built up economies around it. This is an opportunity to address that wrong.
- **Brick and mortar memorials can also work as living memorials that take you on a journey.** If King's Chapel were to have one, what would it mean? How might we become living memorials ourselves?
- **This process unfolding is one of acknowledgement for our congregation that can be pivotal for how we come to this work with humility, enhance the present and hope with the future, and join as a community of faith to engage the trustees to steward funds towards this living memorial.**
- **Share, distribute, and expand resources to the congregation.**

## Group 4 Takeaways: (Emily & Miguel)

Question 1: What are the opportunities and challenges in this context for a memorial to enslaved persons?

Opportunities:

- **Engaging outside the walls of KC.** Potential partnerships with Black churches and/or other relevant partners in the city.(i.e. Louis D Brown Institute). Who else is holding these conversations?
- **Significance of location.** Proximity to the freedom trail and position on this trail makes the memorial able to connect with the larger community. In this way, Kings Chapel is really a global stage.
- **Honor those forgotten.** To honor and recognize the individuals who were enslaved and contributed greatly to the Church.
- **Expanding KC's audience.** A new memorial could draw a wider, more diverse audience to KC and the entirety of its history.
- **Educational opportunity** and way for us to confront our own privilege and learn about anti-oppression.
- **A memorial that speaks to freedom.** With the proximity to freedom trail , the memorial has the opportunity to speak to freedom

Challenges:

- **Acknowledging our own identities.** Our standing as privileged white people to create a memorial.
- **Defining a clear and unified set of principles by which we move forward.** That this not be a memorial only to ourselves, the audience is much larger than just the congregants at Kings Chapel. It will be challenging to avoid mixed signals with who this memorial is for or about. We must be clear in our intentions.
- **Remembering who KC is and what we stand for.** Remembering that we are a church and to focus on being that, a church, and not something we're not, like an educational institution..
- **White guilt in the context of a memorial to enslaved people.** A memorial should not be driven by guilt.

## Group 4 Takeaways, CONT.: (Emily & Miguel)

Question 2: How might a new memorial re-contextualize and enrich our understanding of the existing ones?

- **Digging into abolitionist history.** We could broaden our interpretation of the existing memorials to note memorialized congregants who were abolitionists.
- **How can this memorial fit into the broader KC narrative?** The memorial could recognize its place among the other memorials in an historic and ongoing, evolving community of faith.

Question 3: How might a new memorial provide an opportunity for reflection upon King's Chapel's past, dialogue in its present, and hope for its future?

- **The memorial could create a space for reflection, respite, interaction, and be multifaceted.**
- **Offering peace as a way forward.** We can use the memorial to make amends/reconcile and offer peace in a way that moves forward.
- **Building on work that is already happening.** The memorial should be tied to the mission and ongoing work of the church.