

Crossroads part 1 – written and presented by Michelle Lanier

During this part of the evening's discussion we will talk about the vision of APC being at a crossroads. The physical aspect of being at a crossroads is quite easy to see – we are situated near the intersection of two heavily travelled roads. And, on Columbia Pike, driving east to west, it is fairly easy to observe differences.

As the Vision Team went out into the community this past summer/fall it was with the intention of getting to know our community better and to discover who in our community do our hearts break for.

As the summer went on we found that often we gravitated to the east side of Glebe Rd. where the new restaurants have opened recently. The west side of Glebe Rd. took a little more of an intentional effort to spend time. We had discussions over the summer about trying to make a concerted effort to spend more time on that side. And it wasn't because we didn't want to – but without specifically focusing our attention in the other direction we seemed to gravitate towards the east side.

We also walked around the neighborhoods of single family homes to the north and south and we visited many of the non- profit organizations that seem to be situated in all directions, like the Greenbriar Learning Center, Just Neighbors, Phoenix Bikes, The Arlington Free Clinic, to name a few.

And who was it that our hearts broke for? Well, we had some difficulty narrowing that to a specific population. We discovered that there are many people in our community that deserve attention: the low income workers needing affordable housing, immigrants needing help with the immigration process, children needing help with school, seniors who may be finding it difficult to maintain and live in the homes they have lived in for years, even the young affluent adults who we believe may find themselves at some point searching for something “bigger than themselves”.

Of course we know that we cannot be everything to everyone. We also recognize that there are a lot of good organizations that already exist who are already helping people. But we believe we are situated at this crossroads for a reason and that we can follow Jesus' example of “forming circles”. Jesus brought together people from various walks of life, people who might not have ever known each other, and formed a circle of friends and that circle of friends created more circles of friends, and so on....

Crossroads part 2 – written and presented by Kristine Gabster

During the summer, a majority of my energy went to helping with Gatorade delivery and talking with people on the bus. The opportunity to interact with these folks was a blessing. All I can tell you is that, not only did the idea hit me like a Mack truck, there was also this feeling... While I was helping deliver the Gatorade, I firmly believed that I was a part of something I was supposed to be a part of.

At the end of the summer, being a part of the school supply drive also came with a sense of belief that I was doing one small, right thing (we will be having another school supply drive throughout March, the supplies to be given to Greenbrier Learning Center, where many of the children, some of them children of SEEC, attend).

My conversations with some of the people on the bus were sometimes difficult, sometimes not so difficult. While people tend to talk to me fairly easily, I sometimes have trouble reciprocating that ease. It was very uncomfortable to me to start a conversation or join in on an open conversation but, again, I could tell in my heart that this was important, that it was the right thing to do. I learned about a lot of different things, one of which was why some people pack more people into houses and apartments than “should” be there. I learned about where a lot of day laborers live by talking with Kristl and later with one of the facilitators at SEEC.

Talking to a couple of the homeless people of Arlington was, I must admit, a little scary. That stigma runs deep with me and I am working to overcome it. I was nervous about it until I said hello and saw them smile. No great, deep conversations, just a hello and a genuine how are you that waits for a response and a have a good day. What amazed me was the softening of their faces and the fact that they were amazed that someone was actually speaking to them!!! Most see them and don't say anything. While some are volatile, not all of them are. Some have mental illness (about 25% statistics say) and we do not have time to get into the stigma surrounding that, but we do have time to realize that – while some are paranoid and do not want to be “on the grid,” some are simply unaware of the how and who of getting a permanent place to live, where they can get their medications at low or no cost and how to find help to care for themselves and their place once they get it. There are services for all of these issues. There is even treatment for homeless who have mental illness. Getting the agencies and the people who need the help connected isn't a given. Many people do not know.

I am thinking that we could be a crossroads to help join people who don't know where to get specific help with people who give that specific help: Treatment On Wheels or TOW, ASPAN, AFAC, SEEC, Just Friends to name a few. That will not only help people but it will also inform us of what is happening/what is needed/what might be lacking. Also, folks might not know about how to get help for one thing, but may teach us about other resources that we did not know about for another issue.

When I think of that as a possibility, I get that same feeling and belief in my heart that this is one of the next right things to do.

Crossroads part 3 – written and presented by Sharon Core

So, what does this Crossroads look like—now and in the future? There are two aspects to this part of the vision. The first grows out of the ministry of the Clothing Bank—here is an opportunity for people of different backgrounds to come together. No matter how short the time, relationships are built among those who participate in this ministry. Out of this experience we believe God is calling us to partner with other organizations already serving the populations along Columbia Pike. We have already put this into action with Phoenix Bikes and the Christmas give-a-way. We provide space for SEEC—Shirlington Education and Employment Center—as they train people in green house cleaning. The NoVA Lights Chorale rehearses here on Monday evenings and then holds their concerts in the sanctuary twice a year. Numerous anonymous groups have weekly meetings in the fellowship hall and room 201/202. We do make our space available. But is there perhaps more that we could be doing now? Can we also make ourselves available? It is one thing to schedule building space with Maria, but it is quite another to have someone from this community present to welcome the groups as they arrive—if this is a place we value, a place we hold dear, is it possible that we can communicate that to groups when they arrive? “Welcome to this space; we are glad you are here.” And then is it possible to maintain a relationship with them?, to give them a name and a face, a person who cares about their presence in our midst? Is it possible for us to be more than landlords? We have tried our hand at this with the bike give-a-way and I think that experience was met with great enthusiasm. Now, to expand that to other groups—to those who are already here and with those we have yet to form ongoing relationships with—AFAC, Just Neighbors, the Reading Connection, A-SPAN. How can our life together as a community in this physical space along Columbia Pike support organizations already doing good and faithful work with those living in our neighborhood?

The second aspect of this vision of Crossroads is a bit more involved and long term. You have already heard about hearts breaking for the people who live along the Pike. That has also led to the realization that there are diverse populations in our immediate neighborhood that have no contact with one another. And while we might imagine a worship service is the best way to bring people together that is not always true. It can be very intimidating to walk through those red doors on a Sunday. And so why not host some sort of program? That too can be a bit daunting, especially if church is not something you are familiar with. This part of the vision imagines less threatening encounters—people being in the same place, giving them space to make connections, but not requiring it until they are ready to do so. We’re thinking coffee shop—with comfortable seating, with free wifi, with good coffee, with space for conversation. People come in and out as they choose—they meet friends and colleagues here and quite possibly they meet new people. We would also make other opportunities available—a monthly book club, opportunities to serve in the community, times for contemplative prayer, an invitation to Sunday worship, an open mic night, a knitting circle, discussion groups.

We see this crossroads as a way to provide space for the populations living along the Pike—helping create community among those who may not know each other and in so doing getting to know our own neighbors better.

We see this crossroads as yet one more way to model the body of Christ by bringing people together and possibly in deeper relationship with one another.

The church as a place of crossroads—what excites you about this? What questions do you have?