

September 10, 2023

Hello all,

This past Sunday, Jeff Carter offered his reflection about our scriptures, where Jesus invites people to work through mediation to settle differences rather than submit themselves to the legal system of the day.

The bottom-line message for us today is the following: It is true that we need rules, because human beings need structure in order to function. However, rules are not there to rule us - they are not a substitute for the “Spirit of the Law”. We will never know the divine if we cannot sit down at the crux of whatever conflict lies before us. Jesus teaches us that sitting there together, in the Holy Spirit, is where true healing is found.

Thank you, Jeff, for your words of wisdom on Sunday.

Where 3 of us gathered.....

I have agreed, for better or for worse, to offer reflections on today’s passage from Matthew 18. I have also attempted to frame this passage in the context of Augustine Centre and my last 8 (going on nine) years of involvement.

Rev Eric provides us with the following biblical context: What stands out in this reading is that it follows the teaching on welcoming children. In modern terms, we might say that there is the letter of the law and the spirit of law. The bottom line of the teaching is that while the letter of the law is important, because human beings need structure, the law will only work if it is lived amid relationships of truth and compassion. This teaching about human agency guided by Godly wisdom is a gift to the world when it is introduced.

Christ has assured us that wherever 2 or 3 are gathered in His name, He is also with us. I believe that He indeed was part of what we were doing in 2015, leading to our incorporation in 2018. We knew out of need that we had to work together. Oak Table and SPLASH needed homes. Augustine United could no longer bear the burden of managing and caring for this beloved building. However, the partnership that grew was not only based on need for accommodation. We truly felt that we could offer each other understanding, support, and yes – love.

Lest you think I am looking back with rose coloured glasses, I can cite many instances of Christian love and support –

Each of the partners was willing to share its space with the other. SPLASH offered one of its classrooms for our Sunday School use. As we speak, SPLASH is creating its school aged center and has offered this space to Augustine Centre for evening rentals.

Oak Table, having existed for years in the Guild Hall space, knew we would need a space to gather as Augustinians. We are indeed in the Oak Table space every Sunday after church. Oak Table, as part of its build, included a well-

September 10, 2023

equipped conference room not only for its use, but also for the use of Augustine Centre. This space is available for rentals to smaller groups as well. When we operate the performance venue, the Oak Table space can be used for receptions and gathering spaces for the performers.

All of us knew we could not afford market rates for rentals of our respective spaces. Accordingly, one of our main goals was to offer below market rates of rental to ourselves and to other groups needing affordable meeting space.

The partners (all of us charities) also recognized that some had more guaranteed income than others – some depended only on grants and donations. Accordingly, our rental structures are fashioned at this time to reflect the ability to pay of each of the partners.

The Centre Board continues to operate in an atmosphere of respect and honesty.

You may well think that we should at this point join hands and sing “Kumbaya”. Not so fast.

As in many groups and families, there were growing pains. Augustine as a congregation experienced many instances of angst – some based on how the church would survive. Others based on a mistrust of Augustine Centre. Some found the thought of handing over the management of the building to an incorporated body such as Augustine Centre a sign that the congregation was losing something, in fact giving it away. Some insisted that the new spaces to be created were still “Augustine United’s spaces”. Others felt that the congregation should disband, and the building be sold.

In the end, every motion that was needed to move this process along was ratified by the congregational votes unanimously – and often after some very assertive questioning (an essential for any sound decision making).

Now that leases are finalized and in place, it would seem that everything will run smoothly. Maybe so. However, increasing costs and changes in our society's needs may affect how we continue to work together. Christ’s presence may have been felt during the early days of what we were about to do. But, as Eric will point out, Christ expects us all to gather and to function the same way as if Christ were in the room. And here lies the challenge of continuing trust, respect, meaningful exchange, generosity of spirit and sharing of resources. As an independent incorporated body Augustine Centre has indeed been founded on Christian values. When 3 of us gathered, we truly gathered in Christ’s name. Our challenge is to continue to live and thrive in this spirit – to keep Christ in the room.