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Dear Friends,

This is a long article, but then, because of my sabbatical, it is my last one until January 2015. So if you think of it more as words-per-month, it is well below my usual production.

In the May 19th issue of *The New Yorker*, Dale Russakoff tells the intriguing, complicated, and often frustrating story of recent attempts to improve the public schools of Newark. With the unlikely alliance of outspoken Republican Governor Chris Christie and rock-star black Mayor (now Senator) Cory Booker, and with \$100 million pledged by Facebook wizard Mark Zuckerberg, one might have thought that in a few months things could be set straight. The plan enjoyed the trifecta of good fortune: not only governmental but *bi-partisan* governmental support; media celebrity (Zuckerberg's pledge was announced on Oprah); and a vast amount of money, and not boring money, but money from a billionaire internet wunderkind. What could go wrong?

The article suggests that despite this unprecedented combination of resources and attention, little has improved. In mid-May Newark elected a new mayor, Ras Baraka, whose campaign championed his opposition to most of the changes. Mr. Baraka, a principal of one of the old-style schools targeted by the reformers, made the election something like a referendum on the education project, and he won by a comfortable majority.

Flashback One summer Sunday morning about twenty years ago when I was on vacation, I sat in the congregation of our Cathedral in Newark—the only white person in a full congregation—to hear the Afro-American woman who had been appointed by the State of New Jersey to take over control of the Newark schools talk about her new job. I had come expecting to hear that the Newark system was impoverished. It turned out that it had one of the highest per-student budgets in the state, but that morning Dr. Beverly Hall argued that little of that money actually got into the classroom. The school system, she argued, had evolved to become an employer of last resort in Newark, with a complex network of relationships between local government and the school system to provide secure, well-paying jobs to adults in a wide variety of non-teaching positions, and secure salaries to teachers without reference to their effectiveness in the classroom. In the twenty years since Dr. Hall made this indictment, despite the State of New Jersey having taken charge of the system, the basic charges have not changed.

About a month ago I was recalling that morning with the Very Rev. Petero Sabune, who had been the Dean of the Cathedral when the State had taken over the school system. Sabune, as he is known, had invited Dr. Hall to the Cathedral because of the long-standing engagement of the Episcopal Church with Newark education. Sabune told me that while Dr. Hall was denouncing financial waste and mismanagement, her Board of Education limousine and driver were parked close to the Cathedral, motor running the whole time, to power the car's air conditioning. Sabune, surprised to see the car and driver, had had to tell her that having it parked right in front of the Cathedral the whole time might diminish the impact of her presentation.¹

How the Cathedral became “+ St. Philip’s” In 1964 our Cathedral was simply “Trinity Cathedral.” But in that year St. Philip’s Church in Newark, a vibrant predominantly Afro-American congregation, lost its building to a fire. The Diocese of Newark found itself with a cathedral building with a small, mostly white congregation, and a large Afro-American congregation with no building. The Diocese took the significantly complicated (and, at the time, daring) step of bringing the two together to form “Trinity + St. Philip’s Cathedral” in 1966. The Cathedral went on to elect the Very Rev. Dillard Robinson who became the first Afro-American to serve as the Dean of an Episcopal Cathedral in the United States.

In July of the next year, 1967, six days of racially linked rioting devastated Newark, leaving 26 people dead and millions of dollars of property damage. Bridges into the city were closed, the National Guard was called in, and it was one of the worst of the many urban riots of the 1960s. In part because of those frequent and wide-spread riots, I have little nostalgia for the 1960s.

An offer and a discovery During the decade after the riots, the situation in Newark did not significantly improve. In the early 1980s a philanthropist approached Dean Robinson and offered to provide two Newark students with full scholarships to the prestigious and academically distinguished (and Episcopal) St. Paul’s School in Concord, New Hampshire. Dean Robinson made extensive inquiries, but to his dismay he discovered that in all of the city he could not find any students who could be reasonably expected to do the work at St. Paul’s.

In response, Dean Robinson, working with lay leaders at the Cathedral—many of them employees of that same Newark School system sharply criticized by Dr. Hall—began to consider how the Cathedral might do more than just lament this depressing state of affairs. And in 1988, after extensive planning and preparation, they founded St. Philip’s Academy with a single class of 10 first graders meeting in the former Deanery of the Cathedral, just across the street from the church itself. The next year they admitted another first grade class, and so had two grades. And, adding a grade each year, and modestly expanding each grade, they continued until in 1996 they enrolled 140 students. From that first class of 10, current capacity now exceeds 370 and, no longer improvising in a 19th century residential space, they occupy a fully remodeled (former chocolate!) factory at 342 Central Avenue. Members of St. Elizabeth’s have been significant partners in this project almost from its first days,

The founding Head of School at St. Philip’s was Dr. Maureen Fonseca, whose husband, Petero Sabune, was soon called to follow Dean Robinson as the new Dean of the Cathedral. That the Dean of the Cathedral and the Head of the School were husband and wife seems a compelling

¹ The story of Dr. Hall, at least at this point, does not have a happy ending. After Newark, Dr. Hall became the Superintendent of Schools in Atlanta, Georgia. In 2009, on the basis of the remarkable improvements in the scores achieved by Atlanta’s students, the American Association of School Administrators named Dr. Hall the Superintendent of the Year. Wondering about that remarkable improvement, a local newspaper began to investigate. They discovered a system-wide program of cheating and answer changing on tests mandated by the federal government’s No Child Left Behind program. Hall resigned in 2010 and was indicted in 2013 for her alleged part in the altering of the scores.

symbol of the close relationship between the Church and the School. Not long after Sabune became the Dean, Bishop Spong appointed me to the Cathedral Chapter, something like the Vestry of the Cathedral, and over the course of our monthly meetings, I came to know my colleagues, most of whom were Afro-Americans. They included employees of the school system, original founders of St. Philip's Academy, and one man who had been a Tuskegee Airman in WW II (and if you don't know what that means, it is worth looking up!).

Same facts, different stories So when I hear about "corruption" in the school system and "employer of last resort" and "make-work jobs for relatives," I think not of faceless generic characters, but of many of the people I have met through our Cathedral. I find myself hearing two stories at the same time.

The narrative of the frustrated, or even outraged, reformers is easy to grasp and not wrong. But there was another narrative which begins with the question "Why is there a need for a parallel job economy?"

While the racism of our history, culture, and economy does not provide blanket permission for unrestricted compensatory behavior, that racism does create an environment which is experientially unknown to people like me. And one of the chilling evils of the present situation is that the cost of a history of racial oppression is being passed on to those least able to bear it, the children.

Paradoxically, by ensuring that young people of color in Newark grow up educationally deprived, the system of "corruption" becomes necessarily self-perpetuating: young people who cannot compete in the ordinary economy due to inadequate skills will seek to make a living in a setting in which whatever skills or other assets they have will be recognized and rewarded. It is almost as if this social and economic system, like a sentient organism, has developed the ability to ensure its own growth and survival. In this dynamic I can see the appeal of the Christian tradition of personifying evil—it would be difficult to design a system with a more lasting tendency to "corrupt and destroy the creatures of God." (BCP p. 302)

At the end of May, Terry Battaglia, Joan Conley, and I will present our 8th grade class to the Bishop at the Cathedral to be confirmed. This month at St. Elizabeth's I expect to baptize perhaps half a dozen candidates in a variety of services. In all of those liturgies, we all will renounce evil in its various forms and sources, and we will all, as agents of God's love and justice in the world, join in repeating the commitment to confront that evil. These renunciations and affirmations make up a large part of the Baptismal liturgy which defines our identity and mission as Christians in the Anglican tradition.

A role for the Church What does the evidence suggest about the ability of schools, by themselves, to create in young people a commitment to justice and peace for all people and respect for the dignity of every human being? If a school system has been shaped by the need to respond to oppressive cultural and economic patterns, from one perspective it looks corrupt, from another it seems adaptive and inventive. I sometimes think of the Newark school system as an economic manifestation of the principles of guerrilla warfare: when the rules your opponents follow give them an overwhelming advantage, consider changing the rules. What if the racism at the heart of this dysfunction, rather than a thing in itself, is a manifestation of something deeper, sharing a common foundation with sexism, bullying, ethnic cleansing, the persecution of religious groups, and the viewing of people not as the image of God but as opportunities for meeting a variety of self-defined needs? What if our core problem is not sociological, psychological, political, or historical, but theological: What is the source and the nature of evil, and to what resources might we turn effectively to fight it?

A trip to the basement In my basement workshop I have a variety of tools: a number of different hammers, nearly half a dozen drills, the same number of chisels, handsaws in a variety of shapes and sizes, a score of screwdrivers, bar clamps, pipe clamps, and “C” clamps, a router, and various files, rasps, and cutting tools. Step into the garage and you will see a snow blower, a generator, a chain saw, and any number of rakes and shovels, spades, clippers, and edgers. I occasionally have to make the case to Susan that I really need all of those tools because each one has a distinctive capability.

In the work of raising up a healthy culture—not just young people, but a whole culture—we need a wide variety of tools, and the Church—properly done—has the potential to address essential, and maybe even foundational, issues with a focus and effectiveness unavailable to any other institution. Crossing cultures, classes, disciplines, generations, methodologies, and media, the Church has more and better resources to address the complexity of life and culture than anything with which we have tried to replace it.

Not enough resources Faced with a problem, it seems to me that our culture looks to some combination of regulation and education to develop a solution. We try to pass laws and we seek to fix schools. And when we bring together those two strategies—that is, when we try to pass laws in order to fix schools, we are especially perplexed when good results elude us. Our gods and their religion have not saved us.

I think the Church, having a deeper understanding of the nature of sin and what can triumph over it, may be a more pragmatic option than a secularism which has failed to deliver what it has promised. Churches in the European tradition have a long partnership with education. In the so-called Dark Ages, monasteries and cathedrals preserved literacy so people could read the bible and sing words of the liturgy. In the early Industrial Age in Britain, churches established Sunday Schools—not to teach bible stories to children, but to teach literacy to adults. When the economy saw no need to educate the vast majority of the population, the churches made it their mission to ensure that people would have access to ideas beyond their immediate experience.

When schools are run by churches, this partnership can be part of the institutional life. When schools and churches are in close, explicit partnership, as was the case with St. Philip’s Academy in its early days, then it is as if we have a two-parent family, with one parent as the Dean and the other as the Head of School.

When we are in a setting, as most of us are, where institutional partnership between church and school is not possible, then we must make every effort to ensure that everyone understands the value of a connection to a church (or mosque, or synagogue...) as clearly as they understand the value of a connection to a school. We strive for this goal not to build up the church, but to repair the world.

I wonder if our hundred-year experiment with getting along without a significant role for the church in our culture has been especially successful. Certainly any scheme to establish or impose a particular religion is unlikely to prove to be a blessing to anyone. But perhaps we could begin by acknowledging to ourselves the need to connect to a community with a structured mission to seek God and to live a life correspondingly faithful to the God we seek. Perhaps it would be convenient, or even pleasant, if we could effectively seek God on our own, but membership in a community which is itself rooted in a tradition (a church, a synagogue, or a mosque, to cite three examples) seems to be a necessary corrective to defining God in what prove to be only self-serving terms.

Some input from the 13th century When I was in Salisbury Cathedral this past February, the novelist Ken Follett appeared for an evening to mark the 25th anniversary of the publication of his novel about a medieval cathedral, *The Pillars of the Earth*. As the evening shadows began to lengthen

in the stunning 13th century stone cathedral nave, I asked Follett what he thought such a building might still have to say to the 21st century—what should we learn from what we see?

Follett thought for a moment and replied that no one who started work on a medieval cathedral expected to live to see it completed. Those carpenters, masons, architects, glassworkers, roofers, and general builders all went about their work knowing that what they were doing mattered, that it would never be done if they did not begin, but they would never have the satisfaction, at least in this life, of stepping back and admiring their completed work.

Today, only scholars can read the literature of that age. One of the four surviving original copies of the *Magna Carta*, roughly contemporary with the Cathedral, is housed in the Chapter House there, and though one can get quite close to it, an ordinary person would find it quite challenging to make any sense of the minute markings on the page. We can only speculate about the music from that era, and there are only a very few smaller works of art which remain from that age. But the buildings function just as powerfully now as they did seven, eight, or nine centuries ago when they were first put into use. We need no interpreters to experience the power and the holiness of those awe-inspiring places.

Perhaps as we consider the daunting prospect of problems like education in Newark, like the deep and lasting scars of slavery and racism, and like the continuing struggle to understand what truly constitutes justice across differences of race, class, gender, religion, and ethnic identity—perhaps as we consider these issues, the example of those medieval builders might guide us. They certainly did not have our education, and few of us would choose to return to that manner of government, but the builders of that age had a wisdom from which we could learn today. It is not our task to live to see the work finally finished; it is our task to begin aright, to persevere, and to continue so that neither our efforts nor our faith will be in vain.

Perhaps like those early builders, we might bequeath to those who come after us the opportunity to finish the work, and then leave to centuries of those who follow the delight and privilege to admire the final result. St. Philip's Academy started with 10, and now enrolls 30 times that. The Cathedral never would have founded a school for 300 students, but 10 they could manage. Then 10 more...

Jesus weighs in In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus challenges the crowd, “let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven (Matt 5:16).” Jesus does not say this because God is feeling ignored, but so that our good works might point people towards the source which will offer genuine help and goodness to them. We are unable by ourselves, no matter how well equipped we are, to make the lives we desire. When we bind ourselves together to make a government, we do not magically acquire by the larger scale the ability to do what we cannot do alone. When we deploy money, vast or modest, to retain or coordinate the work of others, the money does not magically confer on those people abilities to accomplish what they could not do before they were hired.

I suggest we should place our faith in God not because we are religious, but because we have been paying attention. We might wish that we could do everything on our own, but we ought to be honest enough to recognize that we cannot. We do not let our blind faith in ourselves stand in the way of seeing the world and ourselves as we are. We look to God not because we are pious, but because we want better results.

May the months of summer give you the opportunity to step back and look at your life and the life of our world and culture. And, if you think we can all do better, and that God might even work through us for the good of others, then as we reconvene in September, let your membership at St. Elizabeth's, and the relationship with God which the parish exists to nurture, be at the center of

your life so that the abundant life which Jesus offers (John 10:10) may become not just a promise, but the experience of each of us.

And when I return in January, I will be eager to hear how this conversation has progressed.

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Rector