

James Hamner

Fwd: The Closing of Doors - NAES Weekly Meditation for Monday, March 17, 2020

Passing on this meditation from my friend and colleague Dan Heischman who serves as head of the National Association of Episcopal Schools. Some good words of wisdom.

The Closing of Doors

The Rev. Daniel R. Heischman, D.D., Executive Director

What a week it has been. Seemingly overnight the world has changed, and what we may have experienced as something abstract and relatively remote, just over a week ago, now looms as a fierce reality to us. Uncertainty and flux have suddenly become the norm. As a couple of school heads have mentioned, just when a set of plans is determined for how the school will deal with the coronavirus, subsequent, unfolding events cause those plans to be shelved.

In response, a pervading theme—out of necessity—is the closing of doors. Schools, churches, athletic facilities, museums, and concert halls are all closing. Conferences are being postponed, many work places are going fully remote, and borders are increasingly shut off. The doors are closing to the places and venues where we have normally lived our lives.

These closed doors are not only disruptive in nature, they are accompanied by a sense of loss. As one clergy person put it, announcing the cancellation of Sunday services and weekly meetings, “As Christians, our first impulse is to gather together in times of crisis, and the idea of doing that (closing the church doors) breaks my heart and wrenches my soul.”

Of course, the times demand this. Closing up is one of the ways we can best mitigate against a rampant virus that would otherwise spread out of control. Our commitment remains the health and safety of our school communities, and this is our best option at this point.

A mentor once told me, after losing a job opportunity I coveted, “One door has been closed; that almost always means another door will open.” As we busy ourselves with important plans for closing, we must not lose sight of what doors are still, or will be, open to us.

Many doors will be opening—the place of home, the promise of learning online, opportunities to pray for those most vulnerable right now. Another door that remains open is that of purpose. We are carrying out these contingency plans for a larger purpose—the well-being of our communities and how we must respond to crises with compassion and courage. It is so easy, at times like these, with events seemingly spinning out of control, to lose sight of the bigger picture, the reasons we are doing these things, the purpose behind being school.

As Margaret Wheatley once observed, “It is possible to prepare for the future without knowing what it will be. The primary way to prepare for the unknowable is to attend to the quality of our relationships, to how well we know and trust one another.” Here, blessedly, is where Episcopal schools are at their best—in knowing and trusting one another, in adhering to a clear purpose, our very reason for being.

Those doors are still very much open!

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