From Bishop Hughes

Instead of going to church we ARE the church

Dear Companions on the Journey,

Every Sunday as part of the Episcopal visitation, I ask congregations two questions: 1) What makes you want to come to church each week? 2) If your church closed today, who in the community will miss this parish when it is gone? The conversations are fantastic and have become my favorite part of Sunday visits. I hear stories of faith, generosity, compassion, and deep ties in the community. We develop a mental picture of the true size of the parish based on the engagement with those outside the parish each week. I encourage each congregation to take their phenomenal sense of community and strong faith out to the world where it is needed and where God is calling us to be.

Some have taken faith into the community for years. Others were perplexed about how to start. And I am sure that in some places, my request sounded like a foreign language and was easy to let fade into forgotten experience.

On Sunday, March 15, all of that changed. In order to lower the risk of COVID-19 infections, 91 of our 97 parishes left their buildings for virtual church. Whether it was their own or another parish’s online service, watching Presiding Bishop Curry from Washington National Cathedral or catching virtual coffee hour, Episcopalians worshipped online and talked about faith on social media. While we typically practice a private faith, in this time of great duress, we seemed to realize it was not just enough to get our worship needs met, but we had to share our worship with others.

Instead of going to church Sunday, we were the church. Singing along with our devices, praying out loud, excited to see the celebrant in our homes, reading the comments section of Facebook, Zoom, or You Tube, and thrilled to see the blue and red icons floating across the screen. We were church for ourselves and we were church for others.

We were church for those who stumbled across our social media pages. We were church to people who were curious about faith. We were church to the anxious, the worried, and the afraid. We were not in our buildings and we were church.

The coming weeks are full of unknowns, but some things are certain:

- God is with us.
- We are in this together.
- We are the church.

(Continued on reverse side)

Spring Events

Due to the CDC guidelines to avoid large public gatherings, all diocesan events in March have been canceled or postponed.

While we still have events on the calendar for April, May and June, this could change at any time. Please see dioceseofnewark.org/events for the latest information on diocesan events.

Resources for this Uncertain Time
dioceseofnewark.org/covid-19
Announcements and resources for churches relating to the COVID-19 pandemic, including important messages from Bishop Hughes with guidelines and updates.

Ways to practice faith at home
dioceseofnewark.org/ways-to-practice-faith-at-home
Canon Clark gives some ideas for spiritual practices, for both children and adults, that can easily be done at home.

Stewardship in the time of COVID-19
dioceseofnewark.org/content/stewardship-time-covid-19
Cynthia McChesney, Advisor to the Bishop for Stewardship and Leadership Giving, suggests some ideas for how we can be good Stewards in a time of great anxiety, including take care of ourselves and our church families.

Worship Online

Where can I find worship online?  
dioceseofnewark.org/worship-online
A list of churches that are worshipping and posting sermons online, with links. Please email changes to Nina Nicholson at nnicholson@dioceseofnewark.org.
Take heart, dear companions. We may not know what is coming next, but God will continue to order our steps. And we will continue to be church. You remain in my prayers.

Grace and peace,
Bishop Hughes

Bishop Hughes posts regular messages, including videos, online at dioceseofnewark.org/bishops-vlog.

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From Canon Clark

We are together in Christ

As I write this in mid-March, many of us have had a new experience – church by livestream, Facebook Live or some other “remote” mechanism. In coming days, the reality of not being able to physically gather in the same way will likely become even more strange, and it is easy to worry about being disconnected. However, I am convinced that strange, difficult times and unusual experiences can offer gifts of insight and inspiration.

Years ago, I headed out on an Easter Sunday afternoon to attend a college mission service. It was a tiny gathering, but by the power of the Holy Spirit I wound up having a deep and moving experience of connectedness and the presence of God. It wasn’t that we had such beautiful worship, or the feeling of the power of two or three gathered in the Lord’s name – it was that, and so much more. I was overcome by a feeling of connection, not only to the tiny group of people gathered, but also to the people I had worshipped with that morning in my own parish, to my Bishop, and to the whole diocese. Suddenly what was going on in that room seemed huge, because of the presence of Christ, and because of being connected through Christ to the whole church. I was changed by that experience, and it shaped how I understand church and ministry.

The first Sunday we worshiped online across our diocese, I was able to pass through multiple online worship services and then join the National Cathedral’s online service. Many things touched me – seeing friends, colleagues and loved ones, and that same strange, but wonderful, experience of being connected. I was very touched when multiple people from around the diocese commented that, like me, they had been singing along.

The definition of “Corporate Worship” in the Catechism in our Book of Common Prayer says: “In corporate worship, we unite ourselves with others to acknowledge the holiness of god, to hear god’s Word, to offer prayer, and to celebrate the sacraments.” I know that is what happened, and I know that will continue as long as we need to abstain from public worship. My hope and prayer is that we also will be given the gift of new ideas and insights, ideas for how to grow together as the one body of Christ.

We are not really divided or separated, not ever, and not now. We are one diocese coming together to do what we must. We can be comforted and assured that no matter how isolating these weeks may seem, we are united one to another in Christ, and we will be given gifts for building up the Body of Christ, the church, which is all of us.

In Christ,
Canon Clark

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Prayer in a Time of Pandemic

May we who are merely inconvenienced
Remember those whose lives are at stake.

May we who have no risk factors
Remember those most vulnerable.

May we who have the luxury of working from home
Remember those who must choose between
preserving their health or making their rent.

May we who have the flexibility to care for our children when their schools close
Remember those who have no options.

May we who have to cancel our trips
Remember those that have no place to go.

May we who are losing our margin money in the tumult of the economic market
Remember those who have no margin at all.

May we who settle in for a quarantine at home
Remember those who have no home.

During this time when we cannot physically wrap our arms around each other,
Let us yet find ways to be the loving embrace
of God to our neighbors.

Amen.

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“All shall be well
and all shall be well
and all manner of thing
SHALL BE WELL.”

Julian of Norwich

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