

## From Our Bishop

### This Easter, remember that God cares for us and is leading us to safety.

*(This is a transcript of a video message.)*

This is Bishop Hughes in the Diocese of Newark and it is Holy Week. And this Holy Week I have been thinking about a woman in the Hebrew scriptures, Hagar. And it probably seems like an odd choice to be thinking about Hagar in the midst of Holy Week, but her story does not leave my mind.

I think part of what draws me back to Hagar's story again and again this week is because she had so little agency. She had so little choice. She was a slave in the household of Abraham and Sarah. They decided that she would bear the child that Sarah could not have because she was barren and too old to bear children. They decided when Sarah no longer wanted to – could no longer face Hagar and her child – because while she wanted that child there, she was upset that there Hagar and that child were. They decided that after Sarah had a child, this miraculous child that was Isaac, that it was time for Hagar to go.

And twice in her story – once when Sarah was so terrible to her after she became pregnant and had that first, and had her child, and then secondly when Abraham decided it was time for Hagar and her child to go – twice Hagar went out into the wilderness. The first time she was in the wilderness because she ran away from Sarah's meanness. And an angel, a messenger from God – it's the first time we hear of a messenger in the Hebrew Scriptures – a messenger from God let her know that God cared

about her, was watching over her and that she should go back to the household where she would be safe. And then that second time she went out until the wilderness because Abraham decided she could no longer stay in his household. He gave her enough food and water to carry and drink for a while, but she wouldn't be able to last forever in the wilderness, and eventually that food and water ran out. And in her despair the baby was crying and she needed water, and it was a messenger of God that heard the baby cry and showed Hagar where she could find water.

And I think the reason that Hagar has stayed so heavily on my mind this week is because there is a sense of a lack of agency, a lack of choice that we have, that says if this virus, this pandemic, created a world and a whole new set of rules that we have no choice but to live into – but we do make the choice. We make the choice not just to keep ourselves safe but to keep others safe. We didn't just make a choice, we made a sacrifice. We have sacrificed worshiping in the way in which we are accustomed and which we love. And learning to worship in a completely different way, in order to keep not only ourselves and our family safe, but to keep all people safe. And we like Hagar are wandering around in a wilderness – sometimes it's a wilderness it feels like we stepped into by choice but sometimes it feels like somebody walked us out into this wilderness and left us there without enough food and barely enough water to drink. And however we got into this wilderness, a messenger of God manages to show us how to get to safety and where we can get a drink to quench our thirst.

Here's what I know this Holy Week, this Holy Week that is so odd, and here's what I know this Easter. This Easter that will be triumphant even without us all sitting in our churches full to overflowing, with ourselves and Easter lilies and carols and bells, but in the midst of Holy Week in our house. In the midst of Easter and our own tables, that the messenger of God is with us. Showing us how to get a drink. Giving us food to eat. Letting us know that right where we are, God cares for us and is leading us to safety.

I pray for God's blessings on the rest of your Holy Week and for God's joy to be full to overflowing in your hearts and in your households this Easter.

## From Our Canons

### Baptism and the Body of Christ

*By the Rev. Canon Dr. Andrew R. Wright*

When we think of "the Body of Christ" we probably think of one or more images immediately. Many of us would right away reflect on the consecrated Bread of Holy Communion, presented to us with those very words "The Body of Christ, the Bread of Heaven." Or perhaps we think about Jesus himself, as presented in the Gospels. One of us, in the flesh, with all the challenges that presents – culminating in the heart-breaking story of suffering and death that we heard on Palm Sunday and will hear again on Good Friday, before we are surprised anew at the story of Jesus, one of us, in the flesh, rising again. The sacramental and historical Body of Christ.

And, yet, for the first 1000 years of the Church, or so, it is much more likely that a different use of the phrase "Body of Christ" would have been the first one to be considered: the ecclesial Body of Christ. That's us, the Church (ecclesial). We are ourselves the Body of Christ in Baptism. The tangible, communal life of Christ in our own world, in our own time.

It's understandable why the sacramental "Body of Christ" would come to mind first, for many of us. The 1979 Book of Common Prayer focused, rightly, on the Eucharist as the main way that we worship on Sundays and that has made us keenly aware of the sacramental Body of Christ. Eucharist is the meal in which we are deeply reconnected with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus (the historical body) and where Jesus unites us with one another (the ecclesial body).

The Eucharist, though, is deeply connected with another fundamental sacrament, Holy Baptism. It is in the waters of Baptism that we are first united in solidarity with Christ, in his life, death, and resurrection, as we enter the waters and come out of them again, clothed, as it were, in Christ himself. In many times and places, the newly baptized would be put in a white robe after coming out of the water, clothed in Christ, part of the Body of Christ. Infant baptismal gowns and vestments such as albs are reminders of how we put on Christ in Baptism.

When we gather for Eucharist, we are returning to our Baptism. Of course, that's part of our challenge right now, isn't it? To be, for the most part, unable to receive Holy Communion in a direct fashion, to gather with our fellow Christians. That is a challenge. And yet, we are no less the Body of Christ, each of us in our homes, than we are when we gather. Receiving the sacrament does strengthen and renew us as we gather, but we are still the Body of Christ even when we are distant. And that is why we pray. And work for God's reign. That is why we continue to support those in need. It is why we go to such lengths to create new forms of worship, using familiar rites and prayers, through online media or through at-home worship. Because we are already the Body of Christ. We are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own forever. Nothing can change that.

Lent is historically a time of preparation for those to be baptized and for all of us to consider anew our life of faith and recommit to it. Sometime this week, before we get to Easter, spend some time in

the prayer book on page 292 – the Renewal of Baptismal Vows – and think about what those promises mean to you in your life. How are you called to live out being the Body of Christ in this unusual and difficult time? How will you let the world know that you are one with Jesus? When we get to Easter, let us recommit ourselves wherever we are to this new life we have been given in Baptism, this renewed calling as the Body of Christ for the world today.

## Stories from Our Congregations

### Adapting Discipleship Online

*By the Rev. Tom Matthews, Rector, Christ Church, Ridgewood*

During the past few weeks, as we've worshiped online in new and dynamic ways, our motto has been "We ARE Christ Church!" It reminds us that although we cannot be in our building during these unprecedented weeks of stay at home orders and social distancing, nevertheless we ARE the church. We also put in our videos a tagline reminding us of our mission statement, "Disciples Making Disciples," but with a new addition: "Always!"

Over these weeks, although we deeply miss the sacrament, we have adapted from receiving communion in person to being in communion through relationship and the assurance of God's presence when it is impossible to be in the same space – for now. In our letters to the parish, we emphasize that this is a "temporary normal" and that we will be back in the pews as soon as we can, but we also emphasize the importance of how we use this time.

This has included pre-recording Sunday worship using the first half of our typical service – The Liturgy of the Word. In compliance with the restrictions on public gatherings, and conscious of keeping each other safe and well, we do the recording remotely using Zoom. An advantage of

doing it this way is that it allows all the original lay readers and prayer leaders to be included in the video. The raw videos are then edited and shared on YouTube. The first week we tried this, we did one service. The second week, we did the same type of service but also added a second separated online service of our Sunday JOY worship, for families with little kids. This week, we are adding a "Virtual Coffee Hour" for us to check in with one another on Zoom. The weekly Monday Bible Study converted over to teleconference last week. We are also planning to do the Adult Forum with a teleconference model.

However, we realized early on that this time period requires far more than simply Sunday worship, as integral as it is in our common life. First, we began checking in with our senior members by phone, dividing up the list among the Pastoral Care Team and tracking calls with a shared Google doc so that I'm aware of any issues. Next, we implemented a call list for the rest of the parish, divided up among the Vestry. Most parishioners are doing well and very glad to have open lines of communication. Some need assistance and we respond.

We also discerned the important of daily communications via email and Facebook posts. Our new Curate, the Rev. Jill Williams, has begun using Facebook Live to do Morning Prayer and Compline. The other staff are working on reaching out to their subgroups of youth and families.

The Wardens and I check in weekly via Zoom and, the Vestry will also meet via Zoom. We're becoming Zoom experts – as are so many!

Last but certainly not least, we have continued Outreach ministries whenever possible, including hosting Family Promise the first week, sending vital items like toilet paper, paper towels and nutrition bars to a local senior living home and a service organization. One setback has been that we cannot do physical collections of items, so the parish is fast-tracking monetary donations to two wonderful ministries we support- North Porch and St. Paul's Pantry in Paterson. We are also considering a face

mask making program set up by the local Valley Hospital.

Truly, while many things are temporarily changed, our mission has not. We are Disciples Making Disciples, Always!

# Diocesan Announcements & Resources

Episcopal House is closed to routine operations at this time. Staff are continuing to work remotely from home, and can be reached via their usual work emails and phone numbers.

All diocesan events scheduled in April have been postponed or canceled. A decision about May events will be made later in April.

## Gratitude Matters reflection: Focusing on the Good

*By Paul R, Shackford, St. Andrew's, Harrington Park*

When I was growing up, Lent always called on us to give up something. Candy... cookies... swearing (loud enough so our moms could hear). As we grew, it was still pretty much the same. But in the past ten years or so we have come to realize that we are not just called to give up something, but that it just might be better to take on something. Prayer. Reading Scripture. Attending other services.

That's a good thing. A better thing. Because that can help us focus on the good in our lives. Things for which we are grateful.

Bishop Beckwith often asked us to think of Signs of God's Grace in our daily lives. I fought that because I wasn't aware of those incidents. But then I realized that I am so grateful for many of the everyday aspects of my life.

Recently I was privileged to help serve meals to nearly 100 hungry people. We are all concerned with the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, people have to

eat. And I got to serve dinner alongside people who are challenged, but who loved to work to help serve others. Raised their hearts.

Raised mine. I am so grateful that God has given me the opportunity to be part of this ministry. But, more so, that God has made me realize that I am doing this so I can do the work God has given me to do.

Thank you, God.

## Report from Diocesan Council

Diocesan Council met via Zoom on April 1, 2020 to conduct business matters remotely. John King, Directory of Administration & Secretary of Convention, reports that Diocesan Council took the following actions:

- Passed the first cycle recommendations for the Ward J. Herbert Fund's mid-spring funding, totaling just over \$65,500.
- Established the COVID-19 Emergency Fund Loan for congregations affected by the pandemic.
- Completed the revisions to the Asset Distribution Policy, which dictates how the proceeds from the sale of closed church properties are allocated.

## Sign up for diocesan e-newsletters

If you have email, you can sign up to receive The VOICE Online, currently published weekly on Wednesdays. Visit [dioceseofnewark.org/subscribe](https://dioceseofnewark.org/subscribe).