



Highlights of diocesan news in printable format — May 6, 2020

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## From Our Bishop

### God preparing us to be the church God needs us to be

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

This is Bishop Hughes in the Diocese of Newark. I wonder if you are like me in this way, that I look back at these eight weeks, these eight Sundays that we have not been in our church buildings and that we have worshiped from at home. I look back at these eight weeks and I can't help but ask myself – what is God doing with us right now?

Let me be clear about something. I don't think God did this situation to us. I don't think God is using coronavirus to do something with, for, or to us. But I do think God has an extraordinary way of taking any kind of circumstances, especially circumstances that are meant to be harmful, and can be quite upsetting and disturbing to us, that God can take those circumstances and find ways to redeem those circumstances for our best good.

So I can't help but wonder what good might come out of these eight weeks and longer that we will be out of our churches? What is it that God is doing with us as individuals? What is God doing with us as communities of faith? What is it that God is doing with us as church?

I'm looking forward to having just that conversation with you, to getting together to talk about the things that you've been experiencing

over these last eight weeks. To talk about the things that you're wondering about in the future, what happens how much longer will this go on? What happens when we start thinking about going back into our churches? What might be happening right now that we want to make sure that we hold on to into the future and probably even more importantly, most important of all, what is it that the world around us needs so much that we've been missing before, that we are much more open to now? I think all of us are very aware of the needs around us and who is God calling us to be with all of those needs as church and as believers right now?

Those conversations will begin in the diocese starting this week, actually. The first one is this Thursday night. And there'll be regional gatherings so that I can talk with people from all over the diocese. And I look forward to hearing your stories. I look forward to sharing one or two of my own. Most of all, I look forward to us spending some time together and discerning – spending some time thinking about what is it specifically that God might be calling us to in the future?

This time has been very rich. It's been challenging and it has been full of blessings. And one thing I am certain of – God is doing a work among us and is preparing us to be the church that God needs us to be, going forward. I look forward to talking with you soon.

## We sacrifice gatherings because we love our neighbors as ourselves, and we are richer for it

*This Guest Column by Bishop Hughes was published in the Jersey Journal.*

Easter was glorious and hard, joyful and sad. Eastertide, the 50 days we continue to celebrate Christ's resurrection, has been shaped by gratitude for the generous service of so many for the common good alongside worry for those suffering from illness, loss of employment, and hopelessness.

Like most people in our state, the churches and people of the Diocese of Newark, the Episcopal Church in northern New Jersey, have grown accustomed to life in this pandemic. We have adapted to prolonged "stay-at-home" orders and school closures. We grieve the reports of 300-plus daily deaths in our state, while offering comfort and prayers for the families left behind. We are relieved to see progress made with fewer hospitalizations, and worried that health care professionals and first responders are still pushed to their maximum.

For our 96 congregations, the health crisis has meant no gatherings for worship or meetings of any kind since March 22. Sunday worship, which involved clergy, acolytes, lay readers, altar guild and choirs, now involves "skeletal" teams of no more than three people in the church building to stream or record the services for worshipers at home. Funerals are either delayed, or held by the priest alone, with the family and friends of the deceased watching a recording or livestream.

We make these sacrifices in compliance with Gov. Murphy's executive orders, but more importantly, we are compelled to live by the most basic tenet of our faith: Love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Staying physically apart is a way that we love our neighbors across the street and across the state. Because we love our neighbors, we do all we can to keep others safe.

And in doing so, we have become a new kind of church with connections that stretch far beyond the boundaries of brick and mortar. The church has found new ways to remain grounded in prayer, Scripture study, worship, caring for those in need, and seeking God's justice and reconciliation in the world.

It seems odd and strange, but this crisis that took us out of our Sunday routine has deepened our faith and expanded our love for all God's people. Wherever we are, including online worship at home, there is the church. When we respond to another's needs, by phone call, handing out food, or packing supplies for newborns, there is the church. When we press elected officials to lessen the increased burden of COVID-19 on African-Americans, the poor, essential workers and the incarcerated, there is the church.

Though we nervously anticipate eventual return to our church buildings, we patiently wait for a time when science, medicine and data show that it is safe to meet in person again. We have begun to imagine gatherings that observe CDC guidelines and state regulations. We speak often of our journey forward into what is next, rather than looking to return to what was before.

We may not be in our buildings, but now more than ever we are the church.

## From Our Canons

### When Jesus said "Feed the hungry" he also meant it literally

*By the Rev. Canon Margo Peckham Clark*

I love cookbooks and recipes, I also love to cook. Feeding people I love and also showing forth Christ's love both matter a lot to me. One of the strange joys and blessings in my Newark apartment during this pandemic stay-at-home time, has been cooking three meals almost every day. I have been reminded by this, and by doing liturgy at home, that the Eucharist is so important to me in part

because food and feeding people is important. I have also spent a lot of my life in advocacy around food, as a community organizer and as a priest. This time of fasting from the Eucharist has reminded me that my faith is grounded in the community made by Christ who feeds us, and who commands us to feed others. This feeding is about every dimension of life, and it is about joy and pleasure and the children of God being satisfied and nourished.

We fail when we forget that we are called to actually feed the hungry. Even when we don't know how to begin, the voice of Jesus says, "you give them something to eat." (Mark 6:37; Matthew 14:16; Luke 10:13)

One of the first actions of the early church was to ordain deacons to provide care (including food) for those in the community in need (Acts 6). Arguably this was the church figuring out how to ensure hungry people ate without the miracles worked by Jesus as the menu. Matthew 25 (the sheep and the goats) describes an evocative test for Christians at the end of time—not where we are asked whether we lied, cheated, smoked or drank—but whether we fed the hungry and tended the sick!

Jesus' teaching and example, and the work of the early church give us a shape for carrying out our responsibility as Christians to feed the hungry: noticing, even finding, where there is hunger and need, and coming up with creative and even new ways to ensure that we feed all those that we are able to feed. This is more than raising money to feed the hungry or collecting food for someone else or some other organization to give out, or certainly at least in addition to those important steps. It also seems to suggest an obligation (found also throughout the Hebrew Scriptures) to ensure that patterns of injustice that make people go hungry are rectified. The Year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25 and Numbers 36) restores the balance of income and distribution and the poor and hungry are allowed to glean, to gather what is left after harvest so that they may eat (Ruth).

Scripture, our relationship with Jesus, what Jesus has commanded us to do, and our Baptismal Vows all insist that we who are Christ's church use all our energy, will, and imagination to feed the hungry. Right now, here in New Jersey, there is desperate and growing need. The New York Times reported on this last week ("Food Lines a Mile Long in America's Second-Wealthiest State" May 1, 2020). One of the statistics cited in the article is that over 40% of New Jersey households have at least one person out of work due to the pandemic. The same article gives staggering descriptions of the increase in people seeking food since the beginning of stay at home, including a food pantry in Summit that used to average 100 families and recently saw 515 families on a single distribution day. What can we do?

There are many things we can do. We can find a way by initiative, prayer and discernment, to make a big difference with the significant needs that are growing every day all around us. That is, after all, how the church was built and the gospel has spread. Here are some books and programs to stimulate imagination (I am sure there are others; feel free to share):

New Jersey native rock star Jon Bon Jovi created JBJ Soul Kitchen, a restaurant where people pay what they can afford, and that has done things such as feed federal workers during the 2019 government shutdown.

One of the most thrilling examples of a ministry that feeds people and helps them to feed themselves is Homeboy Industries in California, founder Father Greg Boyle has written at least two books about the experience of serving in a gang-infested area. "Tattoos on the Heart," and "Barking to the Choir: the Power of Radical Kinship."

City Harvest, an organization that collects and distributes countless pounds of surplus food in New York City and which has inspired other similar organizations started because someone who worked at a soup kitchen asked a restaurant what they did with leftover potatoes after making soup!

In recent weeks the Publix Supermarket chain has started buying surplus produce and milk from American farmers to distribute at food banks. (Business Insider April 23, 2020 “Publix is buying milk and produce that farmers would’ve been forced to dump and donating it to food banks”) These examples may seem impossibly large, yet we are called to have this level of creativity and to achieve ongoing results. They are all examples where an idea led to a larger group coming together and making a difference.

Right now in Northern New Jersey, whole families are food insecure because schools are closed and there are no school lunches; seniors cannot get out to shop safely; others have no access to cars; and so many in New Jersey have lost or will lose jobs. How do we make a real difference? What is God calling us in the Episcopal Diocese of Newark to do? In this time, we need to come together, pray, dream and feed a lot of hungry people!

## Ways to practice faith at home (Part II)

By the Rev. Canon Margo Peckham Clark

Friends,

As this time of stay-at-home and social distancing continues, and as we begin to contemplate that it may continue in some form for quite a while longer, it is vital to maintain our spiritual, emotional and mental health.

One of the gifts of a growing prayer life is the calm, the “peace that passes all understanding” we can experience as a result. God meets us where we are, invites and carries us forward no matter what we might face.

Much of the Christian way has focused on practices that sharpen our focus, deepen our awareness and lessen our distraction and anxiety so we may serve God fully. Other traditions and religions may have similar elements, for a Christian their purpose is to draw us more fully into the union with God given at baptism and sustained by the Holy Spirit through

Christ. Our end and purpose is new life in the new creation that has begun in Christ Jesus.

Throughout the ages some Christians have done this by separating from the world, enclosing themselves in community and marking the days by cycles of prayer. We who are enclosed by necessity and out of love for our neighbor can use this time to deepen our relationship with Christ and our prayer life.

Here are a few resources and ideas that may help seek the grace of God’s peace, and to approach these days and weeks differently. Hopefully there is something that may speak to you, and many need no prior background or information! (All are available on Amazon; those marked \* are also available in Kindle and/or audiobook format.)

Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as resistance, Saying NO to the CULTURE OF NOW* (study guide also available)

Joan Chittister, O.S.B., *The Rule of Benedict: Insights for the Ages*

\*Bishop Michael Curry, *The Power of Love*

\*Bishop Michael Curry *Love is the Way: Holding onto Hope in Troubling Times* (pre-order only)

\*Becky Eldridge, *Busy Lives & Restless Souls*

\*John Main, *Word Into Silence, A manual for Christian Meditation*

\*Brendan Manning, *The Ragamuffin Gospel*

\*James Martin, S.J., *Between Heaven and Mirth: Why Joy Laughter and Humor Are at the Heart of the Spiritual Life*

Nan C. Merrill, *Psalms for Praying: An Invitation to Wholeness*

\*Richard Rohr, *Dancing Standing Still: Healing the World from a Place of Prayer*

\*Phyllis Tickle, *The Night Offices*

Judith Valente and Charles Reynard, *Twenty Poems to Nourish Your Soul*

\*Dave Worster, *I pray in poems, Meditations on Poetry and Faith*

\*Beth-Sarah Wright, *Becoming Who I Am; Reflections on Wholeness and Embracing our Divine Stories*

In Christ,  
Canon Clark

## Diocesan Resources & Announcements

### Gratitude Matters: Let's stop singing the "Litany of Scarcity"

By Cynthia McChesney, Christ Church, Short Hills

First thought in the morning: I didn't get enough sleep last night. Last thought at night: I didn't get enough done today. Sound familiar? Author Lynne Twist, in *The Soul of Money*, calls those thoughts (and everything that goes on in our heads in between), examples of our culture's "litany of scarcity."

Aren't we all vulnerable to living into that litany of scarcity even more thoroughly today? After all, thinking just of our church lives, there are so many things we want to talk about missing, our church buildings, our fellowship, our music.

Scarcity versus abundance. But were we reveling in our abundance before? Hmmm, not really. A stubborn insistence on seeing the world through our culture's lens of scarcity makes us blind to abundance, even when God's gifts are all around us. If we insist on what we don't have, we ignore what we do, and what can be possible.

In a recent Zoom coffee hour at my church, one of our parishioners, who had moved out of state a few months ago, joined the online service and call afterward. She was so grateful to see everyone, to still experience the worship and fellowship despite the miles between us. And we were so grateful to

see her too! Someone said, how can we keep this going even when we're back in church?

Those experiences are available to us even in a time of lockdown, yes, because of technology certainly, but just as important is a willingness to try something new. Let's see that creativity and initiative extend into "what's next." It's an energy that is released when we stop singing the litany of scarcity and open ourselves up to a fuller sense of God's abundance.