



Highlights of diocesan news in printable format — May 20, 2020

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From Our Bishop

Yes, we're in the wilderness – but we do not walk alone

(This is a transcript of a video message.)

This is Bishop Hughes in the Diocese of Newark. And I want to talk with you about these past nine weeks, this journey that we have been on – in particular the way in which this journey is viewed by me as the spiritual leader of this diocese.

Very often in the beginning I talked about the wilderness – that we were in a place that was so strange and so different than anything that we had known, and that it felt very much like we had taken a walk into the wilderness. But not just that we'd taken a walk, because we didn't choose. The needs for safety of our people and of our neighbors and of the people that we loved drove us out of our churches into our homes, into a physical distancing that often felt like a lonely isolation. It was as if we were driven into a wilderness and those words resonated with us because it all began while we were in Lent, a time that we often talk of as being in wilderness, the way Jesus was in wilderness.

In Mark, the first chapter, verses 12 and 13, it talks about Jesus being driven into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit and there he was tempted by Satan and wild beasts. And in some ways it feels that this time that we've experienced in the wilderness, we too have been tempted by God's enemy and the wildest of beasts, by all manner of fear and worry,

by true sorrow. We have had people near to us and dear to us sick, and some of them have died. And it has been heartbreaking to know of those deaths and to not be able to stand with their families, put our arms around them, hold them as they cried and let our tears mingle with theirs. We did all of that from a distance.

That same set of verses, at the very end of verse 13, also says that he was with the wild beasts and the angels tended to Jesus. And we've experienced that in this time. I know I certainly have. It has been a blessing to be the spiritual leader of this place in this time and to walk with people who are so faithful. Who have tried new things. Clergy who have walked outside of their comfort zone. Who have been tireless in their ways, tireless in their desire to meet the needs of their congregations right now. To see our laypeople embrace the ability that God has given them to pray for others, to take care of others, and to teach others. It's as if we became a diocese full of pastors. We still have priests, but we have priests who are shepherding pastors.

We also became evangelists. I think that the angels really tended to us on that one. We learned how to share our faith and interestingly we learned that we could do that in ways that were not overt. We could simply plug into our church's worship service on social media and other people would see what we are doing. We had a way to invite people into the spiritual life that is so important to us. And in the wee small hours, in the lonely times, in the darkest of times, we have known that we are

deeply connected to each other and that we do not walk alone. That it is okay to cry. It is okay to be sad. And it is a good and healthy thing to ask for help.

All of these are things we have learned in this journey, this first part of the journey that was very much in wilderness. And now I believe that we are at a turning point where our journey goes forward. As I talk with more people in the diocese, laity and clergy, one of the things that seems strikingly clear is that God is doing a work of transformation in us. In us as individual believers, in us as congregations, in us as leaders of ministries, in us as a church and in us as a diocese. It's as if God said, "Since you're out of those buildings anyway, let me show you how to be Church. Let me show you how to be the people that Jesus has sent to bring my message of love into the world."

I wish I could say all of this has been easy. I wish I could say that every bit of it has been filled with grace and good times. But we've had to hold both things in the Diocese of Newark and in northern New Jersey, both delight and deep pain have come together over and over again in this journey. And as we journey forward, I suspect those things will continue along with us.

It may be weeks and months before we are able to worship and gather in any kind of way on a regular basis, face to face. I am grateful that we can gather on the phone. I am grateful that we can gather via teleconferencing. I'm grateful for all the communication that people are doing in newsletters. I'm grateful for the many ways that we stay connected by prayer – the messages that I get from others that they are praying for me, and the great honor that it is for me to pray for others. But in all of this, God guides our journey forward into the new church, the church that God needs us to be.

There's a chance that that church is going to be very different than the church that we have been in the past. And for some that may bring sorrow. But

for most of us, I hope it brings hope – the hope of knowing that no matter where we are, we are still the people of faith. We gather the way that we can right now virtually. We gather for prayers, we gather to study scripture, we gather to support each other, and every time we gather Jesus is with us.

We find ways to reach out in our community, and we take seriously this love of our neighbor, recognizing that right now some of our neighbors are doing work that puts them in harm's way, and their very work keeps the rest of us safe, comfortable and with food in our houses. It is not enough simply to say thank you. We must also find a way to say their lives are important, and their lives need to be protected.

So there is much ministry for us to do. And it may mean that as we minister we experience times of sorrow, and times of hopefulness, and through all of it, God will be with us, and the angels will continue to minister to us.

From Our Canons

Sing a new church

By the Rev. Canon Margo Peckham Clark

Do you remember before you learned to walk? I do not. There are other things that my memory does not give a “before” context. I cannot remember a time before singing, before singing sacred music even, and I don't remember a time before loving beautiful buildings, church decorations or those things together with music. These things grew up alongside my faith. I am a woman in a line of church musicians and singers, my earliest memories are of being a toddler in darkened concert halls and churches listening to choral music being rehearsed or of my Nana playing hymns. The piano I learned music on to this day always has a hymnal on the music stand. The memory of looking up at the pulpit in the church where I was baptized, the color and smell of the dark wood, the beautiful

Tiffany window of the boy Jesus behind it is so primary and strong it may be part of how I experience my human body in space, how I experience God as larger than anything. The organist and choirmaster of my childhood in that same church was one of my first and most important pastors and remains important to me to this day. My mind and body carry the sounds of individual pipe organs, their sound and feel. Memories of places I have served as a priest are shaped by the way the light comes through the windows at different times of day, the way the floor sounds under my feet in a procession for burial or following the Paschal Candle.

It isn't memory alone, singing and church buildings and their decorations are part of how I have always navigated the chances and changes of this life, loss and discernment. I paced around my apartment and sang #370 "St. Patrick's Breastplate" before going to meet for the first time with the Standing Committee in the diocese where I was ordained. I stood shoulder to shoulder with a NYC police officer after 9/11 at Pier 94 as we looked at photos of the missing and lost and both spontaneously began to hum "The Impossible Dream". I stood in the shower of my son's godparent's house before the interment of my husband and sang "my Jesus, my shelter, tower of refuge and strength" until I could manage to face the day. Many times, if I have needed quiet with God, I have gone and sat under or lain in front of altars in church buildings where I have served.

Memory and practice join together even more powerfully in moments of sacrament and community. The dress I wore, and the feeling of kneeling before the Bishop to be confirmed stands out, as does the feeling of his hands on my head. The strange and awesome juxtaposition of kneeling to receive communion at my wedding, and then kneeling in the same exact spot just over two short years later as my husband's body was laid to rest. Those moments are vivid beyond words, and are experiences where the kingdom of God, and the

saints and angels seemed so close as to be able to be touched.

Yet some of those church buildings I will likely never be in again. I haven't sung in a choir for nearly two decades and I serve 96 parishes now, not one. As life goes on, I have been given the awareness that Jesus alone is what contains my reality in the truest sense, and that it is possible to get up off my knees and move forward into changed realities I could not have imagined. This is not an insight I came to, or an intellectual description of events and circumstances. God has taught me this and has allowed it to become who I am. I have learned that if I have Jesus, that is always enough, more than enough.

This has let me understand and preach that God is always doing a new thing, even in the midst of death and loss. It has helped me to see in scripture that God's people are always on the move, changing and evolving. We are always called to be God's people and do ministry not only in all the places of our lives, but also in all the moments. This present moment is truly like no other we have ever experienced, and it has impacted the whole world; there is no going back. We hold onto what we treasure most faithfully, by letting God transform it, by trusting that God holds the past, the present and the future together in God's boundless being that is the source of life itself.

No one knows what is next, no one knows what all may be lost, or how long it may be until there is the safety of a widely available vaccine and we can sing together again in buildings. We do know that the feeling of being held in time and space as all the sacred moments of our lives unfold was always really from God anyway, we do know that the singing we need is even more deeply the song that is placed in us by the Spirit breathing in and all around us. God knows all of it and is offering us the privilege to move forward into this new time, into new places in God's worship and service. We will return also in ways, in times, and to places that God holds and transforms in relationship with us. I

suspect the “new things” will retain much of what we have loved, however we must spiritually let it all go so that we can take this journey. We must trust that God is always bringing us home, that word and sacrament and song will go with us as we become something new.

I am reminded of a hymn I love, and although it isn't in any of our hymnals, it has been sung at the General Convention of the Episcopal Church on more than one occasion. It speaks to my heart of the challenge and the opportunity that face us as we move closer to what is next.

Sing a New Church

Summoned by the God who made us
rich in our diversity.

Gathered in the name of Jesus,
richer still in unity:

(Refrain)

Let us bring the gifts that differ
and, in splendid, varied ways,
sing a new church into being,
one in faith and love and praise.

Trust the goodness of creation;
trust the spirit strong within.

Dare to dream the vision promised,
sprung from seed of what has been.

(Refrain)

Draw together at one table
all the human family;
shaper a circle ever wider
and a people ever free.

(Refrain)

Stories from Our Congregations

No one leaves Holy Trinity empty-handed these days

By Mary Frances Schjonberg

The COVID-19 pandemic is changing outreach across The Episcopal Church and the Diocese of Newark, and the 16-year-old food ministry at Holy Trinity in West Orange is no exception.

The parish's food pantry used to supply 150 families with food and staples each week. Now 500 families are being helped twice a week. And, while its Christine's Kitchen used to serve between 80 and 100 guests, the soup kitchen is now giving away 125 pre-made sandwich meals every Saturday. The ministry is also delivering food to elderly people.

Most people seeking food are from West Orange, but the Rev. Miguel Hernandez, Holy Trinity's Priest-in-Charge, said anyone who arrives looking for food receives it.

“We always give something when somebody comes so they don't leave empty-handed,” he said.

Even on the rare occasions when the soup kitchen has extra produce and sandwiches, the leftovers are distributed to church members who don't have transportation or are homebound. “Nothing goes to waste,” he said.

The first Saturday that Christine's Kitchen offered the bagged sandwich meal, there were about 60 left over. So, Fr. Hernandez and some volunteers drove into Newark and found African-Methodist Episcopal Church members giving away food on Martin Luther King Boulevard. He offered the sandwiches to the group.

“By the time we made the U-turn to head back to West Orange, all the sandwiches were gone,” he

said. "That's how the bad the need is. There is a huge need for food."

Added to that need is the fact that grocery prices are getting expensive. In April, grocery prices showed their largest increase in nearly 50 years, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics recently reported. The increase was led by rising prices for meat and eggs.

Responding to the need all adds up. "Our food pantry has been depleted a couple of times," Fr. Hernandez said.

The ministry has been "sounding the alarm," in his words, and the community has responded

"We are being really blessed that the news came out and some people are chipping in, bringing some food, sending a small check, whatever, but it's working," he said.

Monetary donations go a long way. Fr. Hernandez said the ministry buys food from the Community Food Bank of New Jersey where it can stretch its dollars because of lower prices at the food bank and the ability to buy in bulk.

Volunteers are showing up, too, including police department members who helped pick up food and bag it for the pantry.

Area churches are helping. The Church of the Holy Innocents, West Orange, recently delivered nine boxes of food. Others have made financial donations, according to Fr. Hernandez.

However, some dependable sources of donations have been stymied. For instance, Washington Elementary School, across the street from the church, typically runs an annual food drive for the ministry. On delivery day the students form a chain between the school and the church to deliver the food. With students sheltering at home, those drives are not happening.

"Now it's the reverse," Fr. Hernandez said. The food pantry is giving food to some of those students and their families.

He said that the ministry's biggest unknown is finding out about all area people who need food.

"From time to time people ask us if we can give them an extra bag because somebody's at home and they're sick," he said. "We rely on people's honesty, so we give them an extra bag."

Having run the ministry for 16 years and now having had to change their processes to safely respond to the economic impact of the pandemic, Holy Trinity has learned a few things. If other congregations are wondering how they might respond in their communities, Fr. Hernandez has some advice, and an offer.

"Find out if there is a food need in your community and figure out how to provide some kind of ministry to people," he said. "And, if they need help, they can contact us. We have the volunteers who have been running this for a lot of years. They know how to run it and organize the community."

Donations by check should be made out to Holy Trinity Episcopal Church with "Food Pantry / Soup Kitchen" in the memo line, and mailed to Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, 315 Main Street, West Orange, NJ 07052.

Diocesan Resources & Announcements

Memorial Day observance

The Bishop's staff has the day off next Monday, May 25 in observance of Memorial Day. We wish you all a safe and enjoyable holiday weekend.

Gratitude Matters: Thank you, God

By Libby Clarke, Christ Church, Short Hills

When I wake each morning, I start with a simple whisper: "Thank you, God."

I rise and pad through my sleeping household, building back up to my life, up for the day. I reenter

the world by garbing myself with that for which I am grateful. I lean close to my daughter's door to hear her soft breathing. I get dressed as our new kittens silently rub my ankles in greeting. I brew the coffee while saying my prayers and setting my intention for the day. By the time I am out checking the garden, I am fully swathed in gratitude for the life I love and ready to face my day. No matter what I encounter, no matter how I tug and tear, I am thankful – for my life, my part, my very breath.

During this time of isolation, we have a chance to build our gratitude anew. As our plans powered down, animals who used to skirt our periphery are trotting out in the open. Spaces normally brimming with life gently thrum with echos we had not heard before. People who perform the services that keep our lives and towns running are in sudden sharp focus as they pull us all to safety.

Although waiting for the threat to dissipate has been harrowing, we have this chance to recharge and push gently back into a shared new world. We can take this time to reenter life by slowly perusing the layers of our lives we had all along.

Thank you, God.

Prayers of Pandemic from the Diocese of Newark

This week's prayer is by Pat McKenzie, Oblate, Community of St. John Baptist.

Good and Gracious God,
We are grateful for grace-filled learning;
As a church, we understand we are more than our beloved sacred spaces;
As global citizens, we see that our actions have a profound effect on each other, on animal and plant life, and on the environment;
As neighbors, we are increasing in kindness towards each other;
As individuals, we have been given relief from busy schedules and invited to journey inward;
As Christians, we can hear the call to be Your

hands, Your feet, Your voice in the world. And so we pray. Amen.