



Highlights of diocesan news in printable format — May 27, 2020

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Note from the Editor: After this issue, publication of both *The Voice Online* and *The Voice Digest* will change from weekly to every other week. The next issue will be **Wednesday, June 10**.

From Our Bishop

We want our churches to be a safe haven

(This is a transcript of a video message.)

This is Bishop Hughes in the Diocese of Newark. On Sunday, I had the good pleasure of attending worship at three different services online. Three different churches in our diocese. And the thing that was surprising about all three of them, is on that particular Sunday teenagers in the congregation were an integral part of the worship. It was happening for very special reasons in all of the churches. For some of them it was teens who had just finished their confirmation classes and were getting ready for, were waiting for, confirmation to happen. And in some of them it was because it was Senior Sunday, so teens who were graduating high school that Sunday were especially being celebrated.

It was wonderful of course to see young people do the readings, lead the prayers, and in some cases to preach a sermon. And there was one thing in one of the teen sermons that really touched me. And that was when a young lady said that she always found it unusual when people would say to her that it was a drag to go to religious services, because for her, church was a safe haven.

I think that must be something that resonates with all of us, that church is a safe haven. And I think all of us know somebody that is saying something about church, about how it's a place that of the past, that it doesn't speak to the present. Certainly there was much said about church over the last week, week and a half as different people weighed in on what was essential and what's non-essential, who should be open and who should not be open. But I think for all of us who go, one thing that we would absolutely agree with is what that young teenager said and her senior sermon – that church is a safe haven.

I think always, we want church to be a safe haven; that's why we do some things exactly how we do them. We're careful about the number of people who are in a room alone with children. We make sure that people take all kinds of classes to make sure that they're aware of how we care for adults, how we care for children, how we care for staff, to make sure everybody is safe in church. And especially now, in pandemic, we are asking ourselves how do we remain safe?

On May 18th I put out a letter to the diocese explaining the steps that we will take in the coming weeks to evaluate when every church is ready to entertain the thought of public worship. For some of those churches, that will happen outside first. For others, they are simply going to wait until they are certain it is absolutely safe for their folks. For some, it may be that their first services will happen

at that point where we're able to worship indoors. And some may decide to keep their worship online for months at a time. The question all of us will be asking individually, with the help of our clergy, is – is it safe? How can we make sure that church is a safe haven?

I think it's been really hard to watch the churches that have opened and then had to face the fact that some of their members came down sick with the virus, and they wound up having to close the church again. I feel for them. I can't imagine the level of disappointment and hurt and fear that they must have. Our goal is not to be afraid. Our goal though, is to be wise. And to be wise means we have to think things through. We need the best information – that we will all do this together, even though our timings may look different and the way we do things may look different. And we will do it in good order.

So in our diocese, we're already about this work. It will take some time for it to be taken care of at every single parish. But one of the things that we can count on, is that what motivates us is this sense of love, not only for God, not only for each other but for all of our neighbors. Because we want our churches to be a safe haven.

From Our Canons

Come Holy Spirit

By the Rev. Canon Dr. Andrew R. Wright

This time of year – between Ascension Day last Thursday and the Day of Pentecost next Sunday – I'm always intrigued by this in-between time, between Jesus' Ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Ascension is the withdrawal of the Incarnate One, Jesus in his human body, from our world. There is a specificity, a concreteness to that historical Jesus that we long for, in some ways, but is elusive for us. Had Jesus stayed put here on earth, instead of "working from home," as a popular meme has described the

Ascension, we would be deeply limited in our encounter of Jesus by our own specific place and time in this world. Would we have to travel across oceans and continents to encounter Jesus? We would feel separated, apart. We feel that kind of limitation keenly in this time of stay-at-home orders and self-isolation. Jesus, however, gives us a promise, as he takes his flesh and blood into the heavenly realms. He promises us the Spirit of God, who will teach us all things. On that original Day of Pentecost, the apostles received the Holy Spirit and carried the power that they had received into the world. They immediately begin by telling the story of Jesus. The Spirit gives us the encounter with Christ, that we may be formed again and again into his disciples.

For those of us who have come later on, after the days of the Acts of the Apostles, we are given the Holy Spirit in Baptism and are made one with Jesus in that Sacrament. We **become** the encounter with Christ for the world we live in – and we encounter Christ in one another . . . and in Scripture spoken, and in wine poured and bread broken, and, perhaps especially so, in the least among us that we meet. The Spirit shows us the one who was crucified for us and raised to new life, shows us again and again the love of God incarnate – so that we may become that love in our own lives. We are strengthened by that same Spirit in Confirmation, renewed in the encounter with Jesus by the power of the Spirit, to live the Baptismal life.

Pentecost is one of the Principal Feasts of the Church, like Easter and Christmas, and is also a primary Baptismal feast day – the gift of the Spirit given in Baptism powerfully reflected in the Feast of Pentecost. It is a great day to baptize and be baptized, in years when we can gather in-person, and also to renew and remember our Baptismal Covenant (1979 *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 292). We are renewed and restored by the Holy Spirit, as we renew our relationship to God through Christ.

And for those who await Baptism, we hope to celebrate that soon in person and publicly. In the

meantime, there is a provision for any baptized lay person to administer Baptism in the *Book of Common Prayer*, in the case of emergency. While we usually think of that in immediate and urgent terms, Bishop Hughes has identified that this period of pandemic is a time of emergency. If you have someone in your household who desires to be baptized, they can be baptized at home. Or you can wait until we gather again. If you'd like to consider emergency Baptism, please see our guidelines about *Emergency Holy Baptism in Pandemic* for more information and talk with your parish clergy. If you don't have clergy currently, please contact me if you have questions. Baptism is a gift. A gift of the Holy Spirit and new life in Christ that is shared by all of us. Come Holy Spirit and teach us the new things that God is doing.

Stories from Our Congregations

Suddenly busy food pantry needs volunteers

By Nina Nicholson

The Rev. Rod Perez-Vega says the food pantry at St. John's Church in Dover, where he is rector, didn't used to be as big as it is now. "Usually our traffic would be, let's say 200 to 250 people in a quarter."

That abruptly changed the week of March 16. In the next three weeks, St. John's provided food to more than 400 people. Perez-Vega attributes the increase to people losing their jobs due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Formerly open three days a week, St. John's food pantry tried for a while to open its doors six days, Monday through Saturday from 10 AM to 1 PM, but found this unsustainable. The problem was not the availability of food; it was that most of St. John's members who volunteer at the food pantry are at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19.

"I had to make a decision," said Perez-Vega. "As much as they wanted to [volunteer], I said no you can't." A lack of volunteers who could be safely deployed also forced the parish to close its Community Closet entirely.

Fortunately, St. John's is in relationship with other organizations they can tap for volunteers. One of those is Zufall Health Center, with which St. John's partnered in 2019 to launch a successful Summer Food Program for children who need nutrition assistance when school is not in session. This program was featured in the Mission Minutes at the 2020 Convention.

Students in the dietary department at a local college are also volunteering at the food pantry. And when a local Roman Catholic church had to close its food pantry, one of their volunteers came to Perez-Vega and asked, "I hear that you're open – can I come work here?"

"Absolutely," he told her. "And she's great, she knows her thing really well, so she has been an incredible addition."

Currently, St. John's is managing to keep its food pantry open four days a week and provide food to about 150 to 180 people, the same number it supported each week when it was open six days.

To maintain physical distancing and other safety measures, only two to three volunteers work at the food pantry at the same time. People seeking food enter the church one at a time, tell the volunteers how many people are in their household, and then wait in a designated place while the volunteers prepare a box of food for them. Volunteers and guests are all required to wear masks.

In addition, St. John's prepares boxes of food to be delivered to sick people quarantined at home. "Zufall has a list of patients, so we prepare the boxes and a Zufall volunteer comes and gets it."

Perez-Vega has also delivered boxes of food to several people who have called the food pantry from home quarantine. "Basically, we drop it at the

front door or someplace and we call in and they come out and get it.”

The local community is keeping them well supplied with donations of food to distribute. “The Interfaith Food Pantry has been very gracious in delivering food to us. We've gotten donations from the Police Benevolent Association, we've gathered in donations from the American Legion, we had donations from the engineering department and inspection department from the town. People from the engineering department went to Costco and bought a whole bunch of stuff. Two of the people who are running for office statewide, as part of their campaign had food drives and they brought all the food to us. So, it's been a community effort.”

Perez-Vega has a good relationship with the clergy at Dover's First United Methodist Church and Trinity Lutheran Church, both of which also have food pantries, and the three of them coordinate resources if one food pantry has a surplus or shortage.

“Sometimes I have a donation and the person who is making the donation is donating rice, and I have tons of rice, so I call the other pastors and ask,

‘How are you doing on rice?’

‘I need rice, what do you need?’

‘Well, I don't have the long shelf-life milk, the Parmalat.’

‘OK, I'll send you two cases of milk.’

‘OK, I'll send you two cases of rice.’

“So that's a great relationship to have.”

Perez-Vega credits regular posts on St. John's Facebook page about the food pantry's activities with generating awareness – and donations – among their neighbors. “Sometimes I open the mail and I have a check from somebody that I don't know – ‘We see what you've been doing, so here's a check.’

“People call me and say, ‘What do you need?’ and they go out and shop for it. I don't have to go out and do any shopping.”

The only food shopping Perez-Vega does is right across the street from St. John's, at the Latino American Supermarket, where he buys chicken to add to the non-perishable food offerings.

“We had Home Depot donate a freezer chest, and what that allows us to do is, with funds that were designated for the food pantry, we purchase chickens. Their butcher puts the chickens in bags and they just walk them across the street, and we put them in the freezer. We're giving them business and they're helping the community also because they're giving us a special price.

“So, along with the regular offering, we've been able to offer also a little bit of meat to the users of the food pantry.”

There are two ways you can help support St. John's food pantry:

If you're not at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19, they would welcome you as a volunteer.

Monetary donations are also welcome. Donations by check should be made out to St. John's Church with "Food Pantry" in the memo line, and mailed to St. John's Church, 11 South Bergen Street, Dover, NJ 07801.

Introducing the COVID Creations Project: Telling our story in a time of pandemic

“How could we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land?” (Psalm 137:4)

“Tell your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation.” (Joel 1:3)

Entering a third month of physical distancing and online worship due to the COVID-19 pandemic and

the governor's stay-at-home order, we may resonate with the psalmist's experience in exile. We are challenged to express our faith in the foreign worship space of the Internet when we no longer can sing God's praises together in our church buildings.

Yet it is important for us to find ways to tell the story of these challenging times, even as we live through them. Telling our stories helps us examine and process what we are experiencing, gives us insight into what we have lost and learned, and records what has happened for ourselves and future generations before our memories of these intense days merge and fade.

Through the COVID Creations project, we invite you to help tell your stories using various artistic media. Every two weeks, we will solicit contributions in two different media on a particular theme, and we will introduce new media each month. A selection of these contributions will be published in the VOICE online and on the diocesan website.

Here are the themes, deadlines, media and instructions for June and July:

Theme: *Spirit*

Deadline: *June 4*

Media: *Photography and Group Poetry*

Photography: Submit a photograph of an image capturing the theme "Spirit" to CovidCreationsStory@gmail.com.

Group Poetry: Send word or short phrase describing any or all of these to CovidCreationsStory@gmail.com:

- What Spirit sounds like
- What Spirit smells like
- What Spirit tastes like
- What Spirit looks like
- What Spirit feels like

These descriptive words and phrases will be assembled into one group poem on the theme "Spirit." A sample of a group poem created several

years ago on the theme "Heaven" by a church school class at St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Morristown is printed at the end of this article.

Theme: *Courage*

Deadline: *June 18*

Media: *Photography and Group Poetry*

Photography: Submit a photograph of an image capturing the theme of "courage" to CovidCreationsStory@gmail.com.

Group Poetry: Send word or short phrase describing any or all of these to CovidCreationsStory@gmail.com:

- What courage looks like
- What courage smells like
- What courage tastes like
- What courage sounds like
- What courage feels like

These descriptive words and phrases will be assembled into one group poem on the theme of "courage." A sample of a group poem created several years ago on the theme "Heaven" by a church school class at St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Morristown is printed at the end of this article.

Theme: *Essential*

Deadline: *July 2*

Media: *Videography and Songwriting*

Videography: Submit an up to 1-minute video on the theme "essential." Contact Nina Nicholson at nnicholson@dioceseofnewark.org about submitting a video file.

Songwriting: Submit an original song on the theme "essential" to CovidCreationsStory@gmail.com.

You may submit new words to a familiar tune or new words with a new tune. If submitting newly composed music, please include either a PDF of the music or a YouTube link to a recording of the music.

Theme: Disposable

Deadline: July 16

Media: Videography and Songwriting

Videography: Submit an up to 1-minute video on the theme “disposable.” Contact Nina Nicholson at nnicholson@dioceseofnewark.org about submitting a video file.

Songwriting: Submit an original song on the theme “disposable” to CovidCreationsStory@gmail.com.

You may submit new words to a familiar tune or new words with a new tune. If submitting newly composed music, please include either a PDF of the music or a YouTube link to a recording of the music.

Sample Group Poem: Heaven

Heaven

sounds like people playing the harp,
like angel wings flapping above
and dragon wings flapping below.

Heaven sounds like prayers and hymns.

Heaven smells like flowers, roses
rainforests, the ocean, nature.

Heaven smells like orange juice and coffee.

Heaven smells like ... nothing.

Heaven looks like gold,
like a white fortress in the sky
and a many-headed snake with a room
in each head.

Heaven looks like clouds and acorns,
like a big castle,
like a gate, a rocky path and God breaking
sticks.

Heaven looks like whatever you want.

Heaven feels soft, hard as rocks,
warm, comforting, peaceful and relaxing.

Heaven feels like feathers and snakeskin.

Heaven feels however you want.

Heaven tastes like buttercream frosting,
like salty mashed potatoes,
like the ocean and fish.

Heaven tastes like water because
it's in the clouds.

Heaven is whatever you want!

Diocesan Resources & Announcements

Gratitude Matters:

The Bells of St. James

By Martha Boughner, St. James, Upper Montclair

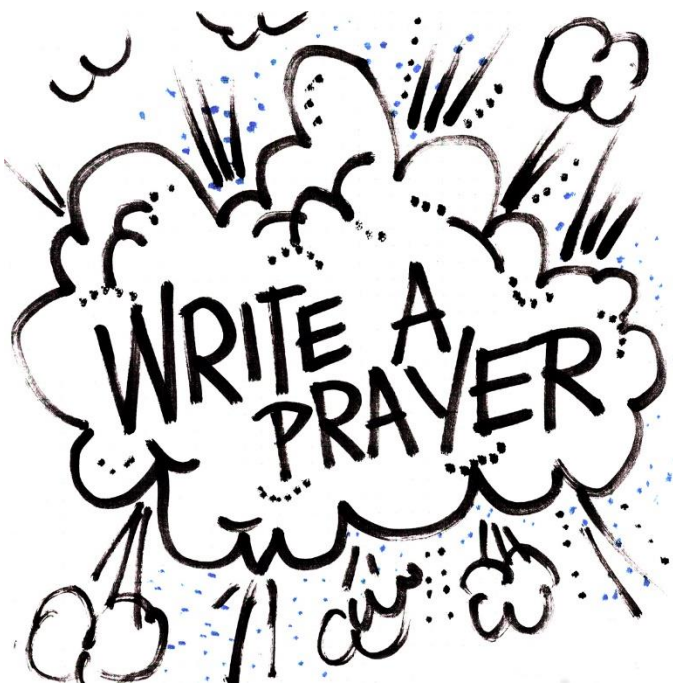
At St. James in Upper Montclair, we have an historic Bell Tower, dedicated to the memory of 93 parish veterans of WWI, including 7 who did not return. It is very dear to the hearts of our parish, our neighborhood, and the town. Since the whole top section, where the bells are, is open to the elements, maintenance can be a nightmare! Several years ago, when the leaking water into the nave became a repeated problem and the tower itself became unsafe to enter and the bells unsafe to play, we staged a capital campaign to repair it. Hallelujah! The bells ring again.

Now, several years later in the midst of a pandemic, our Director of Music Ministries, Sean Price, has made it his practice to play 15 minutes of hymns and one secular piece every day after the noon chime. (The secular piece is often tongue-in-cheek, such as “Ain’t Misbehavin’,” “Accentuate the Positive” and “Here Comes Peter Cottontail” for Easter.) He is physically in the Bell Tower sounding each bell by hand; this is not an electronic keyboard!

For a number of parishioners this has become a daily mission: going to hear the bells, keeping our safe distance, and applauding so Sean can hear our appreciation. Passersby stop to listen and smile, people pull over in their cars to listen, parents have their children listen.

Thank God for St. James's stewardship of the Bell Tower! It's a blessing for our time.

Prayers of Pandemic from the Diocese of Newark



Bishop Hughes has invited members of the diocese to write and share their own prayers during the COVID-19 pandemic. We are collecting these prayers on the diocesan website and sharing them in *The VOICE* and on social media.

Prayers can be sent to Canon Wright at awright@dioceseofnewark.org for posting. Please include the name and town of your church.