

Highlights of diocesan news in printable format — June 24, 2020

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From Our Bishop

Pastoral letter on the guidelines for in-person worship in the Diocese of Newark

Dear Companions on the Journey of Faith,

“Instead of each person watching out for their own good, watch out for what is better for others.”

Philippians 2:4

This week, guidelines for indoor worship and gatherings have been published for the use of all the churches of our diocese. We can all be grateful for the Journey Forward Team’s hard work. Co-chaired by the Rev. Vicki McGrath, All Saints’, Millington and Ms. Pat McKenzie, Church of the Saviour, Denville, this group researched and reflected on the challenges and needs of our congregations at worship.

The guidelines and planning forms they created are important tools for helping every congregation to decide when and how to begin in-person worship. I expect discussions and planning about in-person worship to take time on the parish level. Parish leadership will have the ongoing support of my office to answer questions and discern next steps.

We all wish COVID-19 had gone forever from our midst, but it has not. While the stay at home order was successful in its intended goal, lowering hospitalizations, it did not bring a cure or vaccine for this virus. Though distancing protocols are relaxed, safety is not guaranteed. The assumption

of risk has fallen squarely on each individual, therefore also on each individual congregation in our diocese.

In the last few months, our ability to be the church has grown stronger. Our relationships with God and each other have become more vital and meaningful. Care for the communities surrounding us expanded to include the needs of the most vulnerable. We have been shocked by the murders of young black people in the last few weeks and registered our protest, grief, and great desire for change. We have watched out for each other and we became aware of ways in which essential workers watched out for us.

We have seen the sacrifice of people supporting our safety by delivering groceries and goods, staffing health care facilities, and maintaining services like electricity, garbage removal, and public transit. For many reasons, including needing to take care of their own families, they do work that ensures others can stay safely at home. In doing so, they prioritize our needs over their own.

Their example is a strong model for us to remember. In-person worship will require all of us, clergy and laity alike, to prioritize the needs of others over our own. It is not simply our own safety we watch over, is it the safety of all those we interact with at home, church, work, and school.

Some questions to consider:

- Have you been tested for COVID-19 or antibodies?

- How much exposure to other people have you had before worship? How much will you have after worship?
- Are you in a high-risk group due to age, underlying medical conditions, or ethnic group?
- While parishes will follow guidelines and do what they can to lower risks, gathering in groups, especially while sitting still, carries a risk of infection. Are you ready to take that risk? Is your family?

I have strongly encouraged all churches to continue online worship even when providing in-person worship. I have also encouraged clergy who are in high risk groups to take their own health seriously, and I have indicated some congregations may be nowhere near being ready to resume in-person worship. Some members of our congregations already know that they cannot join in-person gatherings of any kind, including worship. Others may find that at times they have had enough exposure for the week or month and need to worship at home for a period of time.

While it is thought that outdoor gatherings are safer than indoor gatherings, all public gatherings put one at risk of infection. Each of us will have to assess the risk we can tolerate each week. Most importantly, all of us have learned how to love our neighbors in new and lasting ways in the last few months. How we respond to the lack of a treatment and vaccine remind us that we are Christians, known for our love of God and all God's people.

I trust that God who has seen us through challenge, grief, loss, frustration, joy, hope, and a renewed sense of faith will guide us to take care of each other as we continue the journey forward into the church God needs us to be.

Grace and peace,
Bishop Hughes

Bishop Hughes' sermon at the diocesan Memorial Service

(This is a transcript from the live streamed service on June 13.)

Friends, it has been a very long three months. There is simply no way we could have imagined or thought of what would come across our paths in these last three months. And every single bit of it, from leaving our churches and our workplaces and our schools and the routines that we know, suddenly. This sense of being in a place in our own homes all the time. The sense of worry watching our country struggle so hard to meet the need. And I think the hardest thing that I've heard from person after person after person, both the ones who've experienced it and the ones who have watched it happen, has been this sense of loss upon loss upon loss, as good people, beloved people, people whose lives were important to us came to an end.

It's not that we don't know how to grieve – we do know how to grieve – but grieve in this way from afar. Not able to put our arms around someone. Unable to hug, unable to be there to stand with the family, or if we were the family, unable to have that larger family of extended relatives and friends with us at the end of someone's life.

And probably the most brutal of all things is the number of people who did not get to say goodbye. Not face-to-face. Grateful for the people, the medical personnel, that held the telephone to someone's ear or held an iPad in front of them so goodbye could be said in that way. But also with an impossibly deep ache to not be at someone's bedside and to hold their hand as they took their last breath in this earth and their first breath in the next life. It has been hard and it has been troubling and those words that Jesus said to the disciples, "Do not let your hearts be troubled," have sometimes been a comfort and sometimes been hard for us to live into – because our hearts were troubled.

It may help us to remember that we are not the first with troubled hearts, that when Jesus said those words face-to-face to the disciples they had no idea what he was talking about. He had all of a sudden started talking about his death – one minute he's washing their feet and feeding them, the next minute he's telling someone go take care of your business and Judas leaves, and then he talks about leaving them and going to a place where they cannot go with him. It made absolutely no sense and into their confusion, and it could be into their sense of impending doom because his seriousness had to communicate itself to them, into that sense of impending doom here he stands saying, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe in me, and know that my father's house has many rooms and I am going to make one ready for you."

Now here's the part for us. For those of us who have worked our faith and worked our faith for a long time we are actually not worried about where our loved ones are. We know that Jesus has gone and made a place for them. Jesus has taken care of that. There is a sense of us that knows, we can almost feel it in our spirits, that when they took that last breath here and the first breath into the next life, but they went straight into some sort of celebration, a celebration that's hard for us to know about but not difficult for us to imagine. A celebration where Jesus was there to say, "Welcome home. I have a place for you."

We're not so worried about them. It's our feelings. It is for us who are left behind. It is for us who are trying to determine how to make sense of all of this, and how to make sense of the fact that we just feel bad because we couldn't be there the way we wanted to be there. Whether we were a relative or a friend or someone sitting on the periphery, that we couldn't be there the way we wanted to be there.

And I want to hold those words up for us again because I think we hear them, I think we hear, "My father's house has many rooms and I go to prepare

a place for you," and we automatically go straight to the next life, and clearly that is what Jesus is talking about, but God does not seem to be limited in time and space and notion and being the way we are. Could it possibly be that Jesus has prepared a room for us, a place in God's house, right here, here in God's territory on earth. And one of those rooms may be the room where we do our grieving, where we do the hard work of sorrow, and in that room we will find comfort from God. We will find comfort from Jesus. We will find the spirit whispering into our ear. But there is plenty of room for all of us in that space.

And that's not the only room. That God has prepared these rooms of love and connection and friendship so that there are all of these other relationships that have grown so much deeper in this time. The incredible irony of the time that we're in, is here we are physically separate, but our love has grown stronger. The bonds that draw us together have become thicker and more supple, more able to open and take extra people in. It seems odd but in this room God has made more room for those that we love and more room for God that those love.

I've been thinking about these people – all of the people who have died in these three months – and how we can honor them in our lives right now, that maybe that is a part of the work of grieving that we do. That we determine in what way we want to honor their lives amongst those groups of people, were people who adored their families, who loved their churches, who had hearts for people who were on the margins or people who were without. In what way are we being invited into a room that's a legacy room. A room that we keep full of honor for those that we love that have gone on before us. And what way might they be cheering us on. Encouraging us, "Reach out to this one, they're lonely. Reach out to this one, they're tired. Give a call to that one, they don't have food and they're not admitting it to anyone." It could be that in the midst of all the memories that they leave with us,

part of the way that we love them going forward is to honor their memory in a way that was important to them and that touches our heart.

There are many rooms in God's house. Many rooms for people. Many rooms for the stage we're in. Many rooms for the different phases of our life. Many rooms for the way that we express the gifts God has given us. Many rooms for us to work on our sense of nearness to God. Many rooms to honor the ones that we love.

I've been talking with you these last six weeks and often we have talked about the people who have died during this time and how painful that is. And we've also talked about the blessings that we have experienced in this time. I think that's part of what's been so strange is the equal mix, the constant churn of sorrow and surprise and delight and beauty and pain. It's been like a slice of life times 100, intensified so much more than we have ever experienced.

And I think about these people who have gone before us, and I do not know them all, but my sense of the ones I do know is this: they would send their love to us, they would understand our missing them, they know that deep love means deep grief. They would not ever tell us, "Don't cry." What a waste to tell someone, "Don't cry." Let's bless our tears instead. And I think these loved ones would bless our tears. And if they could I think they would stand here with us and say, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. I am home. Now you go and live. And live like this space on earth that you're in is God's home too."

Amen.

From Our Canons

Stories of the journey – floods, deserts, and home by another way – forward

By the Rev. Canon Margo Peckham Clark

These last few months have been different from anything in living memory. We are all left in some way unmoored, set adrift, not knowing how to find the way, or even where we are going. Some of us are still in the early stages of dealing with unbearable loss, some have risked their lives for the good of the community, some of us find ourselves in a precarious status with regard to job, home or food, some of us have had the relative luxury of working safely from home and had food and family with us—and yet, none of us knows really what we will face next.

We also face the reality of terrible injustice all around us, and are invited to join with others in being a part of seeking God's justice and peace for all. We may be seasoned veterans of the struggle, or we may be feeling for the first time ever the pull of needing to "do something." We are sorrowful and hopeful and none of us really knows what may come or what exactly to do next.

I don't know about you, but I like to know what I am supposed to do and where I am headed. I like to know that I have something to contribute. I like to know when something difficult will end. I want to know that people are safe. The truth is nothing is certain right now, and many things have been changed forever. We have mourned so much since March, it is easy to just want to get on with things, and to get back to normal. One of the things I love about Holy Scripture is all the ways it can speak to our situation. Recently Bishop Hughes has spoken of the "Lament" that we find in Scripture and the strength we can draw from the story of Esther. Like many of you, I am reading and re-reading Esther's story this summer in response to the Bishop's

“homework assignment.” I am also reminded in these times, our times, of how wonderful it must have been to have been part of Noah’s family on the Ark when that dove brought back a branch indicating dry land was once again a reality. I don’t think that is the story that we are in, that isn’t the place in scripture I’m looking to for guidance and strength. Even though “Noah’s Ark” is practically the first story any of us learn, and is so beloved, my heart says it doesn’t represent where we are in this time and this place. We are on a different and longer journey than “40 days and 40 nights.”

Moses and Miriam and the Israelites wandering in the desert on a seemingly endless journey comes next to mind. The sense the people had (even if it wasn’t accurate) of having left relative safety and plenty to boredom, hardship and a never-ending diet of manna. ‘Everything was so good back in Egypt,’ they cried, ‘it wasn’t so bad, why were we led out here to all this? Where are we going? Why aren’t we there yet? Has God left us behind?’ That story resonates for me, my heart says that feels much closer to something like the odyssey of these last months. Like the ancient Israelites, our odyssey keeps getting changed and interrupted, and we experience our own version of the dull pain of knowing whatever else may come, we are not headed back to the familiarity of Egypt. We, like them, have no choice but to press on, trusting that God has prepared a place, and that it will be a place of plenty and justice—but that we must do our part to get there!

This week clergy and other leaders have received guidelines for the “Journey Forward” toward the possibility of resuming some kind of in-person worship during this next stage of the pandemic. We know it will continue for some time and may require much more of us before there is a vaccine or treatment that is widely available. The journey continues and we must faithfully continue on it together. We watch the news and see the cry for justice arising from nearly every street and town in our nation, we sorrow at the setbacks and we

rejoice when there are surprising signs of change. We know that centuries and even millennia of inequality and inhumanity and violence will not just disappear. We know this journey continues as well, and we must faithfully continue.

As I think and pray about all this, as I struggle to accept how uncertain and long the journey must be, I am reminded of other figures in scripture, whose names we do not even know, and my heart tells me that they are models, guides, and companions in faithfully journeying on and forward. I think of the Magi who came, as the author of Matthew tells us, “from the east” to seek the newborn king. Their way must have been uncertain and hard, long and dangerous. They find the infant Jesus with joy and could have simply headed home, unconcerned with what came next, or the consequences. They didn’t do that, they didn’t do the easier, safer, faster thing thinking that their journey was “over.” Warned in a dream, they avoided Herod and “went back to their own country by another route.” Their willingness to endure more, for the journey to be longer so as to protect themselves and others seems to me a wonderful model for all the uncertain things we are called to as our journey continues.

As we rejoice, let us remember their witness. As we struggle for justice, let us remember that they were resisting one of the largest empires the world has ever known. We are like those Magi, called by the Spirit of God to seek not only our own goals, but the good and safety of many. We are called to go ways we would not have planned or chosen to ensure that we honor God’s unfolding plan.

Stories from Our Congregations

Montclair congregation's food ministry addresses often-unseen food insecurity in the suburbs

By Mary Frances Schjonberg

This article was originally published by Episcopal News Service.

The economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic is transforming the 38-year-old feeding ministry of one Diocese of Newark congregation. Toni's Kitchen at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Montclair, New Jersey, has quadrupled the number of meals it serves each week, causing the ministry to run far over budget and turning its normally quiet building into a bustling food warehouse.

"I'm amazed at what's going on here," the Rev. John Mennell, St. Luke's rector, told Episcopal News Service during a recent FaceTime call. "We are a food-processing juggernaut right now."

Before mid-March, when New Jersey residents began to shelter in place and people began losing their jobs or seeing pay cuts, Toni's Kitchen averaged about 4,000 meals a week. Now, the ministry serves the equivalent of 20,000 meals weekly. The entire 2020 budget of \$55,000 for purchasing food and supplies has been spent, but community businesses and residents are answering the ministry's call for help.

Even before the economic impact of the pandemic, food insecurity was a real but hidden problem in this seemingly well-off New York City suburb. Montclair is one of the richest townships in New Jersey. It is also a study in contrasts.

A block west of St. Luke's, there are multimillion-dollar homes with views of the Manhattan skyline, about 20 miles east. A block east of the church

there is "a completely different world," Mennell said, with a large immigrant and African American population that struggles to make ends meet.

"God has put us here so we can figure out how to use the resources from those who are willing to share them with those who need them," he said.

Seventeen percent of students in the Montclair school system receive free or reduced-price meals, Anne Mernin, the executive director of Toni's Kitchen, told ENS. That figure ought to be closer to 25%, she added, but older students tend not to want to be identified as receiving such assistance.

"There's a lot of hidden need" in suburbs, and many people presume food insecurity is not an issue, according to Mernin.

In 2017, Essex County, of which Montclair is a part, had the highest percentage of food insecurity of any county in the state.

Meanwhile, food insecurity continues to increase rapidly nationwide. The Brookings Institution reported that at the end of April, more than one in five households in the United States, and two in five households of mothers with children 12 and under, were food insecure. "Young children are experiencing food insecurity to an extent unprecedented in modern times," the report said.

Toni's Kitchen, was founded in 1982 with a mission "to serve our neighbors in need" and is named after its first cook, Antoinette "Toni" Green.

As Toni's Kitchen began to respond to the need created by the coronavirus pandemic, St. Luke's reconfigured its space for food storage and distribution: Every open space on the first floor – the office suite, the conference rooms, the dining room and the hallways – is stacked with food. There are "walls of food, and what's here changes every single day," Mennell said as he walked around the building broadcasting via FaceTime.

The church's parking lot now has two 20-foot leased refrigeration and freezer units, a rented 16-

foot truck for food pickups, the church's van and a van donated by the Montclair Art Museum, as well as a makeshift food distribution site.

Volunteers have always been key to the ministry's success. They now work in small groups for two-hour shifts between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. most days. They wear masks, gloves and disposable aprons. A timer rings every 20 minutes to signal a glove change.

Parishioner Michael McDonnell comes in at 6 a.m. several days a week to move stock to where it needs to be before anyone else is there to get in his way. The Fallace family (mom, dad and two sons ages 12 and 8) arrive at 7 a.m. on Sundays to pack bags of food and then head back home to watch St. Luke's 9 a.m. online worship service.

"It is amazing to see the dedication of so many [who are] willing to put themselves at some risk to serve their neighbors," Mennell said. "We've been transformed so we can serve God's people, so we can act in love, so we can reach out to our neighbors."

Setup isn't the only part of Toni's Kitchen that runs differently now. Instead of sit-down meals at tables in the dining room four times a week, the homeless and near-homeless people the ministry typically serves line up outside and volunteers bring them bags of ready-to-eat meals, produce and dry goods.

In addition, about 350 food-insecure seniors who live in three low-income public housing facilities receive four ready-to-eat meals and staples each week, the cost subsidized by the township. Kiwanis Club volunteers deliver similar packages to another 150 elderly people living in their own homes.

"Seniors have been very hard-hit by this," Mernin said. "Even if you have the financial means to shop, you may not have the neighbor or the relative that can go out and do it for you." The number of seniors needing help, however, has leveled off and is expected to go down over time, she said.

"The number that we would expect to go up is families. The ones we're seeing right now are the ones that have been living closest to the bone and have the least cushion," Mernin said. "When they lost their job or they got a significant pay cut, they just didn't have enough to carry them through."

To serve those families, the ministry has expanded its Healthy Backpack Program. The program began as a way to bring healthy shelf-stable food and produce to students and families in the Montclair and neighboring Bloomfield school systems who qualify for free and reduced-price meals at school. The difference now is no questions about income are asked, and that is prompting more immigrant families to come for food.

The need is increasing. On May 1, the Healthy Backpack Program had packages for 80 families, but "they had a line of 200," Mernin said. For the next distribution, the ministry will have enough food for 250 families.

Continuing the expanded ministry means encouraging more food and monetary donations. "We beg, we beg a lot," Mernin said.

The Community Food Bank of New Jersey has been a "key partner," she said. Local Community Supported Agriculture collectives, grocers and markets are donating. The ministry's advisory committee is contacting distributors and farmers to further diversify its food sources. There are community initiatives to buy food from local restaurants and donate it to Toni's Kitchen.

"We're also buying more food than we ever have before, which is why we are so dependent on donations from the broader community," Mennell said. When Mernin proposed buying \$25,000 worth of food the first week, Mennell said, "We both gulped and said, 'All right, we have that money right now; let's hope that we can keep doing that.'"

The ministry wants to be flexible enough to take unanticipated donations, such as the 500 gallons of milk that came in the first week in May. Sometimes

the food is close to its spoilage date, but donors know that Toni's Kitchen can quickly distribute the food, Mernin said.

More than 1,000 individual donors made financial contributions in the past two months. In the past month, donors have given \$80,000 to a matching fund of the same amount set up by the Partners for Health Foundation, the Schumann Fund for New Jersey, the Montclair Fund for Women and the Town of Montclair.

Two juniors at Montclair High School, Lucy Solomon and Sarah Shiffman, raised nearly \$15,000 with "Closing the Distance," a fundraiser they organized that featured nearly three hours of online performances by local students and graduates.

Toni's Kitchen is in it for the long haul, Mernin and Mennell both said.

"The long-term economic impact of this downturn is going to increase food insecurity and slow donations," Mennell said. "We want to be in a position to support the community in the long run, so while we have amazing support right now, we also want to be in a position to serve the community in the months and years ahead."

The Diocese of Newark has set up online giving to support the diocese's food pantries. Simply visit [e-giving.dioceseofnewark.org](https://giving.dioceseofnewark.org) and go to Area of Greatest Need: Food Pantries (second item from the top). Donations made from June 24 through July 7, 2020 will go to Toni's Kitchen.

St. Mark's, Teaneck moves annual variety show online

By Christian Paolino

The red carpet was out on Saturday, May 16th, but it was more likely trod by bunny slippers than platform heels as choir members and friends of St. Mark's Church in Teaneck staged a "virtual variety show" called *Saturday Night, Semi-Live*.

The program, with a live audience of about 100 "devices," was streamed simultaneously on Facebook Live and in a Zoom "watch party," where more people gathered afterwards for a brief reception. The show exceeded 1,000 views a week later.

The brainchild of St. Mark's Director of Music George Wesner, the show featured parishioners singing, dancing, reading poetry, and even decorating a cake, mostly from their homes.

While some offered straight send-ups of popular classics, others re-worked familiar lyrics to expose the humorous side of life in quarantine. It began and ended with Wesner "at home" in front of the church's organ accompanied by JACK the puppet, and parishioner Ted Mather served as the narrator who wove the vignettes together.

Wesner said the event was an opportunity for the choir, most of whom haven't seen one another since early March, to fulfill their ministry, if not together as a group. Teaneck, in Bergen County, was hard-hit early by the COVID-19 pandemic, and St. Mark's was among the first congregations in the diocese to cease holding worship in person.

The choir typically stages at least one special program a year to help raise money for various projects (previous efforts included *Singing for the Drain* in response to a plumbing problem, and *Too Darn Hot*, which spurred contributions to air-condition the parish hall). This event, however, was strictly a "fun-raiser" to help raise the spirits of a community weary of isolation. With one of the highest per-capita case counts in the nation, Teaneck has been under veritable lockdown, with high-risk residents confined to their homes for over two months.

A featured presence was Dr. James "Doc" Pruden, a parishioner who made regional headlines as one of New Jersey's most celebrated COVID-19 recoveries. The emergency services director at St. Joseph's Hospital in Paterson, Dr. Pruden was among the first cases in the state and endured two stints on a

ventilator before being released to a rehab facility on April 8th.

In a moving scene, Pruden recalled telling his physical therapist he wanted to be able to dance with his fiancée, Jane “Liz” Clements. “[making the video] was a great opportunity to reach inside and find something that was authentic,” he described. “The love that Liz and I have for dancing, combined with the love we have for each other and the prayers that surrounded us made it easy to share that story of how those things came together.”

In a brief keynote, St. Mark’s Rector, the Rev. Joan F. Conley, referenced Dr. Pruden’s recovery, as well as the loss of parishioner Inez Saley and numerous friends and relatives of the congregation.

Recalling her reaction to the event, she invoked the hymn contributed by parishioner Dick Michele and enthused, “‘A sweet, sweet spirit,’ indeed! Thank you to George, (producer/editor) Christian Paolino, (livestream projectionist) Jeffrey Kist and the members of St. Mark’s choir and friends for all of the amazing creativity, heart, and spirit that they poured into this beautiful witness to the power of Faith, Hope, and Love. My family and I were truly moved and uplifted at the same time. A true gift for these times. Thank you!”

St. Stephen's Red Ribbon for Racial Justice Project

If you happen to be driving or walking by St. Stephen’s Church in downtown Millburn, you’ll see a simple, pandemic-safe way to show support for racial justice: you can stop and tie one of the red ribbons provided on their fence, joining with others in the community who have already done so. This visual witness might just encourage someone’s change of heart, which is the first step to the kind of change that can literally change the world.

Diocesan Resources & Announcements

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.

Bedtime Prayer

O God

Please be sure I don’t have bad dreams tonight

And protect us from any harm

I love you

And protect everyone

In Christ’s name we pray

Amen.

– Edith, 7 years old, St. Elizabeth’s, Ridgewood
(submitted by Sheryl Jordan)