

Highlights of diocesan news in printable format — August 19, 2020

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From Our Bishop

Forgiveness

This is a transcript of a video message.

This is Bishop Hughes in the Diocese of Newark, and I want to talk with you today about forgiveness.

So often when we hear that word we automatically think of the other person. That someone has done something wrong to us and now we must forgive them, however hard that might be. And today I want you to think with me about this in a different way. To think about our own need for forgiveness. A need that we hear proclaimed in scripture, from the very beginning of the book in Genesis, to the end of the book and the Revelation. That we hear from God and from God's people, that we need to turn consistently to God. That we need to seek God's forgiveness and seek God's presence.

There is a wonderful gift that we receive in the Episcopal Church, and most particularly in the Book of Common Prayer. And it is found on page 447, the Reconciliation of a Penitent. I say very often that these are the least used pages in the entire prayer book, which is a shame, because these are some of the most needed pages in the entire prayer book. Especially in the time we're in.

This rite, a simple rite of confession and forgiveness is one that is usually done with a priest or a bishop, done with an ordained person, but it can be done with a layperson. You need to have a priest or a bishop to pronounce absolution, but a

layperson could declare forgiveness of sins at the end. And it's important to know that's what's going to come at the end. That when we confess our sins we can count on the fact that God is going to forgive us in the end.

But that confession piece is an important thing, and I love the way there's two versions of this rite. I love the way both of them start. One starts saying "Bless me, I am a sinner." The other one says "Pray for me, a sinner." Bless me or pray for me – to start our confession with those words, knowing that ultimately the most important thing that is going to happen is that someone is going to bless us in the end, that God will bless us. And that someone is going to pray for us. And God's spirit is always at prayer for us. And when we're going to name those things, those wrongdoings that we've done, to others, to ourselves, both people we know and people that we do not know, that when we are blessed and forgiven, prayed for at the end, we can let go of those things.

And for many of us it takes multiple times that we've got to confess our sins, routinely, regularly, and in doing that we become changed. We don't walk around carrying the grudges. We don't walk around carrying the wounds. We don't walk around carrying the hurt. But through prayer, and absolution, and blessing, we become changed.

It's a different way to think about forgiveness, our need to be forgiven. It's a powerful way to walk through the world. As people who are blessed. Prayed for. Absolved. Forgiven. Beloved of God.

From Our Canons

Four ways to pray

By the Rev. Canon Margo Peckham Clark

Prayer can be like exercise, diet, sleeping enough and other things we know are “good for us.” In the best of times it can also seem that while important they really are the province of “professionals,” or those who are really passionate about them, and that nobody can do it all. We are very good at excuses of one kind or another, and sometimes we’re not convinced what the benefits might really be, or even afraid somehow that doing things differently will change things too much.

Prayer is really like breathing. It is what keeps us connected to life, to God. It is also more than that, it is the way we develop a true relationship with our Savior and source of life and strength. Doing things that make us feel aware of God and connected are hugely important. Some of the most essential ways that people have of reliably having that – singing in church, and regular in-person worship – have been curtailed and impacted in ways we never could have imagined a year ago. This impact has now gone on much longer than any of us likely imagined in March, and is likely to continue for some time. There are conversations of all sorts going on and continuing about what it will mean to be the church in the coming weeks and months and years, and I am humbled and awestruck by the depth of those. I am also profoundly grateful for the response that is happening throughout our church to the movement and cry that structural racism and white supremacy must end, and that it is fundamentally within our call as children of God to be a part of that movement, each in our own way.

As this stormy summer winds towards fall, give yourself the life-giving possibility of truly deepening your relationship with God. It’s a little bit like when I tell my son, “call your grandmother.” He knows where she is, that she loves him and he loves her – the conversations make a huge

difference. The variety of conversations in a relationship can be enormous as well. There are news/update conversations, simply being together (even on the phone) conversations, discussions, arguments, asking for something, sharing our feelings, hopes and anxieties, learning, and on and on. Our prayer lives feed us more when they have this variety and more, and in particular our prayer lives are deeper when we develop ways to pray and consistently work on them to listen and even converse with God.

Some people have a special spiritual gift for prayer, and if that’s you, and you have been conversing with God your whole life, that’s wonderful – keep it up, and consider finding a way to share that with others! All of us however, have the gift for prayer, and need to use and develop it to be able to carry out the work God has given us to do, for ourselves, in our families and other parts of our vocations, our work and in the world. In this time it is more true than ever, and it is the foundation for discernment, for figuring out and knowing what God would have us do at each moment of our lives (something we will be talking about this fall in our diocese).

Here are some concrete suggestions. All of them are things that can help quiet our minds and spirits and help us to lay aside our “agenda” with God. While God wants us to bring our petitions to God, there is so much more that is possible when we pray with listening.

1. **The “Jesus Prayer”** is an ancient way to breathe God in and out and to (among other things) make more room for God and listening to God by clearing away things that are anxiously crowding God out of our thoughts. You can whisper or say in your head slowly, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me,” or “Lord Jesus Christ the only Son of God” or “Lord Jesus Christ the only Son of God have mercy on me” or “Lord Jesus Christ the only son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.” This prayer is a key piece of the novel “Franny and Zooey” by J.D. Salinger. If you want a book discussing

Anglican practice of the prayer, look for “Praying the Jesus Prayer Together” by Simon Barrington Ward and Brother Ramon, SSF. You don’t need to read a book though, simply begin the practice of saying this prayer repeatedly and regularly throughout your day and see what happens. This has been an important prayer and practice in my spiritual life for decades now.

2. **Christian Meditation** is a terrific way to slowly begin to simply quiet our minds and be with God. It is similar to other kinds of meditation and “mindfulness” with Christ at the Center. For an array of resources, including books and instructions on this practice, go to the website of the World Community for Christian Meditation. This is a great way to start with 10 minutes a day devoted to you and God. There are many books by John Main and others available on their site or through Amazon or other book retailers.
3. Find a **spiritual director** (I would recommend that it not be your own priest or someone in your parish). A spiritual director is a friend, guide and coach for our relationship with God. They generally have some training and possibly certification in the discipline. This is different from a therapist or an executive or life coach. Spiritual direction is about our prayer life and relationship with God.
4. Make a regular practice of praying with God by **reading and listening to scripture**. Bishop Hughes has suggested reading the book of Esther this summer. When we pray with scripture we don’t look for a “meaning,” we listen for words or phrases that point to what God is saying to us. This is similar to “Dwelling in the Word” that is familiar to many, and some of the ways Bishop Hughes invites us to look at scripture together. It also is also called “Lectio Divina.” If you are looking for some

guidance on how to make this a regular practice you could try “Lectio Divina – the Sacred Art: Transforming Words and Images into Heart Centered Prayer” by Christine Valters Painter (she goes beyond simply using this practice with scripture). There are many other guides that look at the practice primarily focused on scripture, and the new “Common English Bible” translation is available in a Lectio Divina edition that I appreciate.

Our relationship with God, like any other relationship, takes commitment, presence, listening and sometimes variety. We are in challenging times. Consider making it a priority to commit to one of these or other practices to deepen and strengthen your relationship to God in prayer.

Stories from Our Congregations

"We have never been here before": Congregations join schools, families in discerning how to help students

By Mary Frances Schjonberg

Congregations all over the Diocese of Newark have always helped students and parents navigate the challenges of returning to school each fall. The unpredictability of what “school” will look like this year means flexibility is the key to that ministry, according to those in the midst of connecting with their communities’ schools.

No two school districts’ plans are exactly alike, and everyone acknowledges that today’s plan could change depending on the course of the pandemic.

“There a lot of feeling out there that schools will end up closing for a period,” said Anne Mernin, the executive director of Toni’s Kitchen, at St. Luke’s, Montclair.

Toni's Healthy Backpack Program, just one of its ministries, began as a way to bring healthy shelf-stable food and produce to students and families in the Montclair and Bloomfield school systems who qualify for free and reduced-price meals at school.

This summer, the ministry continued offering groceries to parents on the days that students who qualified for free or reduced-cost meals from the schools picked up their lunches that the schools were required to continue. Both the Bloomfield and Montclair districts designated certain schools as distribution points.

Bloomfield's distribution continued as planned but, Montclair had low turnout at its school sites, Mernin said, so they decided to move the distributions to St. Luke's. As the pandemic extended into the summer months, the district offered home delivery as well as the option to pick up food at the church.

"We just had groceries available for whoever wanted them," Mernin said.

The ministry expanded to include the West Orange district as the school year ended and summer began. Food is available at two school parking lots. The Toni's van arrives with groceries, produce, dairy and meat.

Mernin spoke August 12 with the Montclair superintendent who said the district's weekly plan is for two days in school and three days online. Toni's Kitchen will post an item in the district's weekly newsletter publicizing its offer of home delivery or pick up of food.

"What I think is probably most effective is to build a home-delivery network that is more robust than it is right now, where people really understand that home delivery is something they can reach out and ask for," Mernin said. That sort of network can prevent people having to stand in line for food in the midst of the pandemic, she said, adding that delivery can also help essential workers who may be working when distributions are happening.

Food is also an issue for Teaneck Public Schools students, 35 percent to 40 percent of whom are

food-insecure, according to the Rev. Dr. Michelle White, vicar at Christ Church, Teaneck.

Episcopalians there have helped in the past by providing holiday-centered events at the church that offer a meal as part of the program. Their food pantry is also working overtime to respond to increasing needs as more and more people lose their jobs, White said.

"The face of food insecurity has changed. It's not all Black and brown people. There are white people. There are Filipinos, Asians, Pacific Islanders. It's incredible," she said. "People who have had really good jobs and but suddenly they have no jobs." Many of those people do not know how to navigate the government programs such as SNAP benefits that do supply some help, White said, and they are hungry now.

"It is a wilderness," she said. "We have never been here before."

Other Episcopal congregations, the local Jewish community (details of that partnership are here) and businesses have all contributed to their food pantry. "We try to get food from wherever we find it," she said.

When schools shut down this spring, the Teaneck high school distributed food and Christ Church supplemented their inventory with bread, milk and bakery donated by Stu Leonard's, a grocery chain.

Christ Church, which is one block from Whittier Elementary School and shares its space with an early childhood center, has always been involved with smoothing the way for kids going back to school, White said. In the past, the members have filled backpacks with school supplies and then replenished those supplies during the year, along with grade-level books. The supplies, White said, help families counter the \$50-75 per child cost of school-required supplies.

"It's all chaotic," White said. "I'm not sure if the same things will work anymore."

Serving people who are suffering from the effects of the pandemic has changed people, she said.

“It’s a formation opportunity for us to serve. It changes us,” White explained. “I am overwhelmed with gratitude to God for the privilege and I tell the folks who volunteer that it is our privilege to do this. God is blessing us to allow us to be hands of Christ.”

Rosie Grant, executive director of the Paterson Education Fund and a warden at St. Paul’s, Paterson, is another Episcopalian who sees her work as a calling. “To me it’s all about my Baptismal Covenant promise of respecting the dignity of every human being,” she said. “And, I take that a step further because what we’re doing is working for equity.”

The Paterson Education Fund, with offices at St. Paul’s, was formed 38 years ago to engage residents in the improvement of Paterson public schools. Four of the fund’s five staff members attend St. Paul’s.

Just after Gov. Phil Murphy said schools could begin the academic year with remote learning, the school board voted unanimously Aug. 12 to do that. The district will assess the situation by Oct. 15 with the goal of possibly reopening buildings on Nov. 1.

Grant said both decisions were “winners” for students and staff but acknowledged that they are not without their challenges. Some 12,000 of the district’s 28,000 students don’t have devices for remotely learning at home. Nearly 14,000 Chromebooks that the district bought in June with \$3.4 million in federal CARES Act money arrived at the Newark airport where they were held up, she said. One of the companies that the manufacturer uses is among 11 companies in China that the U.S. Commerce Department has imposed trade sanctions against due to alleged human rights violations, according to a recent news report.

The district and community partners like the Fund are scrambling to help, Grant said. “We were promised late October but we understand the whole world is waiting for devices so we’re hopeful and yet we were planning for contingencies.”

One contingency is that the district will distribute to students all of the portable devices in its classrooms. However, that will still leave 4,000 students without equipment. The Paterson Education Fund plans to launch a campaign asking corporations to donate unused devices.

“It’s worth a shot because we’re at our wit’s end,” Grant said.

The group also is convening the child-care organizations in the city to look at the issue of parents of young children who must go to work during the day. Both Grant and the Rev. Deacon Erik G. Soldwedel, deacon in residence at St. Paul’s, said the parish has offered its hall. Soldwedel envisions a sort of supervised physically distanced study hall for students. It would, he said, add structure to some young people’s days.

He and Grant said there are issues about supervisions and licensing but, Soldwedel said, “anything like that we can do, we would do it period.”

Soldwedel said that the parents of many Paterson students are not well-educated themselves and face the challenge of homeschooling their children. That challenge gets tougher as students progress in school, he added.

Grant said that one element of meeting all of these challenges is never lacking. “I find that we always get church members willing to help,” she said. “As the church in the community, we’re obligated to be a part of the community and to look after the welfare of members, particularly the smallest and the most vulnerable among us.”

To support these three ministries in feeding and assisting students and their families, simply visit e-giving.dioceseofnewark.org and go to Area of Greatest Need: Food Pantries (second item from the top). Donations made from Aug. 19 through Sept. 8, 2020 will be divided among Toni’s Kitchen at St. Luke’s, Montclair; the food ministry of Christ Church, Teaneck; and the Paterson Education Fund associated with St. Paul’s, Paterson.

Diocesan Resources & Announcements

Clergy ministry transitions

Arrivals

- **The Rev. Sheelagh Clarke,**
Priest-in-Residence, Church of the Holy Innocents, West Orange – Aug. 15
- **The Rev. Raul Ausa,**
Priest-in-Charge, Trinity, Allendale – Sept. 1

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.

A prayer written by Pat S., St. George's, Maplewood

Dear Lord,

Thank you for keeping me safe and well thus far; and also my family and friends.

I am in a safe place; as is my family, and for that too I am grateful.

Thank you for the increased opportunities to stay in connection or reconnect with other family or friends, near and mostly, far. Thank you for providing me with a regular source of income, food, and shelter.

Whereas I have these many things to be thankful for; please help me to never forget to raise awareness of the extreme needs of individuals with no family, or home, or income; and with little or no food. Keep me constantly aware and vocal about

those who are ignored or cast aside because of their ethnic background, mental illness, or dysfunctional families.

I ask you, God, for the means, and ability, and above all courage to respond in meaningful ways where I am able. Amen