



Highlights of diocesan news in printable format — October 7, 2020

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From Our Bishop

Living with COVID: Communion, Convention, and Confirmation

Dear Companions on the Journey,

As I'm sure you well recall, I put emergency measures into place for this pandemic in March of this year, with in-person worship being suspended in most churches on March 15 and in all churches by March 22. This emergency approach stayed in place into the summer, even as Journey Forward guidelines were issued in June. These guidelines permitted a return to in-person worship for congregations interested and able to do so. Staying completely online or remote continues to be an absolutely acceptable way to worship.

In August, my own perspective on this began to shift, and I started to see this pandemic in different terms. We needed to shift from emergency footing to learning how to live in pandemic for the next year or more. Living with COVID is different than just trying to hang on or get through an immediate crisis. Long-term crisis requires a different approach, especially when we are facing multiple other crises at the same time: political tension, civil unrest, natural disaster, and racial injustice. Ongoing life and ministry look different in a long-term approach. We have different questions now than when we started – and the shape that the answers take may be different as well.

I have been particularly thinking about three areas of questions: Communion, Convention, and Confirmation. Other questions will come up as we make our way through this time of living with COVID. Here is the starting information on these three areas; more details will be forthcoming.

Communion

While many of our churches are returning to in-person worship, not all are doing so or can do so. Not all churches gathering in-person are celebrating Holy Eucharist. In any case, every congregation has people who cannot and should not go to a public gathering during pandemic, even if a portion of the congregation is attending in-person Communion services. It has been very clear to me that there is a great desire for people to receive Communion. I have continued to refrain from receiving Communion myself throughout this time, keeping in mind that many people across the diocese are unable to receive. I also recognize the responsibility that I and our clergy have to administer the sacraments to the people.

I want to ensure that everyone in the Diocese of Newark has the opportunity to receive Communion at least three times in this program year, on three particular Sundays. **The first proposed Sunday for this Diocesan Communion is All Saints' Day, November 1**; the other two dates are TBD. I have asked Canon Wright to gather a small group to make plans for November 1 and you will hear more about that soon. My intention and hope is that every congregation will be involved and that every

member in the diocese will be given an opportunity to receive on these three days.

Convention

Part of the challenge to our institutional life is the apparent NJ requirement that all annual meetings, including Diocesan Convention, be held with voting members physically present. Gathering as we usually would do at the end of January, as wonderful as that has been in other years, would be reckless and unsafe at present. The Rules of Order Committee has reminded me that our diocesan Constitution and Canons allow me to determine a different date for Convention, if needed. It's needed. **I am delaying Diocesan Convention 2021 until July 2021.** This will be a one-day Convention, held outdoors following all of the safety protocols that we know so well (distancing, face coverings, etc.). In-person attendance will need to be a quorum for Convention, at least, and keeping those gathered in-person to a smaller group than we normally would see. The proceedings will be live-streamed for all those not gathered in person.

Confirmation

Confirmation in pandemic, as we usually conduct it, creates the risk of multiple super-spreader events, since I have to be in close proximity to every confirmand, laying on hands. Confirmation services have been large gatherings in the past as well, which creates greater risk for us. It was simply unsafe to hold those services during Eastertide this year, so they were postponed.

Postponing the Confirmation services has created an opportunity for an additional time of reflection and formation for our 2020 confirmands. This extended Confirmation Year allows a deeper engagement with our faith, much like the catechumenal model used for centuries for formation of new Christians or those renewing their faith. **Three online gatherings will be offered to our 2020 confirmands to go deeper in their faith formation, along with other resources that**

we can explore together. The first of these gatherings will be in early December, as Advent begins.

Confirmation services will hopefully resume in July 2021. These services will be conducted outdoors and will be smaller-sized gatherings than is usual for us. We will schedule as many services as necessary until all of our 2020 participants have been Confirmed, Received, or have Reaffirmed their faith, followed by those being prepared currently for 2021.

Changing how we ask the questions we face is an important shift for our diocese at this time. We will likely be challenged by this pandemic, one way or another, all the way through 2021. Perhaps we will see relief sooner than that, but we should prepare to go through 2021 with measures that allow us to do our ministry, to work on our mission, and to continue to grow in our faith.

Grace and peace,
Bishop Hughes

Stories from Our Congregations

Conversations on race with teens and college students

By the Rev. Cathy Rafferty Quinn

Being grounded at home throughout this pandemic period presented St. Elizabeth's, Ridgewood as a community with an unexpected opportunity to connect with teens and college students in our parish – who might otherwise be too consumed with extracurricular activities, yet who with time on their hands have chosen to step up with courage – and engage in tough conversations about issues of race in America.

We give thanks for the adults through whose labor of love these conversations were so thoughtfully prepared: Ivana Gaillard, Sandy Sullivan, Catherine

Olivo, Peter Angelica, Jr., Frettra deSilva, and the Rev. Sharon Hausman – all have invested generously their time, care and wisdom into this project. Their devotion to tackling this tender topic of race in America, for building awareness and making space for tough talking to take place safely, and for helping our children navigate the public conversation from a perspective of their faith, is a great blessing to our community.

Public figures and civil servants like the late John Lewis, Bryan Stevenson and James Baldwin (soon to be joined by women’s voices like Toni Morrison, Nikki Giovanni, and Anna Deavere Smith) have served as role models, not only for caring and courageous conversation, but for living fully the lives God created us to live. In the words of St. Paul, they model being “imitators of Christ”. They depict for us a clarity of vocation, conviction about what God is calling forth from us, in tangible, inspiring ways.

Issues of racial injustice touch Ridgewood in painful ways that have, even recently, been glossed over and ignored. That our young people refuse to accept such inattentiveness encourages me deeply. So does the blessing of having in our midst the bright leadership (and vocational clarity) of Peter Angelica, Jr. whose recent experience with civil rights law, as well as studying ethics and morality at Yale, and prior experience teaching confirmation classes here at St. Elizabeth’s, as well as his particular gifts for moderating challenging conversations, are all blessings to us at St. Elizabeth’s, and to the wider church.

In our first conversation, we reflected on the movie, *Just Mercy*. Our second conversation revolved around the HBO documentary *True Justice*, also focusing on the work of Bryan Stevenson and the Equal Justice Initiative. This past week Peter introduced our teens to the work of James Baldwin.

A guideline for these conversations that Peter presented: “Expect and accept non-closure.” In other words, recognize that in conversations about race, resolution may be elusive; our work is to

develop awareness in a long and ongoing conversation about racial injustice in America.

Accepting and expecting non-closure seems to be a theme of our learning through experience these days, thanks in particular to the unpredictability in this pandemic. In many Zoom conversations this summer I found myself making the sign of a “dangling question mark” across the screen. Ironically, this unexpected experience of accepting ambiguity represents a strange silver lining of this time.

Listen, watch, wait and see – lessons for these times. Those who pray for patience receive ample opportunities to practice it; perhaps more than ever before, opportunities to exercise uncertainty muscles. Toning these muscles readies us to navigate tough conversations with patience and grace.

And on the flip side, there are actions of consequence that flow from the listening and interior work taking place within each participant in these ongoing conversations.

The Rev. Sharon Hausman joined us for our conversation on race with teens and college students on Thursday evening, September 17 at 7pm. For that gathering, Sharon led us in an exercise on brainstorming on creative imagery evoked by association between the senses and the words “privilege” and “dignity.” The group together came up with the content for the two poems that follow, which Sharon ordered into beautiful art, reflective of our time together.

The following prayer was a creation for our July gathering.

O Christ, you spoke up when it was dangerous; you challenged and got in the way; you know what it is to stand when those around you watch for you to fall. You loved those who hated you and had patience with those who kept missing the points you made. You showed us how to stay in conversation. Bless and sanctify our ongoing conversation.

Open our ears, focus our hearing and thinking and speaking together on truth and reconciliation with compassion. Guide the streams of our thoughts to flow together into rivers of living water that draw us deeper into an awareness of your love, gushing up to eternal life.

Help us see clearly what you would have us see, hear what you would have us hear, say what you would have us say. Feed us with holy nourishment; guide us away from ingesting what would impede our respect for the dignity of every human being.

Help us, when we are tired, tired, tired to be brave, brave, brave. Lift us when we need lifting, and help us see and seize opportunities to do the same for others in their time of need. Show us how to love one another, today, and always.

All for the glory of God. Amen.

Poems by the Rev. Sharon Hausman and the Teens and College Students of St. Elizabeth's Church

Privilege

Privilege sounds like children yelling and talking as they play outdoors.

It sounds like crickets and silence.

Privilege smells like a new car,
like grass when it's first cut,
like waves at the ocean when you're on vacation.

Privilege smells – and tastes – like your favorite meal.

It tastes like things you don't really like –
bleu cheese, truffles, licorice and caviar –
but eat because others say you should like them.

Privilege tastes like maple-sugar candy and real maple syrup.

Privilege looks clean.

It looks like schools in suburban neighborhoods,
nice clothing,
pressed shirts.

Privilege is seeing people who look like you.

Privilege feels warm, secure, safe and comfortable.
There's nothing to worry about.

It's relaxed – even lackadaisical.

Privilege feels like putting on a new, clean, cushy pair of sneakers.

Privilege is naive,
living in a bubble where you don't know what others are going through
and don't have to think about it.

Privilege feels like the capacity to choose.

Dignity

Dignity feels like receiving a gift you've always wanted.

Dignity feels hot, fierce and empowering.
It is the anger and frustration
of fighting to achieve one's right to live and be treated the same.

Dignity looks like someone carrying herself with grace.

Dignity looks like receiving a medal or giving a speech.

It is opposing basketball players crashing to the floor
and helping each other back to their feet.

It is people marching in protest
and children carrying Black Lives Matter signs.

It is Nelson Mandela walking into Robben Island prison.

It is members of the Armed Forces,
fighting with dignity.

Dignity smells like a basketball court,
like the sweat of honest effort.

Dignity sounds like applause and chanting,
like "please," "thank you,"

"I appreciate you,"
"You are a blessing."

It sounds like heart-rate monitors and the bustle of a hospital tending to the dying.

It sounds like someone calling you to come

downstairs:

“We are looking forward to your company at the table.”

Dignity is a food everyone shares and enjoys.

Dignity tastes like Communion.

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.

A Hymn for the Pandemic

*May be sung to the tune of Hyfrydol
(Hymn 460 in The Hymnal 1982)*

God, we call on You every new day,
Bless us in this time of trial.
Separated from friends and family,
As we guard against virus so vile.

Mission, Ministry still go on as we
Meet by Zoom for both worship and work.
Stewardship, Finance, and Pre-schools and
Outreach all go on,
As our duty we will not shirk.

Prayer and praise take on new importance
As we try to make sense out of this.
God, we wonder when we can gather
Safely in Your house that we miss.

Education and unemployment and mental health
have all come into play.
Normal will never be normal again we sadly fear,
Gracious God, hear our prayer today.

– *Martha R. Boughner, St. James' Upper Montclair*