



Highlights of diocesan news in printable format — April 22, 2020

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From Our Bishop

There is no shame in asking for help

(This is a transcript of a video message.)

This is Bishop Hughes in the Diocese of Newark. Every week and actually every opportunity I get to talk with you about your spiritual health, I take. This week I want to talk with you about something slightly different – very much related to your spiritual health but different – and that is your mental health.

Let me start by taking us to a Psalm. If you do Evening Prayer you're going to hear this Psalm again tonight. It's one of the three Psalms, 12, 13 and 14 assigned for this evening. And the first verse of Psalm 13 says, "How long O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?"

There can be a point when dealing with disaster, when dealing with this pandemic, when dealing with any kind of situation that is ongoing and relentless and that leads to so much confusion and change over a long period of time. There can be a point where not only does our spiritual health need help but our emotional and mental health need help. That those things can start to erode from the prolonged stress and prolonged uncertainty. It's helpful to hear those words from the Psalm and so often we hear words like that in the Psalms, where someone, some ancient person, asked, "Where are

you God? Will you forget me forever? How long do I have to wait to hear from you?"

It's helpful to know that we are not the first, and we are probably not the last, who turn to God in a sense of hopelessness, that actually says something about the hope that we still hold kindled in our hearts. While the world seems really tough and impossible, and circumstances seem so hard for us to overcome, that we still turn to God with a sense of hope.

It's also important to know that this constant stress that we have been dealing with can wear down our sense of health, of where we are mentally and emotionally, and sometimes that wearing down takes more than the kind of support that you can receive from your clergy person, or receive from your small group or support group, or receive from your family members. That sometimes we need to ask for help from a professional. We need to get the help of a therapist or a psychotherapist or a doctor – someone who can help us get our mental health to a place where it is able to sustain the amount of change, the amount of stress, the amount of worry that we're having to navigate, and will continue to navigate for weeks probably into months as this virus continues to work its way around our country and around the world.

There is no shame in asking for help. This is the wonderful thing about the Psalms and that we see all through scripture is that people ask God for help all the time. We've learned this as faithful people.

There is no shame in asking for help, and we are only too happy to give help to someone or to receive help when we need it. And I want to be clear as the spiritual leader of this diocese that has an eye out on all the clergy and on all of the congregations and all of the organizations – let me say clearly there is no shame in asking for help, to make sure that your mental health gets the help that it needs in order for you to be fit, in order to weather this storm that we call COVID-19.

In this newsletter are numbers that you can call if you are feeling sad or depressed and you are thinking about the end of life and ending it yourself. There are numbers that you can call if you're thinking about suicide. There are numbers that you can call if you need help finding a therapist. There are numbers that you can call if you just need to talk to somebody, that we can get you connected to. Many of those numbers are provided by organizations who've been doing this kind of work for years and years, that have decades of history in terms of helping people through crisis. So I want to encourage you.

I also want you to know that asking for help is going to be something that God is listening to do, and will help you in finding the kind of help that you need, to make sure that you get healthy and that you stay healthy. That same Psalm, going further on, ends like this, "I put my trust in your mercy. My heart is joyful because of your saving help." My prayer is that you will put your trust in God's mercy and let God's help come from wherever it needs to come, whether that is your priest, your friend or your therapist. Your mental health is a blessing given to you by God.

*The NJ MentalHealthCares Help Line offers telephone counseling, emotional support, information and assistance in helping to get behavioral health services needed by you or a loved one. For assistance or more information, please call the toll-free, confidential number: **1-866-202-HELP (1-866-202-4357)**.*

*Those who may be having suicidal thoughts should call **1-855-NJ-HOPELINE (1-855-654-6735)**.*

From Our Canons

Mental health and faith: What Christians can offer a traumatized world

By the Rev. Canon Margo Peckham Clark

The spring of 2020 is unlike anything any of us have ever experienced, and we have lost a great deal. It is important to acknowledge that, while we may be grateful for many things, many things have changed, and in some cases, things have been lost that cannot be regained. This is not only true in the most obvious and terrible reality of human life cut short in the COVID-19 pandemic, it is true for the graduations, weddings, baptisms, varsity sports seasons, plays, concerts, family gatherings, neighborhood BBQs, reunions and travel that have been canceled, re-worked or delayed so significantly that they are almost not recognizable. Being grateful for what is still stable and good in our lives, while important, won't bring back important events or people, or restore them to what they were. The wounds we bear from this time necessarily bring about the grief that comes with loss.

What can we do for ourselves and for our families to ensure we move forward in healthy ways? What is our responsibility as the church to our members and to our communities that are hurting? What can we offer? Answering these questions depends on understanding the importance of mental health services and the relationship to what we uniquely offer as Christ's church. We can use the categories of recognition, perspective, hope and faith as a framework to discuss this.

Recognition

It is important to recognize that we are collectively living through a long-term traumatic event. Even the most psychologically stable people can have trauma-related symptoms. This is more than feeling a bit sad, afraid, or anxious. We need to name the feelings being experienced in our families and in our churches, and to acknowledge that they can be very different. They are not necessarily related to “how much” a person or family has gone through or whether it “affected them directly.”

It is also important to recognize that life as we know it has changed and will almost certainly continue to do so. This time of pandemic is different from previous national traumas because it has changed everything about our daily lives, and many aspects of life will probably remain changed. Change brings grief and loss and is its own sort of trauma. We need to recognize and make room for these feelings as well, and we need to ask God to show us what things are truly essential and must be restored, adapted or re-made, and what things we can let go of because they weren't well suited to our lives even before this pandemic.

Committing to practice all these kinds of recognition, consistently and with intention, will help us discern when the disruption and sadness of trauma (and the changes that flow from it) have become a problem requiring professional intervention and treatment. It will also help us to adjust routines, patterns, and expectations so that we can all heal and can remain as healthy as possible. This will allow us to truly help those in desperate need of help and prayer because we will begin to gain perspective.

Perspective

Working as a chaplain with the Red Cross at Ground Zero and other locations after 9/11, one of the most important things I learned was that trauma produces complicated reactions. In many people this can mean anger (sometimes

disproportionate anger about smaller, unrelated things) or unusual reactions (such as drinking to excess or having an affair). It can also mean that people start regressing or behaving in a less-mature way in response to trauma.

Most of us are not trained in therapy, let alone treating trauma. However, having some perspective on what can happen and practicing awareness of emotions can help us as Christians to have a sense of when it is important to suggest that someone may need to talk to a professional or to know when we need that ourselves. It will also help us to see that, as this pandemic and its aftermath drag on for months and even years, our clergy will have a heavier load of listening and praying with folks in distress. Care for our clergy will be important, and allowing how we do things in our parish communities to change will make room for people to grieve and move forward.

Developing a mature and sophisticated perspective will allow us to act with greater gentleness, compassion, and wisdom. Helping ourselves and others do this necessary emotional work, supported by professionals when needed, is a vital ministry now and for what follows. As Bishop Hughes reminds us, despair, suicide and all sorts of addiction and abuse were already epidemic in Northern New Jersey before this. Scripture's call to “bind up the broken-hearted” is very real and present, now and for the foreseeable future.

Hope

Naming our emotions and having a good understanding of the need for mental health treatment frees us to offer our Christian hope in a new and powerful way. We live in a world consumed by greed and the desire for comfort and success, but we have what John's Gospel calls the “water of life.” We are made by God for God; our hope is in the unending love and mercy of God and in the stability that gives us, no matter our situation. Understanding that this is different from

– although related to – mental health lets us model and minister with authenticity. Jesus isn't our "get out of jail free" card, he is our way, our life. In times of crisis and trauma this is something we offer as Christ's church that the world cannot.

We can support the serious need for healing and for mental health services by knowing that they are from God also. Our job is two-fold: to get people in need safely to clergy or others who can better determine appropriate actions, including possible treatment; and to offer and develop ways for people to connect to God and grow in that relationship. We will need to be spiritual oases and centers of spiritual teaching and growth in the days, weeks, months, and years to come. People need to be shown the love of God and then shown how to be in relationship with God.

Faith

One meaning of faith is "that which we set our heart upon". Knowing that our hearts are fixed on God and that is what we have to offer is the faith that we are always called to share with the world. It will be more important than ever in the times to come. Developing skill and perspective around mental health will be an important component of doing that well.

I am convinced that in addition to all the vital and practical things we do so well to minister in our communities (such as church schools, providing diapers and formula, feeding ministries, etc.), this sense of the faith that we have to offer is the solace the world needs. It will also give us a way to continue to shape the vision for what we do next, what it means to be the church in this pandemic and after. The very nature of living a Christian life is to never deny the brutal and horrible reality of the cross, while living into the promises of the Resurrection given at baptism, this Eastertide – and always.

Diocesan Resources & Announcements

Episcopal House is closed to routine operations at this time. Staff are continuing to work remotely from home, and can be reached via their usual work emails and phone numbers.

[Update on calendar events after April](#)

During this pandemic, our ways of being in community are undergoing a transformation as we strive to comply with Governor Murphy's Executive Orders No. 104 and 107 regarding the need to avoid gatherings.

In addition to our diocesan governance bodies – the Standing Committee, Trustees, and Diocesan Council – continuing their work via online meetings, Bishop Hughes has been working to increase connections throughout the diocese in other ways. Since mid-March she has gathered clergy who are in active ministry in congregations for a weekly Zoom meeting, organized clergy working groups around areas of ministry, and set up regional networks initially for clergy online conversations, which will be expanding soon to connect our congregations and lay members.

The disposition of calendar events scheduled for May is still under discussion. While some events by their nature, such as Confirmation services, must be postponed until we are able to gather again, other events may possibly be conducted online. Plans are under active discussion and will be announced as soon as specifics are available.

[Gratitude Matters: Here I am Lord](#)

By Kathleen Bowen, St. Peter's, Morristown

As fearful as I am at this time, I would still love to be of some use to the community in general. We live in a community of 1,600 residents. Our medical

center and management have added additional time of quarantine to our schedule.

I am always grateful for our Lord, our Saviour and help. We were quarantined already because we were in close proximity to someone off campus, who tested positive for the virus. We wash our hands between us religiously, look out of our window at the approach of spring. Listen to music, books, do puzzles and call our friends, near and far to see how they are feeling. Our voices are cheerful, for those who are still home bound. I want to hold all of GOD'S people in my heart.

The first responders and health care workers are of our first regard. The employees in our community deliver all objects with gloves and masks. We have had some FaceTime with our off-campus doctors. It is our will to help all, whether it is a phone call, a photo, or other contact, or donations to food pantries.

God is always our guide and comforter.