



Highlights of diocesan news in printable format — January 6, 2021

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From Our Bishop

Let's walk bravely, boldly into the light

This is a transcript of a video message.

This is Bishop Hughes in the Diocese of Newark. Christmastide comes to an end today, and we end our celebration of Christmas like good Episcopalians with another celebration. It is the feast of the Epiphany, that feast where we think about the light, about what has appeared in the light, what has been revealed to us, what we have come to know in the light.

Often when we think of the Feast of the Epiphany we think of the magi who were guided by the light to Jesus. I want to expand that and think also about the people who were guided by the light of information. Mary and Joseph, Elizabeth, John the Baptist – all with a light of information given to them by God, having them live their life in a way that took them completely by surprise, moving courageously into that knowledge. I think about the shepherds in the field with the knowledge that the angels gave them, moving courageously beyond that field. They must have been scared to go but they went anyway, moving anyway into that light.

The thing that strikes me about Epiphany and Epiphany light is that it takes courage to walk in that light. It's very different from walking into a dark room and flipping up on a switch and we think, "Oh, I can see everything now, I know exactly where to go." When God flips the switch, when God brings light to us, usually God has so drastically changed everything we know that it feels shaken up or turned around or completely different. As our Presiding Bishop says so

often, "or it has become right side up in a world where everything has been upside down."

It takes courage to walk into that light. And I want to encourage you to live fully into your heart and live fully into courage. That's where courage comes from – it comes from the heart. I want to encourage you to walk into that light and to do so bravely, to do so boldly, because for us in this time that has been pandemic, God has turned on a light. We've been learning something about what the church could be. We've been learning something about who we are called to be as faithful people. And now as we stand just at the beginnings of things beginning to shift and seeing an end to pandemic being a real possibility, I understand the desire to go running back to the church that we were before. And my hope and my energy and my focus is going to be on being the church that God is calling us to be next. I want to walk in that light.

I'm hoping that many of you will find that same courage and will walk in that light also. We'll do it together like we've done so much of this together. I want to invite you to sign up for our January learning event that will be replacing what would have been Convention. We're going to spend our time talking about different ways of being church. How we get more connected to each other and get deeper in our faith and how that impacts us beyond the church. We're going to spend more and more time over the coming months organizing ourselves in such a way that we're ready to be the church that God is calling us to be. Like the magi we're looking for that thing that God is calling us to be next. And I'm pretty convinced that part of walking in that light means that we are being a light to other people.

So have courage, my friends. We will not be in pandemic forever. And the church has something

wonderful in store, but it means going into who we're called, not returning to what we were before. That may take courage, but the light is before us and God is guiding us every step of the way.

Stories from Our Congregations

Christ Church, Teaneck given \$10K for food pantry

By Bill McColl

The food pantry at Christ Church in Teaneck has received a \$10,000 donation to help feed those who have been impacted by the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The board of the Hudson Lutheran Charity chose Christ Church to receive the gift just a week before Christmas.

"I was shocked," says the Rev. Michelle White, vicar at Christ Church. "We depend on small donations, and folks have been faithful in making those small donations. But to receive \$10,000, I was flabbergasted."

The leaders of the charity made the decision after one of the members came to Christ Church to observe the food being distributed.

"We do some research and see who is worthy and might need some help," says board member Ken Wessler. "We've been trying to help food pantries, especially around the holidays."

Wessler notes even though Teaneck might be considered an "affluent" community, that doesn't mean many residents aren't facing some difficult financial choices.

"Things still happen to everybody," he explains. "Do you pay the mortgage or buy food?"

The Rev. White couldn't be more thankful.

"The pantry has grown exponentially in ways I never anticipated," she adds. "We never anticipated this pandemic and food crisis. It's inhumane not to respond. The \$10,000 will help us make a more vigorous response."

The once-modest pantry used to serve a handful of families two Saturdays a month. But after the coronavirus outbreak led to massive unemployment and financial hardships, the demand exploded, and soon the pantry was operating every Saturday, supplying much-needed food and other essentials to hundreds of people each week.

The long lines of those seeking help attracted the attention of members of the local Orthodox Jewish community who live in the neighborhood, and soon donations of food and money came pouring in from them. News about the food distribution effort has prompted gifts from St. Mark's, Teaneck and other churches in the Diocese of Newark; businesses such as Holy Name Hospital, Suez and Bogota Auto Body; Fordham University; and many area residents.

Also noticing the work of the pantry were officials from Bergen County, including Commissioner Tracy Zur, who helped secure a large refrigerator and freezer to store perishable items in the church sanctuary. In addition, the Bergen County Board of Commissioners donated \$5000 in supermarket gift cards to be handed out to those in need and promised to provide a van to be used to transport food from around the county. In addition, the Sheriff's and Prosecutor's Offices have lent assistance in delivering supplies to the church.

Thanks to the efforts of the Rev. White and others, food has been regularly received from a wide range of sources, including Stu Leonard's in Paramus, the Center for Food Action, Community Food Bank of New Jersey and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Monetary donations have gone towards purchasing food and even toys for children whose families

were not able to afford them during the holiday season.

The pantry believes some 10,000 people have gotten food assistance since the COVID-19 outbreak began to significantly affect the country in March.

Because Christ Church is small with limited facilities and depends on members of the congregation and other volunteers to run the pantry, the Rev. White says she hopes to raise enough money to be able to afford to buy more refrigerators and bring in an administrator who can coordinate this now-major Bergen County food assistance program.

And the Hudson Lutheran Charity donation will help support that effort as well.

“There are a lot of things we need to pay for, and \$10,000 is quite a chunk of it,” she explains. “We’re all heartened by such a generous show of support. I’m grateful. I’m really grateful.”

Prison Ministry gets creative during COVID pandemic

By the Rev. Sharon Sheridan Hausman

Online arts workshops. Home delivery of pumpkins and backpacks. Recorded worship.

Like other ministries across the diocese, Prison Ministry spent most of 2020 adapting to the changing circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic to continue serving prisoners and their families.

The year began with an expansion of the ministry’s decades-old program of bringing children for contact visits with parents jailed at the Essex County Correctional Facility in Newark. The diocese provides transportation for the children, who eat dinner, play board games and visit with their parents for two hours.

The children also attended a monthly arts and science enrichment program hosted by House of Prayer in Newark. The program provides transportation, lunch and workshops led by

professional artists and teachers. In January, the children celebrated the Lunar New Year and painted a life-size mural of themselves with the help of diocesan artist Debra Cook that was displayed at Diocesan Convention. In February, the children participated in a drama workshop centered around Black History Month.

Prison Ministry members also worked with adults, leading Bible study, worship and other programs inside two state prisons and visiting an immigrant detainee at the ICE detention center in Elizabeth.

These in-person programs all halted with the pandemic shutdown in March. But the needs didn’t halt. In some ways, they increased, as prisoners faced added restrictions and no visits from family or volunteers, and some of their families experienced greater economic hardship as well as the challenges of their children abruptly moving to all-remote schooling.

The Rev. Nikisha Turner, who coordinates and chaperones the jail visits and enrichment program transportation, kept in touch with the families and monitored their needs. About once a month, she delivered items to cheer and support the children and their caregivers, beginning with Easter baskets.

To help address food insecurity, Prison Ministry has provided grocery cards and Thanksgiving turkey baskets to the families. Deacon Virginia Whatley of Good Shepherd, Fort Lee, secured donations of age-appropriate children’s books as well as chocolate and other treats. And when holding the ministry’s annual back-to-school party wasn’t possible, Turner delivered backpacks filled with donated school supplies and handmade child-size masks for each child. An additional 30-plus backpacks went to children through Apostles House, which houses homeless mothers and children in Newark.

Prison Ministry resumed the enrichment workshops via Zoom in July, beginning with the much-loved drumming instructor Yahaya Kamate, who teaches at the annual drumming camp run by

St. Stephen's in Millburn. (St. Stephen's also was able to hold a modified in-person camp this summer and later to provide Thanksgiving baskets and Christmas gifts to participating families.) Subsequent workshops featured Matt Mitler of the Dzieci Theatre teaching mime, Megan Sweet of Christ Church in Bloomfield and Glen Ridge teaching improv and Episcopal musician Ana Hernandez teaching vocal music.

In October, Dani Pietrowski of Church of the Messiah, Chester, led the children in decorating pumpkins and foam visors at an online Harvest Festival. Each child received a pumpkin, visor and craft supplies. For the annual Christmas party, ordinarily hosted by St. James in Upper Montclair, the children gathered online to decorate ornaments provided by Prison Ministry, listen to a reading of "The Night Before Christmas" and receive a visit from Santa Claus and two small elves. The families later received deliveries of Christmas gifts.

Serving prisoners has proved more challenging, since COVID-19 restrictions prevent volunteers from entering any detention facilities, and technologies such as Zoom are not available for leading online Bible studies or other programs.

Through First Friends, however, Martha Reiner of Grace Church, Nutley, was able to maintain contact by phone with the immigrant detainee she had been visiting and to follow his progress after he was released.

Prison Ministry also provided a recorded Longest Night Worship – an interfaith version of a Blue Christmas service – to the Essex County and Morris County jails, two state prisons, and correctional facilities in New York and California. More than a dozen members of the diocese and the Drew University community and alumni participated in the service, which provided an opportunity for acknowledging grief and loss as well as a message of hope and healing.

Churches and individuals throughout the diocese and beyond have made these continuing ministries possible.

At least 15 churches and multiple individuals in and beyond the diocese as well as churches in the Diocese of New Jersey provided hundreds of Christmas gifts, which were distributed to the families in Prison Ministry's ongoing programs as well as through county jails and other organizations serving children of incarcerated and recently released parents. Volunteers helped transport and sort the gifts.

Prison Ministry also distributed 60 backpacks filled with school supplies thanks to donations from many churches and individuals.

Pat Vine of St. Michael's, Wayne, and Barbara Thompson of Iowa sewed and donated hundreds of masks that were distributed to children in Prison Ministry's programs as well as to children of ICE detainees at the Hudson County Jail.

Individuals and churches throughout the diocese and the Newark chapter of the Union of Black Episcopalians also provided ShopRite cards and monetary donations. Prison Ministry also receives diocesan funding through Alleluia Fund and ACTS/VIM grants and the annual budget.

Moving into 2021, Prison Ministry will continue supporting the families and offering the monthly enrichment program for the children via Zoom until it is safe to resume in-person programming.