



Highlights of diocesan news in printable format — January 20, 2021

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From Our Bishop

Opening our eyes

This is a transcript of a video message.

This is Bishop Hughes in the Diocese of Newark. And I am wondering what God has for all of us to see in this season of Epiphany. We celebrated the start of this season with the feast day a week and a half ago. And this week as we continue into the season of Epiphany – this season of light, the season of God revealing God's self to us in the form of Jesus Christ, this season where God helps us to see with eyes wide open what God is trying to do in the world and in our own lives – we started this week of that season with remembering the life and ministry of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King.

We spent time with our eyes open seeing the passion that he had for those who are oppressed. We spent time with our eyes open seeing his energetic leadership and committed leadership of the Civil Rights movement. We see with our eyes open the dream that he had for every single American. And we can't help but wonder when we see all those things how might God be calling us? What might God have for us to do in this world? How are we to see?

It takes constantly working to open one's eyes. It takes looking sometimes at really difficult things – things that hurt. It takes being willing to disagree with others. And being committed to telling the truth – and the truth based on facts and science

and history – a truth that is actually real. When we open our eyes to the complicated things, to the hard parts of the truth, then we can also open our eyes to see what God is trying to do in the complicated parts of our lives.

It's hard to do that when we hide from it. It's hard to do it with our eyes shut. It's hard to do it when we look away. But the good news is, even if we don't have the kind of clarity of vision that Martin Luther King, Jr. had, even if we don't have a passion that is as deep for our brother or our sister or our neighbor, even if we don't see ourselves as the kind of committed and energetic leader that he was – the truth is God didn't ask us to be him. God created us to be us.

And if we open our eyes and we ask for God's help and step out in faith into a complicated world with complicated facts and history and data that require the best of our thinking and all of our compassion, an abundance of love – that if we step out in faith with that we will meet Jesus there.

It takes opening our eyes. The light is on. Epiphany continues.

Stories from Our Congregations

St. Andrew's helps transform Newark's vacant lots into "Garden of Life"

By Nina Nicholson

Last year, the food pantry at St. Andrew's, Newark rose to the challenge of addressing the exploding need caused by the unemployment that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic. Now they are looking ahead.

"When the pandemic is over, it's not like these people are just going to be employed right away," said the Rev. Sylvester Ekunwe, Vicar of St. Andrew's. "Why not teach people how we can actually use our hands to grow some fresh vegetables?"

He continued, "Even after COVID-19 is no longer a threat, there will still be poor people in these communities who are not eating right, and as a result, impaired with the burden of health issues such as diabetes, high blood pressure, asthma, obesity and nutrient deficiency – the very factors that put them in a high-risk group."

Last August, St. Andrew's started a conversation with the 17th and 18th Streets Community Association, which prior to the pandemic had been meeting regularly in their parish hall. The Community Association was already assisting with the food pantry and other community outreach, such as backpacks for school children.

"We started thinking about having a community garden where we can mobilize the community and to start using the vacant lots in Newark, to see how they can grow some fresh vegetables which they were not getting during a food pantry distribution," said Ekunwe.

"There are so many vacant lots around us – houses that have burned down and the lots have been cleaned up, it's just grass that is growing."

St. Andrew's and the Community Association reached out to Councilman John Sharpe James of Newark's South Ward, who helped them identify which vacant lots owned by the city were available for community gardens. So far, three vacant lots have been identified.

The project is called "Garden of Life."

The City of Newark will loan the lots to Garden of Life free of charge until they are needed for development. In addition, Newark's "Love Your Block" program awarded the project Garden of Life a \$4400 grant.

Community members will be invited to start planting gardens in the lots this spring.

"Even the most affluent communities have pockets of people who are food insecure," said Ekunwe. He encourages other congregations to consider starting a community garden if empty land is available.

Inspired by Cranmer, Lenten program combines daily worship and Bible study

By the Rev. Sharon Sheridan Hausman

A Lenten program created by a liturgy professor and diocesan priest offers a way for congregations to study the Bible within the context of worship and community in a quintessentially Anglican way.

"I've always been really drawn to the preface that [Thomas] Cranmer wrote to his first prayer book," said the Rev. Kevin Moroney, liturgy professor and chapel director at General Theological Seminary in New York and priest-in-residence at St. Peter's, Clifton.

"What he explained in this preface is really that the Holy Scriptures can be learned by reading them,

book by book, continuously nestled within the arms of the daily prayers, morning and evening,” he said. And, when they do so, Cranmer wrote, clergy and laity “become inflamed with the love of God’s true religion.”

“I love that idea,” said Moroney, who also serves on the Episcopal Church Task Force for Liturgical and Prayer Book Revision. “We do that here at General.”

But, he said, “if you don’t have a background with it, the daily offices of the prayer book are a little hard to follow.”

So he created a simplified version of Morning Prayer, short enough to fit on one folded sheet of paper and including one reading, one canticle, one collect and a revised General Thanksgiving. Then he created a daily lectionary of readings using just one book of the Bible – a task that takes about an hour, he said.

Last year, with the blessing of the church visioning group, St. Peter’s members tried out the format as a Lenten study of Luke, Moroney’s favorite Gospel. Each day at home, participants prayed the shortened prayer service using the sequential readings from Luke – usually a chapter or half a chapter at a time. On Sundays, Moroney’s sermons were a teaching on that week’s reading that incorporated questions the congregation submitted ahead of time or asked that day.

The program barely had started when the COVID-19 pandemic forced worship services in the diocese online. “We had about a day to figure out what we were going to do on Sunday,” Moroney recalled. One of the church’s leaders suggested: “Why don’t we just take this as the basis of our Sunday service and keep going with it this way?”

“So that’s what we did. It really became a long-term program.”

St. Peter’s streamed worship over Facebook Live, so Moroney addressed questions he received during the week via e-mail and text and sometimes

online on Sundays during the broadcast. “There was an element of interactiveness. I wouldn’t say that that was the most effective part of it.”

“The real benefit is, you had more people reading more Scripture and praying the daily offices more – at least Morning Prayer more – than was ever true before in this parish,” Moroney said. “And they like it. They wanted to do it again.”

After Easter 2020, the congregation tackled Genesis. Over the summer, they did a thematic study on women of the Bible, from Eve to the women at the tomb. During the fall, they returned to regular Eucharists during in-person worship but moved back online again in Advent. After Christmas, they resumed the Morning Prayer Bible study format with the Book of Exodus.

“In Genesis, we were really taken by the whole idea of providence in the book,” Moroney said. “In Exodus now, we’re dealing with themes of deliverance. We were looking at it on Sunday and how in America ... we tend to craft our narrative from the perspective of who has the power. But in Exodus, the narrative is written from the perspective of the slaves, and that’s a very different way to look at things.”

The simplified Morning Prayer takes about 15 or 20 minutes and leads participants through continuous readings of books of the Bible instead of only certain passages as typically happens with the Revised Common Lectionary.

“What I’m pleased about is ... Episcopal Christians who did not have much background with the Bible, in a year, have significant books of the Bible under their belt,” Moroney concluded. “They’ve read them and they’ve read them within their daily prayer. Their prayer life is growing while their knowledge of Scripture is growing. It’s part of the genius of what Cranmer was trying to do.”

Grants support new era of evangelism

By the Rev. Diana L. Wilcox

A year ago, the sight of tripod mounted cameras, laptops, switching panels, and more in the church on a Sunday would have been a rare sight. Now, these technical tools are the gateway to spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ to a larger community, a new version of our familiar red doors.

Yet audio and video equipment is not inexpensive to obtain, and the increased bandwidth required to leverage them is often costly to install. Diocesan Council saw an opportunity to help the congregations of the diocese cross this technical divide.

At a meeting in the fall of 2020, the Equipping Team, a working group of Diocesan Council, proposed a special grant cycle of the Marge Christie Congregational Growth & Vitality Fund specifically for aiding congregations with these technology purchases. The resolution passed unanimously at the Diocesan Council meeting on October 15, and a call for applications for a special Technology Grant Cycle went out across the diocese.

The Marge Christie Fund was created to provide support to congregational mission and ministry in the diocese, and so it was the perfect match for just this type of assistance to our parishes. The Rev. Deacon Ken Boccino, chair of the board that reviews grant applications for this fund, noted, "These grants for technology support truly live into the fund's purpose by assisting parish families to connect and draw strength from one another during these difficult times."

Thirty-seven churches applied and were rewarded grants totaling \$40,200, to offset the costs of audio and video purchases made since the pandemic, or planned in the months ahead.

"With a \$1991.28 technology grant, the Marge Christie Fund helped to transform the worship experience at St. Stephen's Church in Millburn,"

said the Rev. Paula Toland. "It enabled us to do more than we could have on our own. We went from recording our services on an iPhone, with some obviously amateur editing to ready it for posting on You Tube and Facebook, and additional editing to ready it for local cable access television, a process that took literally hours, to a professional quality live stream on Sunday mornings with just another hour to ready it for the local cable station. It has almost eliminated the anxiety about technical glitches and freed the worship leaders to fully engage in the worship. More importantly, when you join us for worship online, you have a real sense of who we are and how we worship, which is one of the ways we live our faith."

Diocesan Council and the members of the Marge Christie Growth & Vitality Fund Board were pleased to see such a great response to this program and hope that it strengthens our parishes in their efforts to spread the good news of Jesus Christ far and wide. Congregations who were not able to take advantage in this cycle, may still apply for funds as part of future grant cycles.

Diocesan Council is one of the three governing bodies of the diocese, and serves as the "Convention between Conventions," responsible for program and mission of the diocese. Council also has oversight over the diocesan budget, and the grant and loan programs. They meet on the second Wednesday of the month, and members are clergy and lay elected at Diocesan Convention.

The Rev. Diana L. Wilcox is Vice-President of Diocesan Council.