



Highlights of diocesan news in printable format — February 3, 2021

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From Our Bishop

The power of relationships

This is a transcript of Bishop Hughes' message at the beginning of our January online learning event, Faith Groups: Sharing our Lives, Growing in Faith.

It is so good to see you, thank you for making the time. And it does feel slightly out of sorts because this time of year we're usually just in a break time right about now, as we come back to get ready for dinner at our first night of Convention. So I'm glad to be gathering anyway.

I'm especially glad to be gathering at this time because I think we're at a bit of, we're close to a crossroads with a pandemic experience. The way I describe it is we were in a long beginning section that took us about to the summer, and then we were in a really long middle section that was from the mid-summer through about now. And I think as soon as we start hearing those vaccines have spread out and that they're readily available and we're being able to get vaccinated, whoever wants it can get it, I think then we're moving into that kind of longer end section. But we're so close to that long end section. Please do hear me correctly – I don't believe that once that we're vaccinating a million, 10 million people a day that it's over. It's not. It's not going to be over for a while. Get your vaccine, put on your mask, distance and wash your hands. It's going to be like that for another year. That's not going away for a good long while. But, we are at that point where things are going to start

to shift as the vaccine becomes more available and as we move into that time of year where people are outside more, and it's not a negative wind chill like it is today. And so you have to be indoors, and outside is always going to be safer for us.

And while we're at that point it's a good moment to stop and ask ourselves, what has God been doing with us? What have we learned in this time? What do we want to take forward with us? And the thing that I have been asking for months now is, what is the church God is calling us to be? Because clearly God is trying to do a new thing in this time that we're in. That passage that we're concentrating on, that comes from Isaiah, is a prophecy that the prophet Isaiah made to the nation of Israel: "I'm about to do a new thing. Now it springs forth. Do you not perceive it?"

I'm about to do a new thing. It springs forth. Can't you tell? Can't you tell that something new is happening? Now it's out of a much bigger prophecy, because that when the prophet was talking about it, he was saying to Israel, "You guys have had such a hard time living in relationship with God, there's going to be disaster that you walk into, but you need to know that God is prepared for the disaster and God is going to go after the people that bring the disaster to you. When you are captive in their land God is going to come after them and bring you out of that. And God don't want you to look backwards. At that point God wants you to look forward to the new thing that God is doing. It's about to spring forth. Can't you perceive it?"

And I am guessing the nation of Israel, when they heard all of that together, kind of scratched their collective head and said, "No, I don't perceive anything. What are you talking about? Disaster – if there's a disaster coming don't tell me you're going to do me a favor and get me out of it after I've been held captive, and can I see the new thing that is coming – just stop the disaster! How about that? Just prevent that part from happening in the first place!" I imagine that that was just more words that flowed over them.

For the last at least 15 years I have listened to presiding bishops in our church saying, God is trying to do a new thing in the church. I have a sense of this. I can see it. I sat in the room with 2007 with almost 300 priests with Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori at the time talking about the new thing that God was doing. That she could see it as she moved around the country and at that point we, the church, was really fighting with itself because people were leaving the Episcopal Church, upset about various things, including her being presiding bishop. And she's talking about this new thing, and I gotta say that group of 300 priests sat there and listened and smiled and nodded because she's the presiding bishop, and they basically all scratched their head and went, "What is she talking about? We continue to decline in number." The presiding bishop, Bishop Curry says the same thing. That God is trying to do a new thing. And he keeps talking about this Jesus Movement and the Way of Love, and the Way of Love is going to change all things. Tell that to George Floyd! Seriously, where's the new thing?

Here is the interesting part of it for us head scratchers that are going, where's the new thing? What has completely changed the game was disaster came upon us. Pandemic changed it all for us and God is doing new things among us, because this disaster forced new things. Hear me right, I am not saying that God brought pandemic so that God could make change. God's been trying to make this change for a very long time. And we have said,

"Well that sounds very nice, but here's the way we've always done it. And we're just going to keep on doing what we always do because we know we like it. And then people who like it like us, great, they can come, and if they don't like it like us, maybe they need to find another place to go, because we're gonna do it the way we've always done it."

I was giving some thought to some new things just this afternoon. I was like, okay, what new things have I experienced personally? I'm betting you have experienced some of these and you could add to the list. But the new things that Covid has brought into my life: working from home. This is it, this is my office, this is the Cathedral, this is where I see the doctor, this is where I talk to my family, this is where I talk to my friends. Everything happens right here. Sometimes the dog is in my lap. Sometimes I have coffee with me. But every single thing I do is right this place right here. And if I had children I'd be doing school right here. But my whole life happens within the frame of this laptop.

Masks. I don't know about you but were you like at the beginning trying to find the perfect mask because all we needed was one, and then we realized we need, like, 50, because we wear them out or we need to change them and they get dirty.

Distancing. Zoom. Facebook live. YouTube streaming. Taping – taping sermons, taping birthday songs, taping wishes for a happy anniversary, taping everything and sending it to people so that they can hear, you see your face and hear you speak at the same time.

Online church. Online doctor's visits. Online meetings. Online school. Online about every interaction that I need to have. Mourning without funerals. Remembering somebody's life without sitting in the room with the whole family. Senior hours at the grocery store. Covid itself – that word is new. Coronavirus is new. Cooking, cooking, cooking. I love to cook but I gotta tell you I have to

cook a lot now, and I don't love it every single time that I'm cooking right now.

Praying in our own words. Daily Morning Prayer. Daily Evening Prayer. Daily Compline. Quiet. Time with family. It's the end of January. In my little neighborhood the Saturday after Christmas all Christmas lights are down off of all the houses. We are lit up like Las Vegas around here. It makes me so happy everybody kept all their lights up. It is just so joyous and cheerful to see that out every single night.

Online bishop's visits. Time to read. Time to pray.

All of this change, all of these new things that we've been doing – some on our own, some with each other, some with people we did not know before – all of these things have been changing the church, they've been changing us as individuals, and they've been changing the whole wide world. It's given God space. This change has given God space to do new things with us. To do new things in us. To do new things for us. To shape us into new things. The challenge for us is the same challenge Israel had, because right about that time we start thinking in gathering worship, the first in-person worship, the first thing we start thinking of is, "Well, this is how we always do it."

And what might God want to do with us that is different? That's why we're here tonight.

There has been much change that I've been hearing from you all throughout lay visits, conversations with you in smaller groups and smaller meetings, the one overriding thing I hear from people on Sunday mornings, is how much their faith has deepened or grown or expanded. People use different language to talk about it. That they can tell a difference in who they are now spiritually and who they were when this whole thing began.

If I looked at three specific things that I think God is doing new, and specifically with the church, there are three particular areas. One is this area of

growing in the faith. A real sense of people having their own connection to God that is not just what I receive on Sunday morning. But that it is something that is alive and well all other days of the week. All the seven days, not simply the one day out of seven. And that sense of growing and confidence and the ability to lean into God's presence is something that people have continued to build and get more strong in and more comfortable in. So that growing in the faith part is important.

The other part is sharing the faith. That's evangelism – sharing the faith. And we've been sharing the faith online primarily. It's a very interesting thing to me when Episcopalians didn't think of themselves as sharing the faith but they were just telling somebody where they're going to church or they're just posting their service as they sit there online or they have a watch party so other people can do it. We've been sharing the faith and there's a whole piece around the online community. I feel like we are looking at the tip of the iceberg and down below, down underneath all of this, is a mammoth structure that we haven't even gotten to yet. We have time though. That's a new thing God has been doing with us.

And the last piece I would say is caring for the community. Caring for the community – notice how I don't say outreach, and notice how I don't say mission or ministry to those who are in trouble, or doing some good, or doing our mercy – it's caring for the community. There have been, I would say, thousands of Episcopalians in northern New Jersey that have been doing everything they could to make sure somebody has something to eat and that no one is going to bed hungry. And there have been thousands of Episcopalians in northern New Jersey who have been learning about taking steps towards figuring out what they can do to take a stance to bring an end to racism and an end to white supremacy. Even if they had never ever thought about being active about that before, they

are figuring that out and kind of developing the muscle to be able to do those things.

It's that those three pieces are new things that we're going to take with us into the end of pandemic and beyond. But this piece, the piece about growing the faith, is the fundamental piece that fuels everything else. And it's why we're here tonight. It's about the power of relationship – it's what makes us care for the community. It's the power of relationship – it's what makes us invite somebody. And no, you don't have to be lonely, you can come and sit and listen to this, and when you get tired of watching just click off. But you can join for the part you want to join for. That's the power of relationship that does that. And this construct that we're going to talk with you about tonight, Faith Groups, is a place to build those relationships with each other, and to build those relationships with God.

It may feel to some people strange and antithetical, and you might scratch your head a little bit going, "I'm not sure what the purpose is. Aren't we supposed to have a task? Aren't we supposed to have something to report out to people? Where's our list? Who's taking notes? What's our time deadline?" Here's what the purpose is. Jesus sat at a table with his friends, took bread, blessed it, broke it, shared a meal with them. And they sat at that table as friends – talking, praying, laughing, maybe crying – friends who followed Jesus.

He changed their lives, and their lives have changed ours.

We're gonna learn, in this new thing that God is doing with us, we're going to learn how to be with each other. Support each other in our faith. Pray for each other. Help each other. See the things that God is doing among us – sometimes we can't see them ourselves but we can always see it in somebody else's life what God is doing, but we can't see it for ourselves. And it means that we'll gather with that group of people for a period of

time and do what Jesus and those who loved him did: be friends together.

God is doing a new thing. It's not that God's about to do a new thing. God is doing a new thing. And I know we know it here, that the quintessential explanation came maybe two months, maybe three months after pandemic began, at a lay meeting, and someone said it then so well, and I've heard many people say it in different ways since. But what that woman said – and I wish I had her name so I could always give her the credit for the quote – but what she said that night was, "I know I want to go back into my church but I don't want to go back how it was." She's at a Zoom church, and she goes, "On Zoom, I see everybody's face. And at coffee hour I get to hear how everybody is doing. And I don't want to go back and look at the back of everybody's head, and talk to the same handful of people that I talk to every Sunday. And I don't know how we do that, but I'm not going backwards."

This, tonight, is how we do that. I'm so glad you're here. I'm so looking forward to seeing what God is going to do with you and with others in our diocese. Only good things will come. God will bless your time together.

Diocesan Resources & Announcements

Mental & Spiritual Health Minute: St. Brigid's Day Blessing

By your friends at the Episcopal Mental & Spiritual Health Crisis Ministry

Happy Spring! In the Celtic calendar, at least. The ancient Celts celebrated February 1st as Imbolc, the first day of spring – and in the Christian tradition in Ireland and the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, it also became St. Brigid's Day. (Brigid's name may be spelled in various ways.)

The ancient Celtic goddess Brigid had been associated with fire, and St. Brigid assumed most of the ancient goddess's qualities. So there was a natural connection between spring's arrival with its increasing light; fire; and St. Brigid. Legend had it that Brigid was carried off to Bethlehem to assist Mary at Jesus' birth, and she was present at the Temple with Mary for her purification 40 days later. It was said that Brigid walked to the Temple in front of Mary, carrying a lighted candle in each hand. Although the winds were fierce, the flames on the candles neither flickered nor failed. This is how St. Brigid became associated with Candlemas on February 2nd.

Leave it to the Celts to not let the truth get in the way of a good story! Brigid apparently had no problem conquering time travel and geography in order to help Mary give birth and recover afterward.

We may still be in the depths of winter according to the calendar and public health experts battling the pandemic, but the light is increasing on both fronts. To help you know that you are not alone as we continue our journey toward spring, may this portion of a Blessing of Brigit bring you comfort as you recite it and imagine this strong, generous, and wise saint traveling with you:

Blessing of Brigit

I am under the shielding
Of good Brigit each day;
I am under the shielding
Of good Brigit each night.

I am under the keeping
Of the Nurse of Mary,
Each early and late,
Every dark, every light.

Brigit is my comrade-woman,
Brigit is my maker of song,
Brigit is my helping-woman,
My choicest of women, my guide.

(Carmina Gadelica, pp. 238-239)

For mental & spiritual health resources, please visit njmindsandspirit.org. Confidential help for clergy is available on the Clergy Warm Line at 609-365-WARM (9276) on Wednesday mornings from 10 am to 12 pm and Fridays from 4 to 6 pm; if you call outside those times, please leave a message and a counselor will get back to you at the next scheduled time. ***If you are experiencing a mental health emergency, please call 911 or contact the Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-8255.***

Even a pandemic can't stop Alleluia Fund support

Thanks to the generous financial support of many individuals across the diocese, as well as congregational support and funds specifically allocated to outreach in the diocesan budget, The Alleluia Fund for Outreach was able to make grants totaling \$145,000 to 28 nonprofits across northern New Jersey and internationally.

Diocesan Council approved the grants at their December 9, 2020 meeting.

With these funds, our Alleluia Fund partners will assist many of the most vulnerable of God's people in our diocese. Our 2020 Alleluia Fund partners are:

- Faith Kitchen – Brown Bag Lunch Assistance
- Communities of Faith for Housing – The Hoboken Shelter
- Meeting Emergency Needs with Dignity – Healthy Pantries, Healthy Patrons
- Seamen's Church Institute
- Jerusalem Princess Basma Center – Virtual/Residential Family Empowerment
- Love Must Act, Inc. – Academic Expense for Holy Cross School in Grahamstown, South Africa
- Family Promise of Bergen County – Shelter Funding Support
- The Episcopal Church of St. Luke & St. Mary, Hope/Belvidere – Afghan School Project
- United Community Corporation – Emergency Services

- Pathways to College
- St. Mark's Church, Teaneck – St. Mark's Quilters
- Family Promise of Sussex County – Housing Stabilization
- Jubilee Outreach Community Center, Orange – Food Pantry / Soup Kitchen
- Episcopal Jersey City – Triangle Park Community Center
- Greater Life Inc. – Kidstitute Education Enrichment Program
- Newark Shared Ministries – All The Way Up GED/ABE (Adult Basic Education) Classes & Tutoring Program
- Haven of Hope for Kids
- Christ Church CDC, Hackensack – Homeless Shelter Support
- Church of the Messiah, Chester – Senior Resource Center
- St. Matthew Trinity Lunchtime Ministry, Hoboken
- St. Peter's Haven, Clifton – Pantry Renovation Project
- My Sister's Lighthouse Resource Center, Inc. – Domestic & Sexual Violence support service in Newark
- Englewood, St. Paul's Church, Englewood – Youth Mental Health Training
- The GRACE Project, Inc. – Kenyan Education/Healthcare & Vocation Training
- Diocese of Newark Prison Ministry – Children's Arts & Sciences Enrichment Program
- St. Peter's Church, Morristown – Success For All Academic Assistance Program
- Family Promise of Hudson County – Funding Case Management/Case Aides
- St. Paul's CDC, Paterson – Emergency Men's Shelter

Clergy ministry transitions

Arrivals:

The Rev. Kevin Moroney, Priest-in-Residence, St. Peter's, Clifton - NOV 1, 2020

The Rev. Paul Rajan, Priest-in-Residence, Good Shepherd, Wantage - JAN 1, 2021

The Rev. Diana Wilcox, Priest-in-Residence, Annunciation, Oradell - JAN 1, 2021
in addition to continuing as Rector of Christ Church Bloomfield, Glen Ridge