



Highlights of diocesan news in printable format — July 21, 2021

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## From Bishop Hughes

### Perseverance and hope

*This is a transcript from a video message.*

This is Bishop Hughes in the Diocese of Newark and I want to talk with you about perseverance and hope.

It's easy to see these qualities in people who are preparing for the Olympics. They have been training and training and training, and going to competition after competition, and headed to those Olympic trials all in the hopes of being selected to go to the Olympics. And then they train and train and train some more, wanting to compete with the best of the best, all in the hope that in that competition they might potentially get a medal. It is that hope for the end goal. It is that hope to live directly into the gift that they've been given as athletes, and to do it well, and to do it with others who do it well, that gives them the ability to persevere – to push on through to the next thing. I can't imagine that every single day they wake up thinking, "Let me get to the gym, let me get out on the road, let me start running, let me start lifting weights." I imagine that there are days where they look forward to that – I imagine there are days when they just don't feel like it. But they persevere because of the hope that is in them, that thing that gives them the desire for what they want to get to.

It's important for us to think about that hope that is within us right now, especially at this unexpected turn in pandemic this summer. We expected this to be a summer of great joy and so far it has been, reconnecting with family and with friends that we haven't seen in such a long time. The ability to hug again, to be able to be in conversation with our mask off, to gather with great ease for worship and for meetings and Bible studies and prayer groups and choir rehearsals – all those things that we have started back up again. And what a surprise it was to us when suddenly the infection rates started to spike back up here in northern New Jersey with a 65% vaccination rate. The fact that those infection rates still went back up anyway. One of our counties went red, into the red zone, with high infection rate this past week, and we expect another one will happen within the next few days. That's been a change to everything that we had just begun to enjoy.

It could be easy right now simply to be discouraged or to be frustrated. It's hard to know exactly what is driving this. It could be the relaxation in safety protocols, it could be the new delta variant – it's difficult for us to know exactly what it is. We simply know that it is and once again we must be careful.

And what I want to encourage us to do is to hold on to the hope that God has planted in us: the hope for being the kind of church that God wants us to be next, the kind of church that is being shaped in this time. All of us are being changed in this time, into being more faithful, more compassionate, more compelling Christians in all of

this. It's important for us to hold on to that hope as we persevere, as we push on through this.

Now I'm not always going to want to put my mask on, but I'm going to do it anyway. Not just because it keeps me safe but it keeps everybody else around us safe. And it gives me the ability to continue to be able to be in front of people, if I have that mask on and they have their mask on.

By persevering to I want to encourage each of us to ask ourselves, ask our doctors, ask our local department of health: how can we help? Is there something that we can do in households? Is there something that we can do as friends or family members? Is there is there a way for us to approach those we know who do not want to be vaccinated, not because they can't be vaccinated for health reasons, but who don't want to be vaccinated because they don't understand that information? How can we share that information and do that in a way that is compassionate and caring and not judgmental?

This time of perseverance is a time for us to try new things, to look to assist in any way that we can, that our communities and our churches and our households and our schools and our workplaces are all safe. And that we encourage others who are worried or who are afraid, that they can be safe too. God is not going to leave us. God has been with us through every single bit of this pandemic and will continue to guide us. And part of the way God guides us is to give us that hope for the future and the ability to push on through, to persevere until we get to that place.

# Stories from Our Congregations

## Confirmation projects in Tenafly focus on racism

*By the Rev. Lynne Bleich Weber*

What do the National Basketball Association, the Grammy Awards, and many workplaces in America have in common? At the Juneteenth/Father's Day service on June 20, the Confirmation Class at Church of the Atonement in Tenafly reported to the congregation that these are three of many sectors of society where systemic racism has damaged lives in the past and continues to do so.

During the pandemic, the 2021 class – Phoebe, Anotida and Devon, met online with their teachers Carol Petrovich and Bryon Roshong every Sunday, via Zoom. The class covered many standard areas, including The Bible, The Book of Common Prayer, The Episcopal Church, and relationships. The Confirmands discussed what they would do for their Confirmation projects. Before the pandemic, each Confirmand would have had an individual project, working with a mentor from the congregation. But 2020-2021 was like no other year, so a joint Confirmation project seemed best.

One Sunday, the lesson was focused on I John 4:7-16. The teens discussed what it meant to love one another, to love everyone. The subject of racism came up, but not surprisingly the discussion ran out of time. So, in the next week's class the subject continued, and the teachers talked about Presiding Bishop Curry's call for us to walk in love as Jesus did.

Phoebe, Devon and Ano reflected on this call and decided to work together on their own definition of systemic racism, which was included in the bulletin when they made their presentations.

Each Confirmand began their project by interviewing an adult member of the congregation about their experiences of racism. Then they chose an area of society in which to do research. Phoebe chose the entertainment industry, specifically the Grammy awards. Devon chose professional sports, examining the NBA. Ano chose the business world, looking at hiring and firing practices, promotions, and compensation.

On Sunday, June 20, in place of the sermon, each teen gave their PowerPoint presentation to the congregation, including facts and figures, and a Bible reference. After much applause, the service continued with the Renewal of Baptismal Vows, special prayers, the Sending of the 2020 Confirmands Zach and John, recognition of Graduates, and Holy Communion. The congregation recessed out of the church singing, “We shall overcome.” Then the congregation enjoyed hearing Atonement’s choir sing together for the first time since the pandemic began over a year before.

## Media Coverage

### Q&A: Westina Matthews, on authoring ‘This Band of Sisterhood: Black Women Bishops on Race, Faith, and the Church’

*Pat McCaughan | Episcopal News Service*

The unique blessings, joys, frustrations, challenges and realities faced by the first five African American women diocesan bishops in The Episcopal Church are explored in candid conversations in “This Band of Sisterhood: Black Women Bishops on Race, Faith, and the Church,” compiled and edited by Westina Matthews.

Matthews, an adjunct professor at the General Theological Seminary’s Center for Christian Spirituality, wrote in an August 1984 *New York Times* [op-ed](#) article of her own sense of loneliness

as “the first, the only, or one of the few” Blacks in her academic and professional settings, a feeling she began having as early as age 4 when she was enrolled in a newly desegregated school.

Membership in this “exclusive club” continued throughout a 40-year career in leadership positions as an educator, researcher, grant-maker, public servant and author. Matthews is committed to education, particularly for women and people of color, and she holds bachelor’s, master’s and doctorate degrees in the field. She was the first woman and first person of color to be elected a trustee of the Merrill Lynch Foundation, where she grew the company’s annual charitable giving from \$5 million to \$35 million.

“Blacks who have worked hard, played by the rules and attained prominent positions,” enjoy this exclusive membership, but “even in the 1980s we are considered anomalies,” she wrote back then in the Times. “We are continually scrutinized and, yes, asked for explanations,” as if to have firsthand knowledge about the motives of other African Americans whose actions are less than perfect.

From a long line of African Methodist Episcopal ministers, including her father, uncle and grandfather, Matthews exhibited leadership qualities early on, running for president of her Yellow Springs, Ohio, third-grade class — and losing by one vote. She hadn’t voted for herself, an early but enduring life lesson.

Matthews became an Episcopalian about 15 years ago. She has served on the Trinity Church Wall Street vestry; written three books and numerous articles; and as an adjunct professor for a decade, has taught and supervised prospective spiritual directors at GTS.

A chance conversation in a Colorado airport in 2018 with West Tennessee Bishop Phoebe Roaf became the inspiration for “This Band of Sisterhood.” The book includes frank, vulnerable conversations with Indiana Bishop Jennifer Baskerville-Burrows (consecrated April 29, 2017),

Newark Bishop Carlye Hughes (Sept. 22, 2018), Roaf (May 4, 2019), Colorado Bishop Kimberly Lucas (May 18, 2019) and Vermont Bishop Shannon MacVean-Brown (Sept. 28, 2019).

The rest of ENS' interview with Matthews has been condensed and edited into the Q&A below.

**ENS:** Your experiences run the gamut — preacher's daughter, teacher, grant-maker, vice president of the Jackie Robinson Foundation, author, spiritual teacher. How do you describe yourself?

**Matthews:** First and always, I am a PK — a preacher's kid, a child of God, and I've been faithful and spent my life living into the call. This has taken me down many different paths. It looks eclectic, but there is a divine plan: to love, to serve, to teach, to write, and that's the call and that's what I do, and to stay open to paths I might not have considered.

**ENS:** Is that how "This Band of Sisterhood" came about?

**Matthews:** Yes. Bishop Phoebe Roaf and I were attending a [Gathering of Leaders](#) meeting in Colorado, and we were waiting for ground transportation to the retreat center. At first, I didn't understand she was a bishop. She told me that Black women clergy really wanted to get the five Black women diocesan bishops together in a conference. I thought it sounded like a book. She asked the other bishops if they would consider it, and they all said yes, and then we started.

**ENS:** This band of sisterhood — the women included in the book — are very different, from different places, had different careers and training: a lawyer, interior designer, human resources professional, architectural preservationist. What did you discover about them while working on this book?

**Matthews:** I had thought about one-on-one interviews, but they wanted to do the book together. They looked forward to being with one another. I realized it was a gift to them, as well,

that they could come together and share what they were thinking, feeling, experiencing. At the end of each of our meetings, I would ask one of them to pray spontaneously. Bishop Carlye very graciously prayed and talked about this band of sisterhood. She was so grateful to be with women who get it, who she didn't have to explain things to, during one of the craziest times of her life. I knew when I heard it, that was the title.

Curiously, the very first thing they wanted to talk about was growing up Black in the church. Some grew up in a Black church, some did not, but they shared their formational journey early in their lives.

**ENS:** How do they view their elections, in most cases, to predominantly white dioceses?

**Matthews:** It's not bishop talk. They started right in, talking about being Black women. You can't untangle it, being a Black woman in the church. They're prayer warriors, struggling with being leaders. They talked about their concerns and family demands and managing their own self-care during this challenging time — with the pandemic and racial unrest and the election.

**ENS:** What are some of those challenges?

**Matthews:** They talk about healing the church and community and having fierce conversations. Bishop Shannon's brother was arrested in the middle of all of this. He was arrested because he was a Black man, walking where he wasn't supposed to be. I wondered if we should include it in the book and she said, "Yes, tell it. It happened."

Bishop Kym is in an interracial marriage, and she talks about raising biracial children and how she's helping them understand their responsibility to the Black community.

It's a great book because it's their voices, them talking about when we say, "We are the church," who's "we"? And who's at the table and how do we get more people at the table? How are we a place for everyone?

**ENS:** What were their similarities?

**Matthews:** I don't think any of them thought, initially, that they'd be a priest. Other people saw that in them. But they all shared leadership qualities, early on. Several talked about having no role models, no Black women priests. A couple were very honest about how, when they got to college, they decided they were giving up religion and almost walked away from it all.

They talked about their experiences of being in seminary and as new priests. Bishop Shannon was tall and pregnant in seminary and the one other Black woman was short and not pregnant, but everyone kept getting them mixed up. She experienced a lot of racism in seminary, which surprised her. She started praying for whatever church some of those people would be going to. Those experiences are real.

**ENS:** What else would you like our readers to know?

**Matthews:** Bishop Jennifer said she wondered if there would be seven now (since the book was conceived, two other African American women have been elected diocesan bishops: Chicago Bishop-elect Paula Clark and Pittsburgh Bishop-elect Ketlen Solak) if it had not been for Presiding Bishop Michael Curry.

The book is dedicated to Bishop Suffragan Barbara Harris, the first woman and first African American woman elected a bishop in The Episcopal Church (and the Anglican Communion). And let's not forget Bishop Gayle Harris, who succeeded her and who, for 13 years, was all we had. She and Barbara Harris ([who passed away in March 2020](#)) are the foremothers that started this band of sisterhood.

*The Rev. Pat McCaughan is a priest in the Diocese of Los Angeles and an ENS correspondent.*

# Diocesan Announcements

## Clergy ministry transitions

### Arrivals

- **The Rev. Aaron Oliver**, Priest-in-Residence, St. Andrew's, Harrington Park - May 30
- **The Rev. Deacon Lorna Woodham**, Clergy-in-Charge, Christ Church, Budd Lake - August 1

### Departures

- **The Rev. Alexei Khamin**, Priest-in-Residence, St. John the Divine, Hasbrouck Heights - June 30