



Highlights of diocesan news in printable format — August 4, 2021

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From Canon Wright

The Journey Forward continues

By the Rev. Canon Dr. Andrew R. Wright

In the course of the summer we have seen our entire diocese move to a lower risk level (Yellow or Medium Risk on covidactnow.org) in June, but many counties in our diocese have returned to a higher risk level (Orange or High Risk) since then and, in the case of Essex County for a week or so, even a brief return to Red or Very High Risk level. As of this writing at the end of July, all our counties are Orange/High except for one Yellow/Medium county. These recent changes in risk levels weren't from daily case numbers, which many of us became accustomed to watching and tracking day by day – and rejoicing when they finally started declining in April and May. The risk level changes we've seen in the last two months or so have been to an increasing **infection rate**.

Ideally, the infection rate should be as low as possible – it represents, on average, how many people one infected person is infecting. When the infection rate is less than 1, then that means that the number of infected people is shrinking and not growing. Above 1 means that the number of people infected will be increasing. The growing presence of the delta variant of COVID-19 is likely a large part of this increase in infection rate, since it is much, much more contagious than the previous strains of COVID that we have seen.

What this means for our churches is to continue to keep up the very good work you all have been doing throughout this pandemic – though it is weary work at this point. All of us are well and truly “done” with this pandemic, but it is not, it seems, done with us just yet.

In fact, our Diocesan Confirmation services have had to make several changes to adjust to risk level shifts. When a Confirmation service is in a county that turns Orange/High, then we have had to reduce the music and singing, limit the altar party to a minimum, and omit Communion, to keep the service shorter and to reduce the number of people gathering. We actually moved an entire Confirmation service out of Essex County on short notice, because the risk level had moved to Red/Very High, which meant that we couldn't gather in-person, according to our guidelines. By moving it to a safer location, we could still have the service.

Anyone can access the covidactnow.org information – it's updated every day usually around 1 pm ET -and you can put in your county to see the current risk factors and risk level – as well as other statistics like the fully vaccinated percentage and the 1-shot vaccinated percentage. I encourage every congregation to have someone who monitors that site on a daily basis for your county – many of our clergy and wardens already do, but anyone could offer to do so. When a change happens in risk level, that may mean a change in how the church gathers for worship or other meetings. Your

clergy and vestry will have to determine how to proceed when a risk level change occurs.

Detailed information on our guidelines for each risk level can be found in our Journey Forward page. These guidelines were updated in May, so be sure you're using the current document.

The basics haven't changed much. Remember that distancing, masks, and washing hands are essential and that events outdoors are safer than indoors and that gatherings, including worship, should be kept brief.

- Social distancing of 6' between people from different households should be maintained. I think this is one of the hardest ones to continue to do – if you're meeting in person, make sure pews/seats are marked off and give people clear signs about distancing when standing (to go to Communion, for example). I think that this may be the item that has become the least well-maintained on our list.
- Masks indoors are very important and aren't a bad idea outdoors as well, but less critical. Remember that our churches don't check vaccination status of those attending, are open to all people – which includes those who cannot be vaccinated. Wearing a mask is a sign of hospitality and love and concern for one's neighbor. The Diocese of Newark has maintained masks indoors at all gatherings as one of our guidelines.
- Hand washing and sanitization is just a good idea, pandemic or no. But especially when Communion is being administered, the Celebrant should be very intentional about sanitizing their hands and communicants are encouraged to do so also (since incidental contact between the hands of the celebrant and communicant is always possible).
- While it may be more comfortable indoors when the weather isn't cooperating, remember that indoor events have higher

risk. Please be sure your space is well ventilated if you are meeting indoors. Outdoors is always safer, when it's possible to be outside.

- Keeping services shorter (or other gatherings) is an important tool. When possible, worship services should be no longer than 45 minutes or so. Make intentional choices for music, lessons, and preaching to keep the service time in a safer range.

When the risk level is at Red/Very High, our guidelines indicate returning to streaming/recorded/online worship only with a minimal crew on site to create the video. When the risk level is at Orange/High, our guidelines allow in-person gatherings within some limits, but are very careful about some particular details like singing (only a soloist, masked) and doesn't encourage social gatherings like coffee hour. At Yellow/Medium, our guidelines indicate that choral or congregational singing is fine, if masked, and still has some limits on how much congregational singing should take place indoors. At Yellow, a limited outdoor coffee hour is possible. The Quick Reference Guide may be helpful as a reminder.

So check through the guidelines again, keep an eye on covidactnow.org, and pray for all those who continue to become infected, those who are suffering with COVID, those who care for them, and for all those who continue to die as a result of COVID-19. Overall, we are doing much better than we were months ago or a year ago, but we have a ways to go yet.

Pax,
Canon Wright

Features

Prison Ministry arranges kids' outing to Cross Roads Camp

By the Rev. Sharon Sheridan Hausman

More than a dozen children and teens from Newark and East Orange recently enjoyed a day of summer-camp fun in the country when Cross Roads Camp and Conference Center hosted participants in the Diocese of Newark Prison Ministry's PATCH II (Parents and Their Children) program.

The youngsters started their outing with a cookout prepared by volunteers from Church of the Messiah, Chester, and St. Peter's, Morristown. The meal ended with a birthday celebration of ice cream and homemade cupcakes for a boy turning 14 that day.

Then Cross Roads staff led participants – including the adult chaperones – in scaling the rock-climbing wall and tie-dyeing T-shirts. Julie Crawford of Messiah, who coordinates the Good News Garden at the camp, led everyone on a scavenger hunt to identify plants in the garden. Youngsters also harvested some ripe vegetables and brought home their own planted seeds to grow.

The day ended with swimming in the camp pool.

For more than 30 years, Prison Ministry has brought children to visit parents incarcerated in the Essex County Jail. Supported by congregations throughout the diocese and diocesan grants, Prison Ministry also provides enrichment programs, holiday parties, school supplies and camping opportunities for children with parents who are incarcerated or recently released from incarceration.

The Cross Roads outing marked the first in-person activity for PATCH II since the COVID-19 forced a suspension of jail visits. Prison Ministry moved its enrichment programs online and delivered holiday

gifts, school supplies, books, grocery cards and other items to the families' homes to support them during the pandemic.

St. Peter's Haven celebrates 35 years serving homeless families

By Pam Fueshko

The 1980s saw the founding of St. Peter's Haven, a transitional homeless shelter for families. In 1981, the rector of St. Peter's, Clifton, the Rev. Jorge Gutierrez, stated to a reporter; "Somewhere I'm sure there's a group whose needs are not being met... maybe the church can begin to meet those needs."

The original idea for St. Peter's Haven came from Clifton resident Donald Fischer. Fischer was the Senior Warden and organist at the time. He had read an article about a homeless couple living on the banks of the Passaic River because the only available shelters were for single adults based on their gender and they didn't want to be separated. He brought it to the attention of the Vestry, who at the time were debating on whether to tear down the original church rectory for parking. He asked the members how they could vote to tear down a perfectly good building when there were homeless families in need of shelter. It was the spark needed to seek funding for the Haven whose goal is to assist families of any configuration who find themselves in need of temporary housing in order to keep the families intact to maintain their normal rhythm of life.

The Haven opened its first shelter in the former rectory on October 30, 1986. In 1991, the Rev. Bonnie Perry, Interim Rector took up where the Rev. Gutierrez left off, by challenging local political leaders on the statistics of homelessness in Clifton. The Haven's food pantry originally started to provide food for the family in the Haven absorbed the city's food pantry to meet the needs of those in the community struggling with food insecurity. In 2002, thanks to a bequest from parishioner Ella

Brooks, a two family house “Ella’s House” was purchased for additional families to be sheltered.

The Haven has continued to expand its services, offering case management for all resident families, helping them connect to mental health and substance abuse programs, employment and education programs, and financial entitlements. In 2018, in partnership with the City of Clifton, the Haven launched an outreach program to help the unsheltered homeless living on the streets. The Food Pantry has grown with the help of local businesses and organizations to offer fresh food, baked goods and even pet food, and is now serving over 500 families (1600+ person) per month. Thanks to a wonderful cadre of dedicated volunteers, the Haven also distributes backpacks and school supplies for the school year, Thanksgiving dinner including turkey and all the fixings, holiday gifts and winter coats.