



Highlights of diocesan news in printable format — September 8, 2021

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From Bishop Hughes

Start with one thing today

This is a transcript from a video message.

This is Bishop Hughes in the Diocese of Newark. When I ask people how they're doing these days, most often they tell me that they are overwhelmed. Overwhelmed by pandemic that seems to be never ending and leads to all kinds of challenges. And how to keep oneself safe and one's family safe. Overwhelmed by those who refuse to wear a mask and refuse to get vaccinated when we all know that the path to freedom from pandemic are those two things. Overwhelmed by the state of the world. We all watched Afghanistan with our hearts breaking over the last two weeks and it wasn't just the hearts of those in the United States, it was the hearts of people all over the world watching that scenario as it played out. Overwhelmed by the changes in our climates. Whoever would have thought that in New Jersey we would need to be careful and watch out for tornadoes but as it turns out, this time of year, on a regular basis, we need to have our eyes out for tornadoes in New Jersey.

I understand why people are overwhelmed and I want to invite us to remember the way Jesus spoke to the disciples and spoke to us. In Matthew, when Jesus sent the disciples out, he said, "I send you out like sheep among wolves; you will need to be as wise as serpents and as innocent as doves." And that is still our role. The same way the disciples had

that role, we face a complex stew of very hard and difficult, thorny issues – some that feel downright hostile to us, the way a wolf would be snapping at our heels. And it's going to take wisdom, it is going to take discernment to decide what we do with our time and what we do with our attention. And it will take that innocence – the innocence and purity that comes from knowing that God is with us and knowing that God loves us – in order to face that which we need to face.

I think we get overwhelmed when we think we, on our own, must change the whole world or that we, on our own, cannot change the difficult issues that are facing us. And there is rightness to that: on our own, we cannot do it. But if every single one of us does a little bit, if every single one of us does one thing only, then God, working through us, is able to make big changes in the world.

So I encourage you – today even – to start. Start with picking one thing, one thing that you're going to do. What's one thing you can do in your family or in your household – to have that conversation with them or take that one action in order to help everyone be safe or feel safe? What's one thing that you can do to help people who are displaced – like those Afghan refugees and so many refugees that are needing help in our country and across the world? What one phone call can you make, what one gift can you offer, what one thing can you do about climate care? I know I find that to be a large topic and I feel like I cannot make a difference... but the one thing I can do today is drive less. So today, I will drive less. That is my one thing to do.

Our one thing takes us away from thinking that we've got to fix the whole world on our own or that the world is impossible to fix. And if each of us does our one thing, then there we are being wise like Jesus told us to be. Wise and relying on God in that pure and innocent way that Jesus asked us to rely on God – the God who goes before us, the God who goes with us, and the God who goes behind us – helping us to accomplish that one thing.

Start with one thing today.

From Canon Wright

Episcopal House reopens

After almost 18 months, Episcopal House has reopened, beginning yesterday, September 7th. In March 2020, Bishop Hughes closed Episcopal House for routine use as part of our response to the pandemic. This decision was reinforced by the Governor of New Jersey's directive at the time that anyone who could work from home should do so. Most of the diocesan staff has been working from home either completely or on a hybrid schedule, though some staff members have been in the building regularly, depending on their work responsibilities. Episcopal House has also been closed to diocesan meetings and events during this time.

Diocesan staff works Monday through Friday each week (except for the Bishop and Canons who work on Sundays and have a day off on Friday). Recognizing the need for flexibility after this long period away, some diocesan staff members may be working from home on Mondays and Fridays for some time. However, the diocesan staff is now generally on-site at Episcopal House on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday each week.

Diocesan groups, commissions, and events are asked to continue to meet online whenever practical during the 2021-2022 program year. If in-person meetings are needed for a group or event (whether at Episcopal House or elsewhere), Bishop

Hughes has asked that **in-person meetings comprise only 50% or less of the meetings scheduled**. Online meetings should account for the remaining 50% (or more) meetings on a group's schedule. The custom of providing meals at diocesan meetings and events will continue to be very limited and will not be available in most cases. Room scheduling will take into account the need to allow for social distancing, which makes some of our smaller meeting rooms unavailable for most groups.

Guests to Episcopal House will be asked to wear a mask upon entering the building. Staff members and guests alike should anticipate wearing a mask at group meetings and public events held at Episcopal House.

Please join me in commending our diocesan staff who have worked very effectively to continue supporting the ministry and mission of our Diocese throughout this time, requiring a great deal of resilience, creativity, and commitment. Their good grace and good humor throughout this time has served us all well. Please be patient as we adjust to this new hybrid model of working together going forward.

Pax,
Canon Wright

Features

Reflections on the removal of the Charlottesville Confederate statues

By the Rev. Dr. Elaine Ellis Thomas

It happens every year. As the anniversary of the August 12, 2017, Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville approaches, I can feel the anxiety begin to rise. The first year, I wasn't quite sure what was causing my dis-ease in the weeks leading up to A11/12 (as we who were there have shorthanded it). But once the 12th came, the

sensitivity to loud noises, sirens, and helicopters flying overhead were pretty clear signals.

For those of you who don't know about that part of my life and ministry, I was one of the clergy organizers in that "summer of hate." A Mother's Day tiki torch rally around the Robert E. Lee statue, Proud Boys earning their stripes by intimidation and violence along Charlottesville's downtown pedestrian mall, a Ku Klux Klan rally on July 8 around the Stonewall Jackson monument, and the weeks of planning and preparation for what we knew would be a violent day in mid-August – we were in a constant state of vigilance for the next burst of white supremacist activity, trying to protect our community, our congregations, and those most vulnerable to attack.

This year was different. In July, I watched as friends livestreamed the removal of the Lee and Jackson statues, followed by two non-Confederate but equally racist memorials to Lewis and Clark and George Rogers Clark. It was stunning to watch, even from afar, and I shed a lot of tears. Those Confederate participation trophies, as Prof. Jalane Schmidt of UVA labelled them, stood for years as a reminder to Black folks that they did not really belong, that they weren't equal. This belief requires a distortion of history, though, when you understand that the Black population in Charlottesville was larger than the white population during the Civil War. Yes, the majority of them were enslaved, but Albemarle County was still their home.

So, Blacks in Charlottesville had these reminders of racial terror confronting them for almost 100 years, and four years ago, hundreds of white supremacists came to town to try to keep them there. Before it was over, more than 30 counter-protesters suffered serious physical injury from which many are still recovering, Heather Heyer was dead, and two state policemen died when their helicopter that had circled overhead all day crashed just outside of town. To witness those statues come down was stunning.

An irresistible urge to see it for myself gnawed at me for many weeks, so a couple of weeks ago, I hopped in my car and drove to Charlottesville for the first time since shortly after I had left. I reached out to the Charlottesville Clergy Collective of which I had been the co-convener, and let people know that I would be there on a certain day and time and invited any who were available to come pray with me over these empty spaces. A handful were able to join me in remembering and reminiscing and offering prayers for continued healing of Charlottesville and our nation. We walked over the now-empty ground where Lee and Jackson once stood, we paused at the marker where enslaved people were auctioned, and we prayed together.

There is something about shared trauma that makes it hard to process outside the company of those who share it with you. On the first anniversary, as I was trying to cope with not being in Charlottesville, Prof. Schmidt reminded me that after World War II, all the old vets would go down to the VFW and tell war stories, but then they went home and rarely mentioned it. While my experience was certainly not comparable to a global war, the trauma has a similar effect. Sharing it with these friends, clergy and activists and community members, provided healing refreshment.

One of the events we recalled as we stood there on the dirt and stones where a giant plinth held up Lee and his horse, Traveler, was the early morning hours of August 12, when those of us who would be counter-protesting the rally gathered for a prayer meeting at First Baptist Church, the oldest Black congregation in Charlottesville. Dr. Cornel West, the legendary activist, theologian, scholar, and public intellectual – knowing that what lay ahead of us that day would be violent and dangerous and frightening – looked at us, pointing his finger, and said in his inimitable voice, "Do not forget that those you meet today were created in the image of God, just as you were. God loves them, too."

Of all the searing memories of that long, hot summer in Charlottesville, those words continue to echo. There have been many times over the past four years when I found it hard to see God's image in the racists, white supremacists, COVID-deniers, election conspiracists, January 6 insurrectionists, and Q-Anoners. That is why I am always, always grateful to be part of a community of people who remind me of this and who rely on me to remind them, in turn. Jesus knew when people were just going through the motions, doing the right things but harboring judgment and resentment in their hearts. Our work – the work of justice and peace and reconciliation – requires deep, abiding love. It also requires patience and perseverance. Who knows what monuments to hate might yet come down if we keep our hand on the plow and hold on.

From Drumming Camp to Hurricane Ida, St. Stephen's welcomes neighbors

By The Rev. Paula Toland

In the course of a week and a half, St. Stephen's welcomed 10 drummers and 23 neighbors to its campus on the edge of downtown Millburn. Though two very different occasions, both grew out of the parishes to live its faith and its identity as "The Church on Main Street...where love begets love."

The 9th annual Drumming Camp was held August 24 - 26, welcoming eight experienced drummers and two new to the fun. Yah'Ya Kamate and a team of creative staff and volunteers encouraged these young people, whose lives are impacted by incarceration, to drum and dance, to create beautiful art, to play games, and to share delicious meals. Though for the second year, Covid required that some things be done differently, you wouldn't know by the laughter and the joy in the smiles. At the end of camp, each child left with a fully packed backpack, a bag of treats, and the kind of memories that will last a lifetime. As one of the older campers, who has been participating for five

years, said, "Drumming Camp is the best week of the year!"

On September 5, just four days after flooding caused tremendous damage to several neighborhoods in Millburn, including to St. Stephen's three buildings, St. Stephen's hosted a cookout for its closest neighbors, many of whom are facing months of recovery from the floods. Although there isn't much the parish can do to help them at this point, they can offer simple things. A couple of the neighbors have used the working shower in the preschool, which feels like a blessing. Sharing a meal brought people together for a brief respite from all that is part of clean-up and recovery. A cookout, linen tablecloths, centerpieces made from the altar flowers ordered before the flood – all simple things. All examples of the profound grace that is found in caring, compassionate relationships. And quite possibly just what Jesus would have them do.

Upcoming Events

A Service of Prayer & Music on the 20th Anniversary of 9/11

This service, recorded at Trinity & St. Philip's Cathedral in Newark to mark the 20th anniversary of 9/11, will premiere on the diocesan YouTube channel (<https://youtube.com/c/dionewark>) at 10 AM on September 11, 2021, and remain viewable on demand.

Please join us for prayer, music, and a message from Bishop Hughes, as we honor their memories, carry on in hope, and work for peace.