

Highlights of diocesan news in printable format — September 22, 2021

If you have email, you can sign up to receive *The VOICE Online*, currently published every other Wednesday. Visit [dioceseofnewark.org/subscribe](https://dioceseofnewark.org/subscribe)

---

## From Bishop Hughes

### Finding hope in prayer

*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 hope, and in a very specific way. It is the hope I see and hear and experience with people when they ask for me to pray.

Now I've been clergy for a while now, so it is not unusual for me to get asked to pray – at the beginning of meals, at the beginning of a meeting, before people head out on travel, at graduations, certainly in services – but one of the special ways I get to pray is when an individual comes to me and says, "There is this situation happening in my life or in the life of someone that I love – would you please pray for us?" And they want me to stop whatever it is I'm doing right then and pray for them. And it is a privilege to get to stand next to them, lay my hands – usually on their shoulder – and then I lift my other hand towards the direction where I believe God is, and then I pray. And it's usually a very simple prayer, reminding me and the person that I'm beseeching Jesus to assist them, to help them, to be with them, to bring healing in mind, body and spirit – to whatever the situation is.

The interesting thing to me when someone asks for prayer like that is they never put a qualification on it. They never say, "I believe deeply so would you pl

please play for me." They never say, "I'm not sure what I believe but would you please pray for me." They never say, "God may not answer this prayer, would you please pray for me." No one ever puts any qualification on it at all. They always come in great hope – not only that I pray but that God will answer those prayers.

I think all of us have experienced that with somebody somewhere – someone asking for us to pray and that quiet moment of being able to pray with them, and this incredible sense of hopefulness that we have as the person who's saying the prayer, but also as the person who's being prayed for – the great hopefulness that they stand in as they receive those prayers. It is that moment of hope that I think all of us carry around with us in some way.

I think this time that we're in has been so complicated, it's gone on for so long, it has been so wearying on our spirits and on our emotions. We have persevered through much of it and we are ready for something different and yet it has not come yet. And it is not unusual for someone to say to me, "I don't know how to hold on to hope right now. I'm so frustrated, I am so angry, I have had enough." Or, "I'm exhausted, I can't bring myself to care anymore."

And it's an interesting thing when somebody says that to me and I say, "How about we pray?" And they do exactly what everyone does – "Yes, let's pray" – and there's a sense of hope that is reborn in wanting to pray. I hold that out for us all.

And you know it's an interesting thing whenever I say, let's pray about something, there is this sense – occasionally people will say to me that everything isn't spiritual, that you have to do things. Yes, you have to do things. Yes, we have to make phone calls. Yes, we have to make decisions. Yes, we have to show up in places. Yes, we have to stand up for those who are outcasts or broken-hearted. Yes, we must do all those things. And – *and* – when we pray, we receive our sense of hope again. Because when we turn to God and we are waiting for God to do something, it's because we believe – that part of us that belongs completely to God believes – that God can make a difference in the situation that we're in.

So if you are struggling with hope right now I want to encourage you to pray. And if you can't find the words for yourself, look in the Prayer Book. Look in the 800 pages – meaning the page is starting with 800, not all 800 pages – but look in those pages at the prayers and find one that does say the words for you. Or, ask someone else if they will pray for you. In that quiet moment when you are praying, you will find hope again.

## Stories from Our Congregations

### All Saints, Hoboken celebrates Christina in a Liturgy of Renaming

*By the Rev. Dr. Elaine Ellis Thomas*

Last spring, I received an email from a member of my vestry. It was a coming out announcement. Chris (now Christina) wanted me to know that she is a transgender lesbian woman. In all honesty, I had thought nothing of the longer hair in our monthly vestry meetings on Zoom. Everyone's hair was longer or grayer since we had not been able to visit our hairdressers in months!

Knowing that this is not always the case, I was particularly delighted to know that Christina was

fully supported in this transition by her wife and daughter as well as her family of origin.

All Saints is an almost-universally progressive parish and could be expected to take this news in stride, but I offered to advocate or run interference should it be necessary. I also suggested that she send an email to the vestry with this news and offered her a chance to answer any questions at our next Zoom meeting. Her announcement was greeted with nothing but support and congratulations.

Once it was warm enough for us to resume outdoor worship, I proposed that Christina take over my weekly e-news column to come out to the rest of the congregation so that she would not have to tell her story over and over again or endure curious looks or uncertain comments.

After that, I was thrilled when she asked if it might be possible to celebrate her new name and identity at All Saints using the Service of Renaming from the 2018 Book of Occasional Services (PDF; page 120). We did this on Sunday, September 5, in the presence of her family, friends, and All Saints community, all of us celebrating with her.

In the newsletter piece back in July, Christina wrote:

*Back to gratitude. The less personal reason I'm grateful is that stories like mine -- girl lives as a boy, wanders away from the church, finds community in a church flying the rainbow flag, starts living as herself -- can be told among us as a matter of course. We like to talk of All Saints as a welcoming place. We're not perfect by any stretch but it's true and it matters. I'm keenly aware that it isn't an accident and we can't take it for granted.*

No, it isn't an accident, and we do not take for granted that we truly welcome people into our community of faith in the fullness of who they are. Symbols matter. A rainbow flag blowing in the

breeze during Pride Month says something to those who pass by, as does a Black Lives Matter banner, as most assuredly does a cross on the steeple.

I am privileged to serve All Saints Parish where the words “radical welcome” really mean that our doors are open for you no matter who you are. I am also extremely grateful to be part of this Episcopal Church. For all its faults, the development of liturgies for same-sex marriages and renaming ceremonies and expansive language eucharists provide a further radical welcoming for those trying to find their place in the household of God.

One of the hymns our cantor sang the Sunday of Christina's Service of Renaming was John Bell's The Summons, which includes the words

*Will you love the 'you' you hide if I but call  
your name?*

*Will you quell the fear inside and never be  
the same?*

*Will you use the faith you've found  
to reshape the world around*

*through my sight and touch and sound  
in you and you in me?*

The world is being reshaped around by the courage of our transgender siblings. At All Saints, we give thanks for Christina, blessed to be a blessing to all of us.

## Diocesan Announcements

### Death in our diocesan family: The Rt. Rev. John Shelby Spong, VIII Bishop of Newark

One of America's best-known spokespersons for an open, scholarly and inclusive Christianity, the Rt. Rev. John Shelby Spong, died Sunday, September

12, 2021 at his home in Richmond, VA, after a period of declining health. He was 90 years old.

“Bishop Spong's loss will be mourned by family, friends, and this diocese,” said Bishop Carlye J. Hughes, XI Bishop of Newark. “Since receiving the news on Sunday, I have heard stories and remembrances of him that are touching and full of respect for his great love of all God's people, his fine intellect, and his ceaseless encouragement for those seeking new ways to encounter God. His friendship and pastoral care were as important to youth and young adults as it was to diocesan clergy. Most of all, I have heard his great desire to see a place in our church for all people. His legacy is deep and wide. We will continue to be blessed by his ministry in our diocese and beyond.”

Bishop Spong was ordained to the priesthood in 1955 and served for 20 years as a priest in Episcopal Churches in North Carolina (St. Joseph's, Durham, and Calvary Parish, Tarboro) and in Virginia (St. John's, Lynchburg and St. Paul's, Richmond). In 1976 he was elected VIII Bishop of Newark where he served for 24 years.

A deeply committed Christian, he insisted that he must also speak as an informed citizen of the 21st century. He equipped himself for his task by studying at major centers of Christian scholarship: Union Theological Seminary in New York, Yale Divinity School, Harvard Divinity School and the storied universities of Cambridge, Oxford and Edinburgh. He was named the Quatercentenary Scholar at Cambridge University (Emmanuel College) in 1992 and the William Belden Noble Lecturer at Harvard University in 2000. He taught at the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, CA; Drew University, Madison, NJ; Harvard Divinity School, Cambridge, MA; The Pacific School of Religion Berkeley, CA; the University of the Pacific, Stockton, CA; and at Trinity College at the University of Toronto.

He lectured across the English-speaking world, including at events in New York, Canada, Australia,

New Zealand, South Africa, Denmark, Belgium, France, Germany, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Thailand and Indonesia. After retirement from the Diocese of Newark in 2000, Bishop Spong regularly delivered between 175 and 250 public addresses a year, appearing, among many other places, at over 500 colleges, universities and theological seminaries across the world. Bishop Spong was one of Desmond Tutu's co-consecrators in 1976 in South Africa.

He ordained to the priesthood the first English woman, the Rev. Elizabeth Canham, long before the Church of England was willing to ordain women. On December 16, 1989, he ordained the first openly gay man, the Rev. Robert Williams, living in a publicly acknowledged committed relationship. That ordination opened a great debate and led to the church's willingness to bless committed gay unions and finally to the Supreme Court, declaring that marriage was a human right, which must be extended to all people gay or straight.

While serving at St. Paul's Church in Richmond, VA, Spong, together with Rabbi Jack Daniel Spiro and the University of Richmond's Department of Religion Chair, Dr. Frank Eakin, led a citywide Jewish-Christian dialogue, which achieved national attention.

Bishop Spong received numerous honors. The Protestant Episcopal Theological Seminary in Virginia, St. Paul's College and Lehigh University conferred on him Doctor of Divinity degrees. Muhlenberg College, Holmes Institute of Consciousness Studies, the University of North Carolina and Drew University conferred on him Doctor of Humane Letters degrees. In 2004, the Jesus Seminar gave him the John A.T. Robinson Award for "Courage and Integrity in Theology" and, in 2006, he was made an Honorary Fellow at the Gladstone Library in Hawarden, Wales. He was inducted into the Martin Luther King, Jr. Board of Preachers and Collegium Scholars at Morehouse College, Atlanta, Ga., in 2004. In 2010, Morehouse

commissioned the painting of his portrait to hang in their Hall of Honor alongside other noted civil rights leaders.

Well-known in radio and television circles, he appeared on such diverse programs as *Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher*, *The O'Reilly Factor* with Bill O'Reilly, *Late Night with Tom Snyder*, *Good Morning America* with Charles Gibson, *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, *The Phil Donahue Show* and on NPR radio with both Diane Rehm and Terry Gross. He has also been featured on CBS's *Sixty Minutes* with Leslie Stahl. He is the author of 26 books, which have sold all together over 2,000,000 copies. They have been translated into every major language of Europe including Russian, Arabic, Korean, Japanese and Swahili. His published articles have been featured in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *London Times* and others.

From 2000 to 2016 he was a weekly columnist online, published first by EverydayHealth.com and then by The Center for Progressive Christianity. Copies of his columns have appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Vancouver Sun*, the *Toronto Star*, the *Globe and Mail* and countless other newspapers across the world. In a Spanish translation, these columns are still running today in Spain and across Latin America. He has been the subject of stories in *Time*, *Newsweek*, *People*, *Vanity Fair*, *Playboy*, and *New Jersey Monthly*.

Because of his views, Bishop Spong cultivated many enemies and was harshly criticized by Bill Buckley, George Will, Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and two Archbishops of Canterbury. He received death threats from right wing religious and political groups and was once named "Public Enemy Number One" by the Ku Klux Klan in Eastern North Carolina. He and his wife walked through angry picketers to deliver lectures in the United States and abroad.

He is survived by his wife Christine Mary Spong, who also served as his editor; their five children, Ellen Elizabeth Spong (Augustus Charles Epps, Jr.),

Mary Katharine Spong (John Baldwin Catlett, Jr.),  
Jaquelin Ketner Spong, Brian Yancy Barney  
(Julieann), and Dr. Rachel Elizabeth Carter (Scott);  
and their six grandchildren, Dr. Katharine Shelby  
Catlett, John Baldwin Catlett, III, John Lanier  
Hylton, Lydia Ann Hylton, Colin David Barney, and  
Katherine Barney.

Funeral services will be held at St. Peter's,  
Morristown and at St. Paul's, Richmond, VA. Dates  
and times will be announced as soon as they are  
available.

Condolences may be addressed to: The family of  
Bishop Spong, c/o Diocese of Newark, 31 Mulberry  
Street, Newark, NJ 07102.

Memorial donations may be sent to the John  
Shelby Spong lectureships at St. Peter's,  
Morristown (70 Maple Ave., Morristown, NJ  
07960); St. Paul's, Richmond (815 East Grace  
Street, Richmond, VA 23219), or the Gladstone  
Library at Hawarden, Wales, United Kingdom.