

Highlights of diocesan news in printable format — March 16, 2022

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From Bishop Hughes

The freedom to pray for miracles

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 praying for miracles. It is the season of Lent and I very often during this season talk with people about prayer – they have questions for me about a way to change their prayer practice or start a special prayer practice during Lent. It's not unusual during this season to want to experiment, to see if one can go deeper in their prayers, that one can learn more about what God is wanting from us in prayer. And very often, people want to have a sense of silence in their prayers and trying to understand how silence actually can be a prayer. So, this is something I talk about a lot during this time of year.

And this year in particular I have been very aware of how pragmatic we are towards prayer, that we like to pray for something and then we want to see something happen. Or we think that there are prayers that are appropriate to bring to God and that there are prayers that are not appropriate to bring to God. Or that God might answer our prayers if we have acted in a manner that we feel that God approves of and if God doesn't approve of us, God might not answer our prayers.

And I want to remind us of Hagar in the book of Genesis, out in the desert – she had an illegitimate child, she was the enslaved member of Abraham's

household and there she was with his child. And his wife, after she had her own, did not want Hagar and her child around and told Abraham to get rid of her. So he walks her out to the desert and she's there in the desert on her own with her baby – nowhere to go, not knowing what to do, and she cries. And an angel asks her, "Why are you crying?" and then reminds her-- and maybe "remind" her it's not the right word – maybe it's "informs" her that God has a plan for her and for that baby.

I think it's helpful to remember that God hears our prayers and very often answers them in miraculous ways. And sometimes those prayers are things that we don't have words for, that we turn to God in our deep sadness and our sense of loss, in our shock and consternation at what is happening in the world and the things that we see. Or something that has harmed someone that we love and sometimes we don't have the words. And even then, God responds to what that word, what those words, would have been if our cry, our grunting, our moaning, our groaning is all that we had to say.

So I want to invite us that even if it is in moans and groans and grunting only – but sometimes it might be in words and things that we are hoping for – to pray for miracles, to pray for God to do the impossible, whether that is in our family, in our church, across the street, across the state, or across the world in Ukraine. God so often hears our cries to take care of those things that we can't take care of ourselves, to take care of things in ways that are better than we could have even imagined them to get taken care of.

I want you to have freedom during the rest of this Lent to pray for miracles and to look for God's answer.

Stories from Our Congregations

A church and a piggy bank offer aid to Ukraine

By Nina Nicholson

After Russian forces invaded Ukraine, “For the first few days I was numb and I was shocked,” said Lyubov Ferara, a Ukrainian-born parishioner of St. Elizabeth’s Church in Ridgewood. Ferara moved to the United States 20 years ago, but her mother and the rest of her extended family still live in a small town in western Ukraine.

“But then within probably a day or two or three I started calling, I couldn't stay still and do nothing,” she said. She called people and organizations she knew in the local Ukrainian community, including the Ukrainian Orthodox church in Clifton, Holy Ascension Cathedral, which hosts the school where her two children take classes in Ukrainian language and culture.

“They said we are collecting humanitarian aid and here's the list if you would like to collect or bring anything.”

Later the same day, the Rev. Andy Olivo, Rector of St. Elizabeth’s, contacted Ferara to check on her and her family. “He said, ‘If there's anything we can do as a parish, please let us know.’” She told him about Holy Ascension’s aid collection effort, and Olivo called the priest there.

“I said, ‘St. Elizabeth’s would be glad to be a drop-off point. We can collect it all and bring it over to your church where it's being processed.’ He was really excited that we wanted to help him that way.”

A message to the congregation and posts on church social media announced that St. Elizabeth’s would begin collecting donations on Ash Wednesday. “At 10 o'clock when the parish office opened, we had folks waiting outside the doors to drop off their donations,” said Olivo. “Literally every day the hallway outside of our offices was just overflowing with donations, and a team of folks would then come in at the end of each day and put it in trucks and take it over to Clifton to clear the hallways. And then the next day the church would open at 10 o'clock and we'd have folks waiting to bring things.”

Olivo noted that the donations came not only from St. Elizabeth’s members, “but also folks who just saw the posting on social media and shared it with their friends.”

One Sunday afternoon, “someone from Norwalk, Connecticut pulled up – she is Ukrainian-American and said she saw the post on Facebook and wanted to bring her donations in, and so she drove the hour plus with her daughter to get here.

“It's been amazing and inspiring and encouraging all at the same time – the folks who want to help.”

Ferara agrees. “It's incredible how generous and how kind and big-hearted people are,” she said. “I cannot put in words the gratitude we have.”

The Ukrainian cathedral in Clifton is working with companies, such as Meest-America, that specialize in shipping between the U.S. and Central and Eastern European countries. Trained volunteers pack donations according to the shipping companies’ requirements. The goods are flown to Warsaw, then transported by truck over the Polish border into western Ukraine for distribution where they are needed.

In fact, the collection of medical supplies, baby supplies and other goods has been so overwhelming that on March 7, Holy Ascension stopped accepting donations of goods for the time

being as they catch up with the donations they've already received.

"They never expected so many donations and so much support and help, so they need time to process it," said Ferara.

Instead, those wishing to help Ukrainians are encouraged to make monetary donations to a relief organization.* "No amount is too small," said Ferara – a sentiment her 10-year-old son took to heart. Upon overhearing his parents discussing the cost of shipping donations to Ukraine, he brought out his piggy bank and dumped the contents on the table. Asked what he was doing, he replied, "I'm counting my money – I want to collect everything and donate it to cover the cost of shipping so these kids can get their clothes as soon as they can."

"I just stopped and I cried," Ferara said.

As for her extended family in Ukraine, "They are not willing to escape, to flee – it's their country, they've done nothing wrong." Instead, like her, they are doing what they can to help. "They are sheltering the refugees, they donated blood, they cook for the front lines, they cook for the refugees.

"I check with them daily, multiple times a day – thank God we still have communication – so I always check that they made it through the night, they're alive, and we just keep praying that everybody's safe.

"But now," she added, "family has become bigger – it's 44 million people."

***Where you can donate**

Donations to Episcopal Relief & Development's "INTERNATIONAL DISASTER RESPONSE" fund will provide humanitarian assistance for the crisis in Ukraine. Working through the Action by Churches Together Alliance (ACT Alliance), your donation will provide cash, blankets, hygiene supplies and other needed assistance. To donate, call 855-312-4325.

Diocesan Announcements

First BCEF Call of 2022: St. Peter's, Clifton

The Bishop's Church Emergency Fund (BCEF) provides financial support for church buildings in the diocese needing repairs and renovation, usually with a special focus on emergency and unforeseen needs. Through the BCEF, you can support the critical needs identified by the Bishop.

The first BCEF call of 2022 is for Hurricane Ida recovery at St. Peter's, Clifton. To donate, mail a check payable to Diocese of Newark with BCEF Call #1 in the memo line to: Diocese of Newark, Attn: BCEF, 31 Mulberry St., Newark, NJ 07102.

St. Peter's Church in Clifton celebrated the 125th anniversary of its founding. An 1896 newspaper article at the time derided the founding members as "little strugglers" and said there were too few Episcopalians in Clifton for the church to succeed. The Rev. Canon Dr. Kevin Moroney, who serves as Priest in Residence at St. Peter's, wrote last year, "I would say we can take that denunciation and wear it as a badge. For in the 125 years, we little strugglers have built two churches, a hall, purchased three homes (two of which are used for the homeless), performed the sacraments on countless people, and currently help to feed 1,600 souls each month."

A central ministry of the parish, Saint Peter's Haven (SPH) is a non-sectarian 501 (c) (3) charitable organization that feeds the hungry and helps the homeless. Pam Fueshko serves as Warden of the church and Acting Executive Director of SPH. "We place great emphasis on keeping families together," she explained. "Shelters typically house men and women separately. We make every effort to keep homeless families together." Using two homes owned by the parish, SPH can assist several

families at a time with shelter, food, and social services. Up to 18 persons can be accommodated, typically for up to 90 days. SPH is also part of the New Jersey Food Bank and operates its extensive food pantry for the City of Clifton. SPH is a major social service provider with several full-time employees and dozens of volunteer workers.

The congregation's website says St. Peter's "celebrates the wonder of God's love in a community that embraces all who enter our doors." This claim is certainly embodied by the amazing ministry of Saint Peter's Haven. Making this all possible, St. Peter's Church is located in a beautiful residential section of Clifton, a city of over 80,000 residents in Passaic County. Pam Fueshko explained, "Before the pandemic we averaged 30-40 worshippers on an average Sunday. When we started streaming services, this number went down. But one Sunday when we streamed a baptism, we had 140 people join us online!"

Like so many churches in our diocese, St. Peter's and SPH suffered devastating losses from Hurricane Ida at the end of August 2021. Six feet of water poured into the sub-basement of the church and rose to four feet in the basement itself where the offices of both the church and SPH were located. Computers, copy machines, records, furniture, and all supplies for SPH were totally destroyed. Heat exchangers were damaged, as was a blower for the pipe organ. The cost of the damage is likely to reach \$500,000. The parish had flood insurance but its deductible still leaves them with \$38,000 to pay. This is a big challenge for the parishioners once called the "little strugglers." Given their remarkable contributions to helping those in need, in this our first BCEF call for 2022, please be as generous as you can in assisting them rise to the occasion once again.

God's peace,

+Carlye J. Hughes

The Rt. Rev. Carlye J. Hughes
Bishop of Newark