



Highlights of diocesan news in printable format — June 8, 2022

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From Bishop Hughes

The blessing of professing one's faith

This is a transcript from a video message.

This is Bishop Hughes in the Diocese of Newark. We live in a time of immeasurable change and of boundless challenge. And in this time of change and challenge, one of the things that has been an incredible blessing as we've worked through – and diligently worked through – much that has been difficult and that has been hard and has been full of tragedy – we have grown in our ability to see God's grace, to see the gifts that God has given us and the many ways that God has blessed us. And most certainly in this diocese, in our parishes and for individuals, confirmations and ordinations have been an extraordinary blessing.

We had to delay on those in the worst of pandemic and when we started confirmations back up this past August, we were doing basically – we called it “make up” confirmations – there were people who had waited over a year to be confirmed. And we had confirmed a group of people in August, in six or seven confirmation services, another six or eight confirmation services in the Fall and then we had our regular confirmation season this past May. In all those groupings of confirmations, more than 300 people in this diocese stood before God, their friends, their family and their clergy and professed their faith.

Oh my goodness, I wish everybody in this diocese had been able to be a part of those services! And you can – you can look at them online. They are so inspiring – to see those people come forward, to have them kneel and have the prayer said before them and the joy that they experienced in knowing that they were taking their place in the church. The same joy is evident at the ordination services where we pray for those who profess their faith and profess God's calling to a particular ministry to serve God's people in the church as deacons or priests.

I think this inspiration is something that all of us need to hold on to and cultivate because at some time we have all felt it. And particularly as we continue to work through the change and challenges of this time, that inspiration that led us to the faith in the first place and that keeps us going in the faith is going to be important to us.

So I leave you with these words that have been said over you if you are confirmed. And if you're not confirmed, please talk to your priest, they'd be happy to get you ready for the next group of confirmations. But these words were said over you as you were confirmed and that someone – a bishop – laid their hands on your head and said this, knowing that God would fill you and carry you in your faith and in your ministry:

“Strengthen, oh Lord, your servant with your Holy Spirit, empower him or her for your service, sustain them all the days of their lives.”

Amen.

Bishop on abortion, guns: Where is the commitment to life

This guest columnist opinion piece by Bishop Hughes was published in the Star-Ledger on May 31, 2022.

As an Episcopalian, I have long considered life to be a sacred and sanctified gift. Each new day, and in fact every breath we take, is a blessing to be savored and lived fully. I am a product of a church that “takes seriously its obligation to help form the consciences of its members concerning this sacredness. Human life, therefore, should be initiated only advisedly and in full accord with this understanding of the power to conceive and give birth which is bestowed by God.”

Abortion seems to defy the church’s teaching and position about the sanctity of life. And yet, the Episcopal Church also holds that life is sacred for all people and in all circumstances. Since 1967, the church has regarded the right to make and act upon informed decisions to be a fundamental necessity for women’s health. Abundant access to high-quality care should be a baseline for all people and most certainly women, including those considering pregnancy or already pregnant.

The choices made to end a pregnancy are personal, private, and particular to the circumstances an individual woman faces. An outsider entering such a private decision is as shocking as an intruder entering the inner sanctum of one’s home by force.

Still, the opinion offered by U.S. Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito — and then taken up by states emboldened to enact new laws in anticipation of the official Supreme Court action this summer — tramples and destroys all that is personal, private, and particular to women. Legislation written to create a large and all-encompassing boundary leaves no room to respond to many forms of unwanted pregnancy such as rape, incest, force and trafficking.

Suddenly courts, rather than skilled medical professionals are involved in determining if the health of a pregnant woman is in jeopardy. Fertility treatments have become suspect. Miscarriages are reviewed for wrongdoing and potential prosecution. A woman’s right to determine the course of her life and pregnancy has been unduly threatened and removed.

Not satisfied with restricting women involved in a healthcare decision, some laws are designed to prosecute anyone who assists a woman in finding reproductive care or an abortion in another state. The need to punish seems to be as important as the need to insert the court’s opinion into the private lives of women. It all seems to leap several steps beyond a right-to-life philosophy into a demand to control the reproductive lives of women.

I cannot help but wonder, where is this commitment to life in a nation awash in guns and gun violence? The last two weeks have been a horrific refusal to honor the lives of those going about the business of being alive. Grocery stores, churches, subways, schools — none of these places are safe anymore. It is strange and disturbing that no right-to-life decisions or legislation have been passed to demand control over guns or gun violence.

As a spiritual leader, I find myself in the difficult position of encouraging faithful people to pray and protest again. Difficult because there has been so much prayer and protest in the last few years and things seem worse, not better. Even the faithful are discouraged and uncertain about their ability to make an impact on women’s reproductive health, as it is yet another issue short-circuited by partisan politics. I understand their despair, and still we face complex issues that require us to press ahead to protect the rights of women. Further, we must protect the right to live free of the gun violence that has become normative.

The Supreme Court took up the personal, private, and particular needs of women’s reproductive health as a pressing matter and states have followed suit, yet Congress has refused to protect Americans from gun violence. We are left to ask ourselves, who will care for the rights of those already born to live, move, and have their place in the world? It seems that you and I have been designated for this work. Say a prayer and roll up your sleeves.

Stories from Our Congregations

Ridgewood and Glen Rock congregations complete Sacred Ground series on race

By Sandy Sullivan and Catherine Olivo

The evening of May 26, parishioners from St. Elizabeth’s, Ridgewood; All Saints’, Glen Rock; and Christ Church, Ridgewood gathered to celebrate a service of Closing Eucharist and a fellowship potluck dinner to mark the completion of *Sacred Ground*, a five-month dialogue series on race and faith produced by The Episcopal Church.

The *Sacred Ground* series is one of many fruits of *Becoming Beloved Community*, a long-term, strategic vision and commitment to the Church’s work of racial justice, reconciliation and healing. As of April 2022, over 20,000 Episcopalians across the country have joined dialogue circles to study and reflect on this issue.

After St. Elizabeth’s parishioners Catherine Olivo, Wendy Broadbent and Sandy Sullivan joined Bishop Carlye Hughes’ online study group in January 2021, the three joined heads to create a series of conversations, in hybrid format, over the next year, based on the PBS series *The Black Church*, the documentaries *13th* and *My Name Is Pauli Murray*,

and a tour of the historic Old Paramus Church in Ridgewood.

As a next step, we decided to explore the larger and deeper commitment to the *Sacred Ground*. In an effort to expand the conversation, we offered the experience to two other congregations and to our delight and surprise 51 people registered. Five circles were formed – two in-person and three on zoom – led by two facilitators for each group.

Sacred Ground was a big commitment; the five circles met every other week to from January through May to read, view and discuss a film-based curriculum. The material was based on our country’s history of race and racism, family story, economic, political and regional identity and the histories of peoples of Indigenous, Black, Latino and Asian/Pacific American descent as they intersect with European American histories.

Often challenging and uncomfortable, the readings – which included Howard Thurman’s landmark work *Jesus and the Disinherited* – prompted us to consider how we, as faithful Christians, can’t be the body of Christ unless all people are accepted and acknowledged as beloved children of God.

So how do we continue the journey? Hopefully, recent participants will emerge to offer to lead another round of the series, with its recently updated and expanded curriculum. Following a discerning next steps meeting this summer, the *Sacred Ground* alumni hope to engage parishioners within the three congregations that were unable to participate in the series.

How might God be calling you to the work of racial justice and healing?