

Highlights of diocesan news in printable format — September 14, 2022

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From Bishop Hughes

Beginning anew

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 beginning anew. I, like everyone else at this time of year, feel like I'm supposed to sharpen a pencil and get out a clean piece of paper or a brand new notebook to start getting some work done in a new and fresh way. School is starting again. And even if you don't have school aged children in your house, we are socialized, we think that September comes and we should start thinking about beginning anew.

This is going to happen for us again, right after Thanksgiving, as the liturgical year starts with Advent One, and we'll ask ourselves as people of faith as people that worship in a service that's liturgical, we'll ask ourselves, what does this all mean to begin anew. And then the year will come to an end, the calendar year will come to an end, and on January first we'll be thinking of beginning anew again and wanting to sharpen that pencil and get a fresh piece of paper, so we can write out a list of the things that we're going to do differently.

I'm also aware that this year in particular, all of these beginnings happen at a time when the whole world is trying to figure out how to begin anew. As we have continued to work our way through pandemic, we recognize that we are changed – as individuals, as families, as neighborhoods, as cities, as nations, as schools, as churches, as businesses – that every facet of our life has changed in some way. And chief among those changes, is a genuine

sense that we have come to value each other, we have come to value the important relationships in our lives, and we recognize that we are put on this earth to do something in particular, for the glory of God, and for the help of God's people, that we have come to know that in this time of pandemic. And so with that knowledge, how are we to begin anew in all of this?

I want to encourage you, wherever you are – if it's in your small group at church, or in your Bible, study your prayer group, if it's in your own household, if it's with a friend, or with a spouse, or with your children, if it's in your workplace or in your school – that I want to encourage you wherever you are, that you spend some time talking with the people that you know and love and care about, about this time that we're in, and how you want it to reflect the priorities that you individually, and collectively, have come to know and come to value. That is part of what beginning anew will mean for us, as church is also going to mean asking those same kinds of questions. What is our purpose? What is it that we are trying to accomplish? What is it God is calling us to do?

I've been saying for over two years now that God is calling us to be a different kind of church. It's going to take our thinking and experimenting and praying and trying things to figure out exactly what that means. But it's going to start in conversation, with you and the people that you worship with, the people that you pray for, and pray about. It's going to start with all of us asking those questions. What is the new thing that God is doing among us?

We can be sure that God is doing something new. We get that in Scripture. We see it in the Hebrew

Scriptures, with the prophet saying that God is doing something new, can't you see it? That old things have gone away, pay attention to those new things. We see it in the way that Jesus tells people to wait for the advocate, that God is going to do something new with them. We see it in the Apostle Paul, talking to the family of faith, saying that when you are in Christ, that something new has begun in you.

It is time. Sharpen your pencils, grab that new piece of paper and go to your prayer closet. Go to conversation with those who are nearest and dearest to you. Think on it, on this. What are those new things that God is doing among you? And how are you being called to honor those.

Strategic Visioning Project 2022-2023

The Episcopal Diocese of Newark is launching a visioning process in September 2022. A team of members from across the diocese will work together to understand what is happening in the diocese now, collect ideas, and develop a new vision for the diocese with priorities, goals, and recommended actions to meet those goals.

The first phase of the process will include holding listening sessions for every congregation, so that the Visioning Team can understand the strength of our ministries, the challenges we face, and the opportunities that we might pursue.

Phase two, which runs concurrently with the last two months of phase one, encompasses revisiting the current mission statement and developing new mission and vision statements. We will use the new statements, as well as the information gathered at this point, to establish the priority areas for the new vision.

At the beginning of 2023, the Visioning Team will form additional working teams, one for each priority area, to set goals and identify actions to reach those goals. This work will last through April 2023.

During the final phase, the visioning team will review the proposals from the working teams and prepare the final recommendations with goals, cost estimates, next steps for implementation, and

assignments. They will then forward the recommendations to diocesan leadership for review and approval.

Timeline

September 2022: Kick off visioning process and review of the status of the diocese

October & November, 2022: Congregational listening sessions, leadership interviews and development of new mission and vision statements

December 2022: Analysis of listening session responses and determination of priority areas for the strategic vision

January-April, 2023: Formation of working groups for the priority areas, additional research, and development of goals and next steps

May 2023: Final recommendations reported to diocesan leadership for review and approval

Meet our Strategic Visioning Consultant

Consultant Katie Ong will be guiding the visioning team through this process by organizing team meetings, gathering and synthesizing information to help them in their work, preparing written reports for diocesan leadership, communicating with all of the working teams, and keeping everyone on track to meet our timeline.

Katie has done strategic visioning with various organizations as a board member, staff member, and consultant. In 2021, she guided the Episcopal Diocese of Missouri in a visioning process, while this year, she helped the leadership of Christ Church Cathedral in St. Louis to form their own complementary plan. From 2011 to 2019, she worked with the Episcopal Diocese of Ohio to create Bellwether Farm Camp, Retreat, and Education Center.

Stories from our congregations

"A string of miracles" - Second house renovated to host Afghan refugees

By Nina Nicholson

Last year, we shared the story of several churches that partnered to renovate an unused rectory to host a family of Afghan refugees. This year, some of those same churches have renovated a second unused church building to host a second Afghan refugee family being sponsored by a Presbyterian church— a project made possible by “a string of miracles,” according to the Rev. Michael Muller, Rector of St. Peter’s, Mountain Lakes.

Even before the churches completed the first house, they had begun eyeing a second unused building next door to it, which once had been used for church offices and classrooms but then fallen into disrepair. Mountain Lakes parishioner Steve Shaw, a master builder and Morris County Commissioner, went through it and said renovation would be a six-figure project.

This is where the string of miracles start, with money and talent appearing just as they were needed.

First, there was the angel donor. “Somehow, through our ministry network, a woman heard about what we’re doing, and she said she’d like to help,” said Muller. When he told her that at least \$100,000 was needed to start work on the second house, “She said, ‘In fact, I could do that.’”

Then three church members with the perfect mesh of experience stepped forward to take on the work of project management. From Mountain Lakes were Doug Sonn, an engineer, and John Garrison, who oversees Buildings and Grounds and describes himself by saying, “I’m an inveterate home remodeler. I’ve always loved old houses. I’ve renovated five houses on my own that I bought and sold over the years.” They were joined by Fran Maenza, a vestry member at St. John’s, Boonton

and an interior designer “who seems to know every code official in the county,” said Muller.

As estimates for renovations came in, it appeared that their baseline number would be \$140,000. St. John’s came up with \$20,000, and an ACTS/VIM grant this past spring brought in another \$20,000, allowing work to begin in April.

They contracted with Jeff Luisi of Genesis Building to serve as general contractor. “Jeff took to the task like a mission from God,” Muller said. “We have lost count of the ways that he has gone above and beyond.”

Likewise with the electrician, Jim Burke, who did \$25,000 worth of work – installing a new circuit breaker panel and replacing old “knob and tube” wiring throughout the three-story house – for under \$10,000. Burke, who has donated his skills to outreach projects at other churches, said that when it comes to helping people in need, “it hits a point where the money is not an issue anymore.”

Several Mountain Lakes parishioners in construction-related fields were able to help keep costs down. When architectural drawings were needed for the new kitchen and bathroom, architect Gary Musciano did them pro bono. Bob Gibbons, a builder and remodeler, was able to obtain replacement windows at cost as well as special labor pricing for their installation. And Jackie Vitiello, who works for Benjamin Moore, arranged for her employer to donate over \$4,000 worth of paint.

Even the town in which the house is located contributed to the project by foregoing \$2,400 in building permit fees. (For the privacy of the refugee family, the town is not being disclosed.)

The quick completion of the renovations in a time of supply chain issues itself seemed like a miracle. “Nobody believes we started work in April and a family is able to move in in August,” said Muller at a July 29 gathering at which the volunteers celebrated the completion of the renovations, and Muller blessed the house.

A family of nine sponsored by Westside Presbyterian Church in Ridgewood moved in to the

second house on August 3. Their previous housing situation, a two-bedroom apartment over a shop in Jersey City, was too small for them. They have the same Church World Service caseworker as the family of seven who moved in to the first house in December 2021, and the caseworker connected the Presbyterian church with the Episcopal team as they were working on the second house. The two groups agreed to partner, with the Episcopalians providing the housing while the Presbyterians handle the ongoing responsibilities of helping the family get settled.

Muller said that both houses in the Afghan resettlement project were inspired by a “Mission Minute” video shown at the 2020 Annual Convention, describing how St. Paul’s, Englewood renovated an unused sexton’s apartment to house a homeless woman and her three children. A table discussion with fellow members of his Regional Ministry Network, Constance and Her Companions, brought to mind that there were unused church buildings in their network as well as parishioners in construction-related fields, and they saw an opportunity for joint ministry.

Initially they had reached out to Homeless Solutions of Morris County, “But there were state regulations we just couldn’t meet,” said Muller. “Then during the Afghan refugee crisis last summer, Don MacGowan, St. Peter’s outreach chair asked, ‘What can we do?’ and we decided to revisit this idea.”

One year ago they had two empty, run-down buildings and just the spark of an idea. Now, those buildings are completely renovated, and two families who were forced to abandon their homeland and make a perilous escape are starting new lives in them in peace and comfort.

That is a miracle indeed.

Help is still needed: *The father of the new family has found employment, but the family is still without a car, forcing him to ride a bicycle eight miles each way to his job. If you have or know of a used car in good condition that can be donated or purchased at a low cost, please contact the Rev. Michael Muller at 973-334-4429.*