



Highlights of diocesan news in printable format — December 21, 2022

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From the Bishop

A Christmas message

“But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.”

Luke 2:10-12

The joys of Christmas celebrations are underscored by the effort we make to delight, surprise, and care for those we love. At the center of the shopping, wrapping, cooking, and traveling is love. A love that is expansive because of the birth of Jesus. This is good news of great joy for all people. We are loved truly, deeply, unconditionally by the one who came to us as an infant among the very least. His love of us makes our love of others grow.

You have my prayers for a Christmas overflowing with the unconditional love that Jesus has for all people. May our love expand beyond our family and friends and touch the lives of those needing to be loved.

Merry Christmas,
Bishop Hughes

From the Presiding Bishop

Love always

The following is a transcript of Presiding Bishop Michael Curry's recorded Christmas message for 2022.

Hello. I'm inside St. James Church by-the-Sea, La Jolla, California. We thank the rector, the clergy, the staff, and the good people of this church for allowing us to bring this Christmas message to The Episcopal Church from this wonderful and beautiful congregation.

There is a Christmas carol not that well known here in the States, maybe better known in Great Britain, that says quite simply, “Love came down at Christmas. Love all lovely. Love divine. Love was born at Christmas. Star and angel gave the sign. Love came down at Christmas.”

The older I get, the more I am convinced that God came into this world in the person of Jesus for one reason, and one reason alone: to show us the way to be reconciled and in right relationship with the God who is the creator of us all, and with each other as children of that one God who is the creator of us all, and of all things.

Jesus came to show us how to live, reconciled with God, and with each other, and He taught us that the way to do it is God's way of love. For God's way of love is God's way of life. It's our hope for our families, our communities, our societies. Indeed, it is our hope for the whole world. For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, and love came down at Christmas.

Now, look, I'm 69 years old. I've been around the block a little bit. I know that sounds nice, sounds like the kind of thing we say in church. It sounds nice, but naive, idealistic but unrealistic, and yet, consider the alternative. Need I just simply say the names? Uvalde, Vestavia Hills, Tree of Life Synagogue, Club Q in Colorado Springs, Ukraine.

Now, God's way of love is not naive, it is not unrealistic, it's the way. It's the way to life for us all. Dr. King once said, "Darkness cannot cast out darkness; only light can do that. And hatred cannot cast out hatred; only love can do that." Love came down at Christmas. And as some of us are beginning to say in this Episcopal church of ours, "Love always."

Earlier this year, I went to Mother Emanuel AME in Charleston to be part of the seventh commemoration of the murders of the martyrs of Charleston. You may remember that a number of years ago, while members of that church had gathered for Bible study, a man came in and they welcomed him in, and invited him to join them, and he turned on them, and he killed many.

It was the seventh commemoration to both honor and remember those who had died, to give God thanks for those who helped—first responders, medical persons—but it was also something else. It was a time to commit ourselves, not simply to throw up our hands in despair, but to reach out our hands to each other, to roll up our sleeves, to take God's hand and take each other's hand and do the hard and holy work of love, which brings healing, which brings hope, which binds us together, and lifts us up to be all that God dreams and intends for us all to be.

Love came down at Christmas. Love always, because love is the way. It is the way that Jesus taught us based on the ancient teachings of Moses, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength. This is the first and great commandment, and the second is like unto it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself," for on these two hang, depend, all the law, all the prophets, everything that God intends because God is love.

Love came down at Christmas and so let this Christmas be a moment of rededication to the work of love in the world. As Howard Thurman wrote long ago, "When the song of the angels is stilled, when the star and the sky is

gone, when the kings and princes are at home, when the shepherds are back with their flocks, then the work of Christmas begins. To find the lost, to heal the broken, to feed the hungry, to release the prisoner, to rebuild the nations, to bring peace among others, to make music in the heart."

For love came down at Christmas, and our work is to love always. God love you. God bless you, and may God hold us all in those almighty hands of love. Merry Christmas.

The Most Rev. Michael B. Curry
Presiding Bishop and Primate
The Episcopal Church

Happening at Our Churches

Combining coffee hour and the World Cup final

On Sunday, Dec. 18, St. Luke's in Montclair had its Christmas Pageant and, rather than having everyone rush off after church to watch the World Cup final, they showed it on a big screen in the parish hall. They also provided a full, cooked, Irish- and British-inspired breakfast in lieu of coffee hour, and they ended up with about 150 people partaking.

They report: "It was a huge hit. It helped that the final was an absolute epic."

Christ Church, Teaneck's food ministry sprouts new possibilities, including hydroponic gardening

By Sharon Sheridan Hausman

Sorting onions at the back of Christ Episcopal Church in Teaneck, New Jersey, Susan Shils says she's not fond of organized religion. But when she rendezvoused with a PTA member to pick up a raffle prize at the church two years ago and saw its food pantry at work, she stayed to help – and kept coming back.

“It raised my spirits in 2020 to know that there was a group of people helping other people,” said Shils, who regularly visits the church to sort and pack groceries for distribution.

The food pantry at the Diocese of Newark church has helped people since opening about 25 years ago, when it fed two to five families a week. Propelled by the COVID-19 pandemic and continuing high inflation, it’s grown considerably. From 2019 through 2022, it will have fed 60,000 people, said the Rev. Michelle White, Christ Church’s vicar.

Now the church is adding hydroponic plant towers in hopes of supplementing the food packages it distributes with homegrown produce, and perhaps spurring new dreams and opportunities in the process.

“We started as a small group in the basement,” recalled Gail Storer, 86, a church member since age 6. From the beginning, the pantry was ecumenical, with donations and volunteers from other churches. Today, Storer is among a diverse crew of volunteers who sort donations and prepare packages of groceries each week. Others arrive on Saturdays to distribute the food.

“I stopped [coming] in the beginning of the pandemic. They wouldn’t let me out of the house,” said Storer. “I finally said, ‘I’m going to the pantry. I’ll wear a mask, but I’m going to the pantry.’”

“I believe in helping others less fortunate,” she said, “and there’s wonderful people working here.”

The ministry has become interfaith, with strong support from the local Orthodox Jewish community – and from those with no faith tradition, who make up a majority of volunteers, White said. “Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, unaffiliated – there are people who never knew what the inside of a church looked like” until they started volunteering, she said. “For me, this is the ultimate in evangelism: that the people of God are everybody on two legs. We don’t have a lock on God.”

The pantry provides food for everyone who comes, no questions asked.

“Things started ramping up before the shutdown. It was clear that people were having a hard time managing their budgets and getting enough food,” White said. “The development of the pantry mirrored the development of the pandemic. By May [2020], we were probably serving about 150 families a week. Right before the shutdown, it was maybe 20 or 25 families. It just skyrocketed, and so everybody was engaged in a Herculean scramble to get food.”

White began broadcasting the need for donations wherever she could, and people responded. One man arrived from a nearby town with \$2,000 in government stimulus money he and his wife had received.

Christ Church moved the pantry from the cramped basement to the back of the nave. The church applied for grants, enabling it to install refrigerators and freezers to offer fresh as well as nonperishable food.

The church’s two new hydroponic towers grow plants in nutrient-rich water instead of soil. White has applied to the Hudson Lutheran Foundation for \$15,000 toward adding 10 more towers.

“By springtime, we should be up and running, and it should be absolutely phenomenal,” White said.

In early November, a healthy crop of string beans and vines covered with yellow blossoms and young squash grew from slots in the water-fed towers. Their seeds had sprouted in fibrous wool pods inserted into the slots.

The pantry’s gardeners are learning about adjusting the water’s PH and maintaining the right room temperature.

“It’s a learning process for everybody,” White said, explaining that each plant requires a different water chemistry to thrive. “The chemistry for Swiss chard and kale is similar to the chemistry for zucchini. If I was trying to grow strawberries, I couldn’t grow them with zucchini.”

White has recruited two young men with special needs, who already help with the pantry, to maintain the indoor garden. As it expands, she’d like to involve other young people, such as high

school students needing community service credits. “They learn a little something about food science and a little something about chemistry.”

“This is the kind of stuff that changes people’s lives,” White said. She dreams of ways the hydroponic garden might inspire pantry clients and others. Perhaps they could partner with mentors from a local college. Perhaps young people will start a business growing and selling herbs to Teaneck’s many restaurants. Maybe they could put plant-filled towers in senior centers.

“If we could get five or 10 churches to set up a hydroponic system, they can produce strawberries. We can have Episcopal strawberries all over the place.”

Already, the project has inspired some pantry volunteers. Shils ordered a smaller hydroponic kit as a Hanukkah gift for her brother. Erika Ilgenfritz, a volunteer from Grace Lutheran Church in Teaneck, took a break from sorting groceries to examine the towers and sample a green bean. “I think it’s just wonderful,” she said. “We need to do more of that.”

Susan Papera, another Grace volunteer, agreed.

“That is a marvelous thing because, if you can generate your own food, you’re so much more sustainable,” she said. “It’s a way to get the congregation involved in sustainability and environmental concerns. I’m just amazed at the work of the Holy Spirit, that it grew into this whole thing.”

White sees “so much possibility in this world” with the ability to create that God has given. “Where it will end, I have no idea,” she said. “It’s sort of like a Johnny Appleseed kind of thing. Just throw the seeds. I think that’s pretty much what the Gospel story is.”

This article was originally published by Episcopal News Service.

Diocesan Announcements

Christmas & New Year's Break

In observance of Christmas and New Year's, Episcopal House will be closed Friday, December 23, 2022 through Monday, January 2, 2023.

The Bishop and her staff send their warmest wishes to you and yours for a blessed Christmas and a safe and happy New Year.

Alleluia Fund stories: All the Way Up Adult Education Center

Thanks to the support of donors like you to the Alleluia Fund for Outreach, All the Way Up is helping adult learners in Newark and Essex County achieve their educational dreams as they work toward their High School Equivalency Certificate. All the Way Up provides small group tutoring and the results are exciting.

Your generous donation to the Alleluia Fund joins others in making a difference to many nonprofit partners including All the Way Up. To donate to this year's Alleluia Fund, you can either send a check made payable to the Diocese of Newark to 31 Mulberry Street, Newark, NJ 07102. Thank you for making a difference!