



Highlights of diocesan news in printable format — April 19, 2023

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From the Bishop

How we need to support our Confirmands

This is a transcript of a video message.

This is Bishop Hughes in the Diocese of Newark, and it is confirmation season. We do something quite wonderful with confirmation in our diocese. It happens in the most festive time of the year, during the Great 50 days of Easter where we are celebrating and continue to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It happens at a time of year where churches have had the fullness of the program year to prepare people for confirmation, so they're not having to run, dash, "Quick, get them ready, because the bishop is coming!" They know that they're going to be doing it at this time of year. So there's a chance to prepare in an intentional, full and practical kind of way for confirmation.

And it also happens in a way in which we unify the diocese, that confirmations are spread around regions, groups of churches gathered together. And when people are confirmed, regardless of their age, if they're young, or if they're older, if they're reaffirming their baptismal vows are being received into the Episcopal Church, whatever is happening, they're doing it with a large group of people – more than the people who would just be in your parish. And it helps open up this sense of being called to this next part of being a faithful person, being

someone who has professed your faith publicly, in front of family and friends and congregation and before God and before the bishop. It's a wonderful joyful experience that we have together.

I want to share with you just a little bit about something that happened in confirmation retreat this year, that I would say in my fifth year of being with you, and in my fifth year of doing confirmation retreats – but we had one year where we were off because of pandemic. But across the confirmation retreats, one thing that I've heard over and over and over again, especially from our young people, is how important it is to them to take this step because they know it is something that is expected in their family, that they come from a faithful family or they come from generations of Episcopalians or generations of people who have been confirmed, and they want to take their place. And that is important. And I'm so delighted that so many of our young folks have family around them that are modeling something for them, that gives them a sense of how to grow into their faith.

This year's group is a very different group. It reminds us that the world is changing, and the church has got to change with the world. In all of my meetings with them during the retreat this year, I had fewer than five people say to me that they wanted to be confirmed because it is something that happens in their family. The vast majority, dozens of young people said to me, I want to be confirmed because I want to know God more. Or, I want to be confirmed, because I want to take my place in the church, this place has been

very important to me, and I want to take more of a responsible role in the church.

Those are very different responses. It doesn't make previous responses wrong. But it is a change. And it means that we have to change with it. When these folks are confirmed – again, regardless of age – they're going to truly need us to support them in their desire to know God more and to take their place in the church.

And so I asked every member of a congregation who has someone being confirmed – and your priests will be telling you and the confirmation sponsors will be telling you who's being confirmed – I ask every single one of you to put their names on your daily prayer list. Pray for them personally, each day. I also ask that you reach out to them personally. Let them know that you are praying for them, that you're praying for their relationship with God, that you're praying that they find their place in the church.

And then the thing that I think is the next important thing for you to do is to invite them, to specifically invite them whether you know them well or not – maybe you need to invite their parents with them so you get to know their parents better – but to invite them into the activities of the church that will support them in getting to know God better or support them in being a full and active member of the church.

Our tendency is to diminish people who are new or diminish people who are young, to put them into low-responsibility areas of the church. That's not what these confirmands are asking for. They are saying, I am a person of faith, I want that faith to grow deeper, and I want to find my place in the church. So it is on all of us to change, to open our arms, welcome them into the church and welcome them fully. Help them find that deeper faith and help them find their place in our church.

Stories from Our Congregations

A story of resurrection: How The Lighthouse in Jersey City overcame challenges to become Lighthouse 2 in Union City

By Nina Nicholson

Picture this: a young couple, both early 20s. The woman is eight months pregnant. Asylum seekers from South America, they have just been released from Immigration & Customs Enforcement detention in another state. Since the only person they know in the United States is a friend in New Jersey, ICE puts them on a plane to Newark Airport, but when they arrive, their “friend” refuses to answer their calls.

Not knowing what else to do, they get in a taxi and ask to be taken to the place most likely to find work. The taxi driver takes them to Union City and leaves them there. They begin knocking on church doors, but since it's mid-week, no one answers. Then they see a house with a red cross on the door and knock on it. Someone opens the door.

They haven't found a church – they've found something even better for their immediate needs. They've found The Lighthouse.

Originally launched in 2017 in Jersey City, The Lighthouse provided temporary housing to individual asylum seekers who had been released from ICE detention centers, until they could find employment and more permanent housing. After 18 months of ministry, a series of challenges forced them to close their doors temporarily. This month, Lighthouse 2 is celebrating two years in its new location in Union City, along with a greatly expanded mission.

“The services that we're providing in Lighthouse 2 are a completely different story than Lighthouse

1,” said the Rev. Deacon Jill Singleton, Director and Chaplain of both iterations of The Lighthouse. “Lighthouse 1 was just a taste of what the Episcopal Church could do for people. And this is like an incredible fresh expression of just how comprehensive, how broad and deep our support for individuals and families can be.”

As Singleton recounts, “In Lighthouse 1, we didn’t have any real expenses, because we were sharing the rectory building with Church of the Incarnation. They had their offices in that space, and so we were using some of the space, they were using some of the space. And clients were coming to us exclusively from First Friends of NJ & NY. So the deal there was people would be in detention, they would get released from detention, they would be on First Friends’ roster, and they would bring them directly to The Lighthouse. They were individuals, mostly men, and so they could pretty quickly get on their feet to the extent of at least being able to rent a room someplace.”

Operating in this manner, Lighthouse 1 served 91 individuals from 26 countries.

Then Incarnation began the process of unification with St. Paul’s, Jersey City – and the Incarnation property needed to be vacated in preparation for sale. Other challenges followed – the biggest being the COVID-19 pandemic – which slowed The Lighthouse’s search for a new location.

Eventually, they set their sights on the rectory of the former St. John’s Church in Union City, which had closed in 2014. The diocesan Trustees had already sold St. John’s church building and parish hall and were preparing to sell the rectory also. “But thanks to the voice of Eric Soldwedel, my fellow Deacon who was on the Trustees at the time,” said Singleton, “he said, ‘Wait a second, why are we selling that? The Lighthouse is looking for a home.’”

After the Trustees paid for necessary repairs to make the long-unused rectory habitable, Lighthouse 2 opened its doors in Union City in April

2021. They are granted rent-free use of the building, but are responsible for all its expenses, such as insurance, utilities, and maintenance.

Then came another challenge. Just as their building expenses were increasing, they lost the support of their planned partners.

“When we opened, the idea was that First Friends and Church World Service and Welcome Home were going to be the sending agencies,” said Singleton. “So, they were going to be sending the clients to us, they were also going to be making room donations toward their stay. And they were going to be supplying the case management.”

Then in August 2021, Governor Murphy signed legislation barring county officials and private detention facilities from signing new contracts with ICE. While immigration organizations had long advocated for this legislation out of concern for detention center conditions, one of its side effects was to change the landscape for those assisting asylum seekers in New Jersey.

This particularly affected their original partner, First Friends. “They are trying to figure out how they’re going to be supporting people in this way, but they’re no longer in a position to support us and partner with us in the original way that we had hoped for,” said Singleton.

As for their hoped-for new partners, Church World Service has switched to working with refugees, and Welcome Home has partnered with the International Rescue Committee (IRC), whose housing requirements are not compatible with what Lighthouse 2 can provide.

“So, those three organizations that were going to be our kind of feeding organizations, not only for funding, but also for case management, were no longer a reality,” Singleton said.

And yet another challenge is that asylum seekers are no longer mostly individuals; now many are families with children.

“This is a much more complex sort of situation,” said Singleton. “Finding housing for a family unit is a lot more difficult than finding housing for a single person, and they need longer stays and broader support.”

Needing to provide case management services themselves, The Lighthouse applied for and received an Alleluia Fund grant which, along with a generous monthly donation from an individual, enabled them to hire a part-time social worker, Jacob Pirogovsky.

“I’m just really grateful to be able to work with all the families and with Jill,” said Pirogovsky. “My parents came as refugees to the U.S., so I know how hard it is.”

Pirogovsky assists the residents of The Lighthouse in navigating many essential tasks: acquiring IDs and working papers; signing up for SNAP benefits; enrolling in English classes at Hudson County Community College; and acquiring bank accounts and credit cards and learning how to manage them online. He also helps parents register their children for the health insurance that is available to all NJ residents under 19 regardless of immigration status, enroll school-age children in school, and find tutoring when it is needed.

The Lighthouse has also applied for an ACTS/VIM grant to subsidize a women’s empowerment program to provide the female residents with English classes, driving lessons and self-defense classes. “One of the things that we’ve noticed,” Singleton said, “is that the women and children are particularly vulnerable, because the men are out getting jobs. And so they’re learning the culture, they’re learning English, they’re earning money, they’re gaining experience. But the women at home with the children are not and they’re much more isolated. And God forbid that partnership should dissolve between the mother and father – these women would be really, really vulnerable.”

In its first two years, Lighthouse 2 has hosted 23 asylum seekers from 6 countries. Currently there

are 14 residents – the number Singleton says is the “sweet spot” for the six-bedroom, three-bathroom house. A family of six from Guatemala is using two bedrooms; two couples, one from Colombia and one from Columbia and Venezuela, both with an infant, each occupy a bedroom; and two individuals from Ghana and Cuba each have a bedroom.

There is no time limit on a resident’s stay at The Lighthouse, as long as they are making progress towards their goals of legal status and becoming self-supporting. Once a resident finds employment, they begin making a room donation towards their lodging, on a sliding scale based on what they’re able to pay.

The Lighthouse receives support from several churches and other organizations.

In addition to providing oversight of The Lighthouse’s ministry, the Church of St. Paul and Incarnation – where Singleton serves as Deacon – makes a financial donation, and parishioners are generous in donating food and household supplies.

Support also comes from Grace Church in Union City, which has a Spanish-speaking congregation. Their priest-in-charge, the Rev. Hilario Albert, does Bible studies at The Lighthouse, and several of the residents worship at Grace Church. One of the couples plans to have their baby baptized there, with Singleton as the godmother.

All Saints Parish, Hoboken and St. James, Upper Montclair – as well as its thrift store, separately – have been generous donors. All Saints has also partnered with its Hoboken neighbor, St. Matthew Trinity Lutheran Church, in organizing events at The Lighthouse, such as a Shrove Tuesday pancake supper. Just last Sunday, Lori Lawrence of All Saints, a volunteer ESL teacher, brought a group of fellow parishioners to The Lighthouse for a “Coffee Chat” so that the residents could practice their English with a friendly partner – something they plan to continue doing every four to six weeks.

Women on Deck, a Clifton organization comprised of Latin American women who arrived as immigrants and now are all successful professionals, hosted a luncheon. “They were able to share about their journeys and talk a little bit about what lies ahead for our folks and what they can expect,” said Singleton. “They can speak with a voice that’s very much more relevant and powerful than our voices. Because these are people who have lived through the experience.”

A physician’s assistant volunteers with The Lighthouse. “We’ve had two babies born while at The Lighthouse with us,” said Singleton, “and this person has walked the journey with the moms through the whole medical process, through their visits, and all of that. So that was a real blessing also.”

A local sorority cooked Thanksgiving dinner for the residents, did a cookie baking with them, and donated bilingual children’s books. Local artists have given art classes, and an avid crocheter has taught crochet.

The United Synagogue of Hoboken delivers fresh produce weekly, and regularly calls to ask, “We’re going to Costco – what do you need for The Lighthouse?”

For those who wish to help, there are many opportunities, both large and small.

The Lighthouse is working with Congregation Beit Simchat Torah in Manhattan, which runs a *pro se* clinic to help asylum seekers with their legal status. Volunteers help with filling out paperwork, which is then reviewed by an attorney. Volunteers are needed to accompany and assist The Lighthouse residents, and while legal experience or Spanish language skills are greatly appreciated, they are not required; training and support is provided to those with the time and willingness to help.

Volunteers with accounting experience are also needed. “Helping our folks understand taxes and all of that stuff is really important,” said Singleton.

Used clothing is *not* needed as it is covered through partnerships with thrift stores, but The Lighthouse also provides new arrivals with a small “kit” of brand-new clothing – a couple each of pants, shirts, and sweaters or sweatshirts, plus socks and underwear and shoes or boots – and would welcome donations to supply them.

Singleton talked with sadness about people she had to turn away because The Lighthouse was full, and expressed hope that churches with unused space would consider making it available. “There’s just so little space,” she said, “and there’s so much activity right now, especially with Ukraine. That’s really taken a lot of the resources.”

Financial donations would always be welcome.

Speaking of The Lighthouse residents, Singleton said, “While they’re with us, I feel like it’s a little window. And it’s a time to breathe, and it’s a time to heal, and it’s a time to see possibility that you didn’t see before. That’s really important. Even possibility for joy and fellowship, and love and connection and friendship. And that, to me, is the most important thing.”

Diocesan Announcements

Clergy ministry transitions

Departures

- **APR 16 - The Rev. Lorna Woodham**
Priest-in-Charge, Christ Church, Budd Lake