



Highlights of diocesan news in printable format — September 6, 2023

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From the Bishop

Holding onto the lessons from the Summer of Sabbath

This is a transcript of a video message.

This is Bishop Hughes in the Diocese of Newark. Labor Day has come and gone, and though we are in a heatwave here in Northern New Jersey, the slower schedule of summer has also come and gone. And suddenly we are back into full schedules, all kinds of activities, and many places where we need to be most days of the week.

One of the things I want us to hold on to are the lessons that we learned in the Summer of Sabbath. I am not naive, I know that not everyone in this diocese, nor did every place in this diocese, participate in the Summer of Sabbath. But one of the things I asked us to do was to think about Sabbath this summer, to take things a little bit more slowly, and to think about dedicating time, to rest, to gratitude, and to joy.

There's a reason for all of that, a deep theological reason. And it's an important part of our growth spiritually. That is, when we are in the midst of Sabbath, when we have managed to get some rest, when we can see the things that we have to be grateful for, and when we've experienced that deep joy of doing things that we are meant to do, that we are created to do, that give us a sense of joy like nothing else. When all of those things come together, we also come to a place where we're able to know God more.

I can't help but think of that verse from Psalm 46: "Be still and know that I am God." There is this sense for us sometimes, it's stillness means absolute quiet, no

movement in any direction. I would like us to hold on to Sabbath as our sense of what stillness looks like. That every week going forward, whether it's an hour, or an afternoon, or a morning and evening or a full day – and I recognize that for some people that seems almost impossible. But to declare a weekly piece of time as Sabbath, the time where you get a little bit of rest – even if it's just putting the devices away, or taking a nap – a time where you can think about the things that you are grateful for, the good things in your life that God has placed there, that you remain grateful for. And when you can participate in those things that bring you the greatest joy.

When we are still, when we are in Sabbath, when we have that strong sense that God is there, and that God has care for us and all the things that are important to us and matter to us, then we have the chance of becoming stronger in our faith, of having a sense of knowing what we are called to do in the midst of the busyness. That in every activity in some way, we are called to bring our faith into that activity – faith at work, faith at school, faith with your family, faith in the grocery store, faith when you're getting your car filled up with gas, faith as you're walking down the street – we are called to grow our faith and to live that faithful life. When we have that incredible sense of knowing God, *knowing* God, that all the things that we do are in some way to the glory of God.

So I encourage you no matter where you fall on the spectrum of Sabbath – that you got this, or you don't understand this, or you're somewhere in between – find the way to claim some time for Sabbath every week as we go into this busier time of year.

Stories from Our Congregations

Haven of Hope provides respite for families of chronically ill children

By Nina Nicholson

It's a sunny August morning in Phillipsburg, and a young boy from Irvington is riding a pony for the very first time.

A little nervous at first, he gains confidence as the stable's owner leads the pony – named Edgar Allen Pony, or Poe for short – on a slow walk around the paddock. After a few minutes he relaxes, grins, releases his grip on the saddle's pommel, and flashes a thumbs up to his watching mother and siblings.

Also watching, and ready to provide a steadying hand when needed, is Colleen Wolfe, Program Director of Haven of Hope for Kids, the ministry that is making this experience possible.

Launched in 2004 by St. Luke's Church in Hope (now part of St. Luke & St. Mary, Hope & Belvidere), Haven of Hope ministers to families of chronically ill children by providing them with a free five-day vacation in rural western New Jersey, near the Pennsylvania border.

Families are referred to Haven of Hope primarily by hospital social workers. Some of the children have cancer diagnoses; others have life-long medical conditions such as sickle-cell anemia or cystic fibrosis. In recent years, Haven of Hope has expanded its program to include children on the autism spectrum.

"Our business is helping these families in need with making memories," says Haven of Hope Board President Amy Hovell.

From Wednesday until Monday morning, the family stays in a cottage that St. Luke's owns directly behind the church. During their stay they have a choice of activities with Haven of Hope's partners, which in addition to the Phillipsburg horse farm include a bowling alley, Land of Make Believe in Hope, Lakota Wolf Preserve in Columbia, and the Belvidere Community Pool.

The partners either donate their services for free or provide them to Haven of Hope at a discounted cost, which the ministry covers. Low-income families can also receive a stipend for groceries.

Sometimes, though, it's the simple pleasures that mean the most. Noting that about 90% of their families come from urban communities in New Jersey and New York, Wolfe describes how, "We had one family who didn't even make it in the front door – the kids ran straight to the yard." Where they lived, they didn't have a yard.

"What I love about our program," Wolfe says, "is that we have the whole family unit. Parents have a chance to relax." Usually, she says, "they're in and out of hospitals" with their sick child.

"I try to make this as seamless as possible for families," she continues. "If there's a problem with the schedule, I work it out. This is their vacation."

The program runs for 10 weeks each summer, from late June through August, hosting a different family each week. Several additional local families are also served by Haven of Hope each summer by providing them with day trips.

Haven of Hope is Wolfe's summer job. A professional child development specialist, her job the rest of the year is doing early interventions with children up to age 3. Because of her professional training, "I can meet the needs of not only children but parents as well." She often finds herself providing a sympathetic ear to an overwhelmed parent.

She is assisted by Program Coordinator Emily Carter, whose "regular" job is as an aide in the local school district working with children on the autism spectrum.

"We also have very active board members who are very involved," Wolfe notes, and when needed, she can call on one of several volunteer translators.

After every family member has a turn riding Edgar Allen Pony, the next stop of the day is the Belvidere Community Pool. Like the horseback riding, this is a new experience. Again, there is some nervousness, but soon the children are lining up to try out the pool's slide.

Wolfe sums up Haven of Hope's ministry: "We're here to have fun with the families."

Food pantry offers "Christmas in August"

By Nina Nicholson

If you visited Holy Communion in Norwood on a recent Saturday, you might have spotted Santa Claus – in August.

There is a perfectly rational explanation for this.

On Saturday, August 19, Holy Communion turned one of its food pantry days into “Christmas in August,” a smaller version of its annual Christmas event. In addition to giving out 125 bags packed with food, they set up their parish hall with tables covered with brand-new toys donated by the Bergen County Police Benevolent Association. Stacked both on and underneath two other tables were 50 new backpacks filled with school supplies, donated by the Jewish Federation of Northern New Jersey. Overseeing it all was “Santa Claus,” a volunteer named Eric who was a good sport about wearing a hot Santa costume in the dog days of August.

In the covered walkway between the church and the parish hall stood more tables with jugs of milk and pantry staples such as flour, sugar, oil, and mayonnaise. Out on the lawn, still more tables were set up flea-market style with gently used toys, household goods, and clothing, donated by parishioners and community members.

All these items were free for the taking to registered clients of Holy Communion’s Choice food pantry.

Holy Communion launched its food pantry in 2012, and like many others “it blew up during the pandemic,” says Joanne Scalpello, Holy Communion’s senior warden and co-director of the food pantry.

Originally serving just Norwood, the food pantry first expanded to serve the towns of Northvale, Harrington Park and Old Teppan, then expanded further to serve the entire northern Bergen County area, and even some households from across the New York state line, located just a few minutes from the church.

In addition to the twice-a-month food distribution, they also hold drives for turkeys, toys, and coats, give away Easter baskets, and hold a regular Christmas event in December.

To register for the food pantry, clients simply need to give their name, phone number, and the number of people in their household. They can then select the food items they need from a list provided in both English and Spanish; the amount of food they can request is based on the size of their household. Volunteers use the lists to pack bags in advance, ready for pickup at 10 AM on the scheduled Saturday.

On this morning, clients began lining up at the check-in table well before start time. Once they checked in, a volunteer brought them their bag or bags of food. They then had the opportunity to browse the milk and pantry staples, the flea market items, and the parish hall filled with toys and backpacks, selecting anything else they needed. Children seemed delighted with picking out their own toys and backpacks and talking to “Santa.”

More than 70 volunteers, who include community members as well as parishioners, keep the food pantry and its related events running. On this day three of the volunteers, Jillian, Ethan, and Kyle, are local high school students who all started volunteering there as an activity to include in their college applications, but have continued because, as Jillian says, “It’s fun.” Kyle has even gotten his mother to join him as a volunteer.

Scalpello says they are working with the Bergen County Health Department to make one of their monthly events a pop-up health event with resources on healthy eating, exercise, and mental health issues, that would be a model for other area food pantries.

Holy Communion also works with the Bergen County Office of Food Security, which supports more than 70 food pantries with grants, resource guides, and database software. In addition to the Bergen County PBA and the Jewish Federation, other partners include the local Women’s Club and Seniors’ Club; the American Legion; the Girl Scouts; Open Closet, an organization offering second-hand clothing; Catholic Charities; and several local churches of other denominations. St. Luke’s, Haworth and St. Andrews, Harrington Park collect food donations for them monthly.

Speaking of all the organizations, schools, churches and many community members who consistently donate to the food pantry, Scalpello beams.

“We are truly blessed,” she says.

Seeds of change – together!

St. Stephen's 11th annual drumming camp

By Maria T. Card

St. Stephen's, Millburn hosted 20 campers at its 11th annual Drumming Camp on August 21-25. The week's activities included drumming, singing, dancing, arts and crafts, playing games, making and eating s'mores, and getting soaked with water balloons!

The theme of the program and the week, "Seeds of Change – Together," was based on a book about Dr. Wangari Maathai, a woman from the Kikuyu people of Kenya who became a well-respected scientist and leader for environmental justice.

Dozens of family members, parishioners, and friends gathered for the campers' closing program on Friday, August 25, which was led by Côte d'Ivoire native Yah'Ya Kamate. After enjoying a cookout together with their families, each child carried home a backpack stuffed with school supplies, a shopping bag filled with snacks, and their craft creations from the week. And, as they have every year, campers left knowing that they can make a positive difference in their communities and the world.

When asked by a staff person, "What's one thing you can do to make our world a better place?", Cindy, a returning camper responded, "We can volunteer and help somebody who needs help." And Shakinah, who was a former camper and volunteered this year, talked about entering college in the fall, with a goal of one day starting a non-profit organization to provide healthy and nutritious food to those in need.

The five-day camp experience is led by a core staff of experienced teachers and counselors, as well as an array of volunteers from the parish and surrounding area who assist in a variety of ways, including preparing and serving snacks, dinners purchased at local restaurants – Oscar's Deli, La Strada Restaurant, and Vinnie's Pizza – and dessert each day.

Two of the counselors who worked with the children this year were themselves former campers from years past.

The camp was established in 2013 in partnership with the Diocese of Newark Prison Ministry, which advocates for restorative justice, interfaith programs, and personal healing for prisoners, their families, and communities. This year it was expanded to include the children of refugee families sponsored by two Episcopal parishes. The camp is free for all participants and is funded by charitable contributions from friends, parishioners, and the St. Stephen's of Kansas Charitable Trust.

Augustine region celebrates patronal feast with region-wide picnic

By Christian Paolino

On Sunday, August 27 more than 60 members of churches in the Augustine of Hippo Regional Ministry Network gathered at St. Mark's, Teaneck for a region-wide picnic. The purpose of the event was for the Augustine congregations to begin to get to know one another. It concluded with Evening Prayer using the Propers for their region's patronal feast on August 28. They plan to hold another event in the coming months to begin brainstorming what the Holy Spirit might be calling them to do together.