



Highlights of diocesan news in printable format — March 6, 2024

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## From Canon Clark

### Two parishes begin experiment with Team Ministry

*By the Rev. Canon Margo Peckham Clark, Canon for Congregational Life*

A new thing has begun at the Church of the Messiah in Chester and St. Mary's Church in Sparta. These two parishes located about 20 miles apart will be working as a Team Ministry. This collaboration between two wonderful, independent parishes is the first "living experiment" with a unique model of congregational collaboration launched after the diocese identified "Congregational Collaboration" as one of the four focus areas in our Strategic Vision.

Mother Elizabeth Ivell has accepted a call to serve as Priest-in-Charge of both parishes, and she will lead a Ministry Team comprised of a Priest-in-Charge, a Deacon, and eventually at least two licensed "Lay Pastoral Leaders," one from each parish.

"This is a dream come true," says Bishop Hughes. "When we realized that these two vibrant and thriving parishes each did not have the resources to continue to support full-time clergy at this time, we approached each vestry about whether they might be open to exploring a different way forward. Both vestries enthusiastically agreed, and they began a process of many months of getting to know each other, relationship building, and practical conversations – all before they could even begin to think about interviewing priests."

The Wardens of the two parishes met, followed by multiple joint vestry conversations, discussions with the Canon for Congregational Life, a dinner, a bonfire and picnic, meetings between the treasurers, a meeting with the Bishop, and more.

"This was an awful lot to take on, given that the Wardens in each parish were also working to make sure the worship life in each parish continued without clergy in place, handling building repairs, dealing with baptism and funeral requests, and all the other parts of parish life," said Bob Schock, the most recent past Senior Warden at St. Mary's, Sparta. "I think especially given that, the whole process was miraculous and grace-filled, and we could all feel that and kept going!"

Early on, the two parish vestries adopted a set of principles as to how they would interact with each other, what they were hoping to do, and what they were not seeking to do. This created some real clarity around a framework for the practical conversations and ground rules for relationship building.

Ross Wisnewski, Treasurer at St Mary's and John Pietrowski, Treasurer at Messiah had identified in the earlier stages of each parish's transition that while their respective parishes were financially stable and the physical plant in good shape, there simply weren't enough financial resources to responsibly take on calling full-time clergy.

Calling part-time clergy, historically very difficult, has become even more challenging in recent years – dozens of part-time cures are available at any time, in any one region, and nationwide there are at least hundreds. The situation is even more complicated in northern New Jersey where few can afford to retire. Further, if part-time clergy are called to meet budgetary needs only,

without a vision about re-starting and moving forward, that can be a recipe for stasis or decline.

Wisniewski puts it this way: “Here we had a chance to try something exciting and new, to really experiment not only for the ongoing ministry of these two parishes, but for the whole diocese.”

Over time the vestries crafted a vision of what this could look like. They shared their desire to grow the life of their respective parishes, to support each other and share resources, and to have a Team working with and leading the spiritual life of both parishes. “I think we started to see, particularly since both parishes have such committed and active lay leadership, that this was a way to really re-invent some aspects of being the church today, and that there is no limit to what we can do together, that we can be stronger together,” explained Merica Dermody, one of the Wardens at Messiah. Discussion of shared music programs, combined youth events, cost savings by sharing, and new ministries covering a wider area have already been floated for discussion.

In the late Fall, after extensive interviews and dreaming together, the vestries of the two parishes requested that Bishop Hughes appoint Mother Elizabeth Ivell (right), who had been serving at St. Peter’s, Morristown, as Priest-in-Charge for the new Team.

Mother Ivell says “I am so excited by the possibilities for this collaboration and how it can strengthen, deepen, and grow ministries in both places.” She goes on to say she may even use this ministry as a basis for her project in the Doctor of Ministry program she is beginning.

Bishop Hughes has also appointed veteran Deacon Gail Kertland (right) to work with Mother Elizabeth to begin this venture and to be a part of the Ministry Team for Messiah and St. Mary’s. Deacon Kertland has served in many dioceses and in a range of ministry settings, and brings a passion for sharing the Gospel and serving all God’s people. She says this: “I am honored to be a part of this pilot program and am excited to work to bring it to fruition with Elizabeth and the rest of the Team.”

The Pastoral Leaders will be identified through discernment in the parish, with special training in advance of the Bishop licensing them for this ministry. “I am hoping we will eventually have Pastoral Leaders

all around the diocese in nearly every parish!” said Bishop Hughes.

Stay tuned for updates on this collaboration and news about others as they are developed and launched around the diocese.

### **Some basic considerations when starting the friendship process and possibly discerning a new congregational collaboration**

- Collaborations between congregations need to arise from the congregations with coaching and support from the Bishop’s office, and they need to be tailored to the parishes in question – it isn’t just a matter of “choosing a model” based on what the parishes can “afford.” Even the decision about what sort of “model” to adapt should be worked through locally.
- Parishes should probably be somewhat like each other, particularly so there isn’t a wildly different worship style or schedule that a priest would need to navigate.
- Each parish must be stable enough to commit to a three-year initial commitment.
- There should be a fully functioning parish/team/shared arrangement after the work is complete (in other words there should be enough people and resources to move the collaboration forward once started, and ideally it should provide at least one fulltime cure).
- Collaborations may not work as easily together if there are large, delayed capital needs in any involved parish.

## Catching Up with Bishop Hughes

### **Bishop Hughes’ travels Feb. 5-Mar. 7**

Did you know that Bishop Hughes has been on the road most of the past month?

**Feb. 5-8 - Virginia:** Served as faculty at the College for Bishops (AKA “Baby Bishop School”).

**Feb. 19-22 - South Carolina:** With the Sisters of the Order of St. Helena, where she serves as Bishop Visitor.

**Feb. 24 - New York:** Attended the Consecration of the Rt. Rev. Jeremiah Williamson as 10th Bishop of Albany.

**Feb. 28-Mar. 4 - Texas:** Attended the semi-annual House of Bishops meeting at Camp Allen.

**Mar. 5-7 - New York, again:** Currently with a group of our clergy at Holy Cross Monastery for the annual Clergy Retreat.

All this while visiting one of our parishes nearly every Sunday – AND attending the Absalom Jones service. Whew!

## Diocesan Announcements

### Relocation of diocesan headquarters: Staus update March 2024

We have an update about the planned move of diocesan headquarters, as well as NJPAC's plans for 31 Mulberry.

NJPAC is acquiring 31 Mulberry as part of a major expansion of its campus. A new 53,000-square-foot facility, to be called the Cooperman Center, will be built on the parking lot next to 31 Mulberry to house NJPAC's arts education and community programming. They plan to renovate 31 Mulberry itself to serve as office space for the NJPAC complex.

Meanwhile, the Bishop's staff and the Building Committee are busy preparing for the relocation to Livingston.

Renovation plans for the former St. Peter's Church in Livingston are complete and have been submitted for bids. Once bids are received, the completion date can be estimated. Preparatory demolition work is already underway, and it is hoped that construction can begin this month.

Moving preparations have started at 31 Mulberry. A shipment of 490 packing bins was delivered on Friday, February 23, and a group of 13 volunteers joined John King and Cecil Broner, Jim Caputo, Jane Jubilee, Sam Reckford and Canon Andrew Wright to move the empty bins from the parking lot to inside the building. John

wants to thank the volunteers for coming to Episcopal House and very rapidly teaming up to move the bins into a few key locations for the next phase of the packing. John says, "It was wonderful to have a diverse group of volunteers who came from all over – I mean ALL OVER the diocese to take time out of their busy lives to get this job done and share a meal. We formed a fire-bucket brigade and moved all of the bins quickly and efficiently, and as far as this phase of the process goes, now we can say, 'Bin there, done that! What a crate experience! Thanks, everyone!'"

John also thanks the Trustees of the Episcopal Fund and Diocesan Properties for agreeing to fund this important effort to safeguard the Diocesan Archives during the upcoming move and into the future.

### Clergy ministry transitions

#### Arrivals

**FEB 22 – The Rev. Deacon Gail Kertland**

Deacon, Ministry Team at St. Mary's Sparta and Messiah, Chester

#### Retirements

**MAR 31 – The Rev. Candace Sandfort**

Rector of St. John's, Montclair