



Highlights of diocesan news in printable format — May 1, 2024

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## From the Bishop

### Two things everyone can do to grow the church

*This is a transcript of a video message.*

This is Bishop Hughes in the Diocese of Newark. Lately people have been talking to me about church growth. They want to know what am I or what is the diocese going to do, or what are other churches doing, in order to grow. And for the past five years, I've talked with this diocese about probably the most important thing about church growth. Actually, it's two things. One is fellowship. The second is evangelism.

And I say them in that order for a specific reason. In order to be in the place where your own spiritual life is nurtured, and healthy, and vibrant enough to be able to talk about the faith with another person, you really have to do your own work. It means learning how to pray, learning how to pray for yourself and for others. It means learning to develop a discerning ear, to hear the things that God is saying to you, to a group, to your family, at your work, to your church, to our country, to the world – to be listening for the ways God is working, and the ways God is trying to lead us in every part of our life. It means spending time – and that's why it's under the umbrella of fellowship – it means spending time with other people who are working on their spiritual life.

One of the ways that we have suggested doing that in this diocese, is something that we call faith groups. It's a group of people who covenant – make a promise together – who covenant to meet with each other on a regular basis for a period of time. There are faith groups

that decide to meet all throughout the academic year, so September through May or June, they meet. There are faith groups who decide to meet for a season – we're going to meet in the fall and winter, or we're gonna meet in the spring and summer. There are faith groups that meet every week, there are faith groups that meet every other week.

The thing that is particular about faith groups, though, is they are not meeting for the task of running a meeting or committee. They're meeting for the purpose of shoring each other up, helping each other grow into the faith. They may spend some time ruminating, thinking about, pondering on a piece of scripture, but they're not necessarily studying that piece of scripture trying to pull everything they can out of it in terms of its historicity, or how it was written, or when it was written, those kinds of things. Rather, they're taking a piece of scripture, reading it together, letting it inwardly soak into them. And then asking the question, how does this speak to my life, how to speak to the world, etc. So that fellowship piece is important. It's how we grow our faith. I know we want to believe that that one hour on Sunday morning will take care of it, but it is simply not enough. We need more time, and time with other faithful people talking about faith.

The other part is evangelism. And I don't think sharing the faith, talking about faith with other people, is something that we're equipped to do if we have not worked on our own faith. So to talk about faith means that we have to be able to look at our own, and be comfortable with using that language – something that we can do when we're in our small group, when we're working in our faith group, talking with people in our faith group about faith, we learn how to talk faith. We learn how to use those words, they become comfortable to us. And when they become comfortable

to us in one setting, they become more comfortable in another setting.

Almost every time I talk with people about sharing the faith, the thing that they express the most fear about is that there'll be some expectation that they're going to go out and convert people to the faith. And I would say this, our real message in terms of sharing our faith is to let people know that they are loved and that they belong to the One who created them. And sometimes people can hear that message just from the beginning because they've heard such a hateful message about who God is. And so it's healing to know that that God created them exactly as they are, intentionally, and loves them exactly as they are. Really that is the biggest gift we can bring when we talk about faith, to let people know that they are loved by us, that they belong in our own company, and that they are loved by God and that they belong to God.

These two things, fellowship and evangelism, will grow the church. It's something everybody can do. It doesn't matter if your church is large or small. It doesn't matter what your plans are, if you have a strategic plan or not. Every single Episcopalian in this diocese, can spend time in a small group talking about faith, learning how to do that beyond the group, beyond the church, in sharing the incredible love, mercy and relationship that God wants to have with God's people, wherever we go in the world.

If you want to grow the church, start with growing your own faith.

## May is AAPI month

### A reflection on AAPI Episcopal experience

*By the Rev. Dr. Paul Rajan*

I am Father Paul Rajan, originally from south India, but I have served as a missionary priest among the Pacific Island communities in New Zealand for a long time. So, I included myself in the AAPI list. How did the AAPI community get to this place and phase in history to celebrate this month?

May 7 and May 10 are two significant dates in the history of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders: The

first Japanese immigrants arrived in the United States on May 7, 1843, and the first transcontinental railroad in the United States was completed, with significant contributions from Chinese pioneers, on May 10, 1869. In 1979, Congress passed a joint resolution directing the President to issue a proclamation designating the week of May 4-10, 1979 as Asian/Pacific American Heritage Week. This practice was repeated annually until 1990, when Congress amended the resolution to expand the observance to the entire month of May. [Source: Library of Congress.]

This annual observance is a time to recognize and honor the contributions, achievements, and cultural heritage of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in various sectors and our Church. AAPI Heritage Month provides an opportunity for reflection, education, and appreciation of the contributions of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders that enrich the American experience.

As I write this reflection of my experience in the United States and in the Episcopal Church, I am excited to report on the Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) Leadership Retreat. This retreat, which was started last year in Austin, TX and continued this year in Portland, OR, is a significant gathering for AAPI leaders within the Episcopal Church. Last year, we met at St Matthew's Episcopal Church in Austin, TX, and were hosted by the Diocese of Texas. This year, we met at the St. Paul's Episcopal Cathedral Church in Portland, OR, and the Episcopal Diocese of Western Oregon hosted it. These retreats, sponsored by Asian Episcopal Ministries, Trinity Church Wall Street, and the Diocese of New York, provide a platform for AAPI leaders to share their experiences, discuss important issues, and celebrate their contributions to the Church. Bishop Alan Shin took the lead in organizing these events, along with the local Bishops of the respective dioceses. The Rt. Rev. Diana Akiyama, Bishop of Western Oregon, celebrated the Holy Eucharist at the inaugural service, and I had the privilege of celebrating at the closing Eucharist.

We had an average of 45 attendees during both years, representing a rich tapestry of AAPI cultures. Among us were individuals from diverse backgrounds, including Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Hawaiian, Pacific Islanders, Philippians, Chinese, and Indian. This diverse representation is a testament to the unity and strength of our AAPI community.

The Rev. Dr. KyungJa “KJ” Oh, the first ordained priest from the AAPI community, a retired Chaplain, Vicar, Rector, and Seminary Faculty, was the guest speaker for the last two years of the AAPI Leadership Retreat. KJ retired in June, 2022, after having served as Director of Formation and Contextual Learning at Bexley Seabury for eight years. Dr. KJ guided us through the themes of the retreat, which were "Renewed in the Spirit" last year and "The Gifts We Bring: Resilience from Living In-Between" this year. These themes were carefully chosen to address the unique challenges and experiences of AAPI leaders in the Episcopal Church, and they sparked meaningful discussions and reflections among the participants:

- What gifts do we bring, not despite, but because we are Asian and Pacific Islander Americans?
- What resilience and strength have we already found from living in the in-between?

Our AAPI community, despite the challenges of living in a cultural “in-between,” has demonstrated remarkable resilience and strength. This strength, born out of our unique experiences and cultural heritage, is a source of inspiration and empowerment for all of us. One participant said, “While living here and ministering here, our needs are outweighed by the local needs.” This is the kind of sacrifice I have made so far.

While introducing each other, we had an “intro bingo” game in which we asked, “How many of you do not use shoes at home?” and 98% said they do not use them. Our stories are our stories, and we own them. They are rich and painful, which has taught us to live a life of sacrifice and love. We are committed to those cultural values.

I think there was a time when most of these nations received the gospel from Western missionaries, and now it is the time for us to serve as missionaries to the West. One other participant said, “God loves us as the brown people that we are,” and I wish to add to this, “We are an option when there is no other option.” So, we need to wait for the Lord to use us, and He uses us in His time and in His ways to fulfill His mission.

Let me end with these verses, which talk about the purpose of our life in the new land of America, where we are “in-between” cultures, and the purpose of our

life, the promise of God to fulfill this missional purpose. Matthew 28:18-20: “And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’”

*The Rev. Dr. Paul Rajan is Vicar of the Church of the Good Shepherd, Wantage.*

## Happening at Our Congregations

### Grace, Madison teen selected for General Convention Official Youth Presence

*By Nina Nicholson, Director of Communications*

Meredith McKeever is one busy 17-year-old. In the fall she plays on her school soccer team. In the winter she’s on the swimming team – and in the 2024-25 school year, her senior year, she’ll be team captain. In the spring, she runs track. At Grace Church in Madison, she sings soprano in the choir. And this June, she’ll be one of just 18 young people selected to have seat and voice at the 81st General Convention as part of the Official Youth Presence.

The General Convention, which normally meets every three years, is The Episcopal Church’s governing body. It comprises the House of Deputies, with nearly 900 clergy and lay deputies elected from the church’s 108 dioceses and two area missions, and the House of Bishops, with around 140 active and retired bishops.

This year General Convention will meet June 20-28 in Louisville, KY. Among the business to be conducted is the election of the 28th Presiding Bishop for a nine-year term that begins Nov.1 when they succeed Presiding Bishop Michael Curry.

McKeever got her first taste of Episcopal Church polity serving as a youth deputy representing the Evelyn Underhill Regional Ministry Network at the 149th Diocesan Convention in Feb. 2023.

“I found that whole process really, really interesting,” McKeever says. “And I thought it was interesting that I – I would have been 15 at the time – and I had vote, and I could speak in front of the whole crowd.”

The Rev. Asa Coulson knows McKeever both through his work as co-chair of the Diocesan Youth Commission as well as his time as Associate Priest at Grace, Madison (a role that concluded this past January when he went to Grace, Nutley to serve as Priest-in-Charge). He encouraged her to apply for the Official Youth Presence when applications opened last fall to Episcopal teens ages 16 to 19, and endorsed her application by serving as the required non-family member nominator.

“I was initially impressed with Meredith during the confirmation program three years ago at Grace, Madison,” says Coulson. “In our class sessions she expressed a sincere desire to know more about our faith, as well as the way our denominational organization functioned. She was keenly interested in how individuals, including youth, could play a role in governing and decision making of the church. Immediately she began to lead as an acolyte, lector, intercessor, choir member, and was active in the parish youth group.

“When she served as a youth deputy to the last Diocesan Convention Meredith showed deep intellectual curiosity during legislative sessions and leadership during conversations with other deputies, youth and adult alike. This past summer at EYE [Episcopal Youth Event] she was always among the first in our delegation to reach out to other diocesan delegations and make friends.

“In all of these instances I knew Meredith would make an excellent member of the Official Youth Presence at General Convention this summer and was both excited and honored to nominate her.”

Sixty young people applied for the 18 spots – two youth from each of The Episcopal Church’s nine provinces. The Episcopal Church Office for Youth Ministries coordinated the selection process in collaboration with the General Convention Office and the president of the House of Deputies.

In the Zoom interview that was part of the application process, McKeever says, “They asked me a lot about how I am active in my church and what I do in my church. And then, what change I want to see in the church, what I can do at General Convention, and then most importantly, what can I bring home from General Convention and implement into our diocese and into our parish?”

About that last question, McKeever says, “The things I’m most passionate about are creation care, especially in our area where things are so congested; and accessibility within the church, making the church a place of refuge.”

After their selection, the 18 youth traveled to Louisville in February for four days of orientation and training.

In addition to learning about parliamentary procedure – with which McKeever is already familiar from serving as a Diocesan Convention youth deputy as well as participating in the Harvard Model Congress through her school – she says they also talked about how to speak effectively at General Convention.

“On the general convention floor, you only get two minutes to speak at a time, so it's important that you speak confidently, you speak loudly, but you put it out there, you get your point across and you're done.”

The youth deputies also talked about how to comport themselves.

“As the youth, people are looking at us, so our dress, the way we speak and present ourselves will be very, very important. So we have to keep that in mind.”

Asked what she's most looking forward to, McKeever says, "Seeing the people I met in the training session – I'm really interested in seeing my friends again.

"But I'm also really interested in just seeing how the church works. Because I don't get vote, but I get voice so I can contribute to the conversation.

"I think that the youth are quite possibly the most important voice at General Convention. And they're really the ones you should be listening to. We often get ignored. And people are like, 'Oh, my gosh, the youth aren't coming to church anymore.'

"You should be listening to us."

## In the News

### Newark diocese's leaders rally with advocates for homeless people as Supreme Court hears case outlawing camping on public property

*By ENS staff*

*This article was published by Episcopal News Service (ENS) on April 22, 2024.*

The Diocese of Newark's bishop and archdeacon rallied alongside other advocates for homeless people on April 22 in the city's Harriet Tubman Square.

Every faith tradition has something like the Golden Rule, noted Newark Bishop Carlye J. Hughes, addressing the crowd. "That simple basic belief of treating others well, treating others the way you want to be treated, is one that makes life human, fair and equitable," she said. Respecting people's inherent dignity contrasts with those who "see homelessness and say, just get rid of it, make it go away."

The rally coincided with the first day of arguments before the U. S. Supreme Court concerning an Oregon case about laws that ban camping on public property when there aren't enough available beds in homeless shelters.

Also speaking at the rally was the Ven. Diane Riley, the diocese's archdeacon for mission and service and co-

leader of the diocese's Commission for Justice and Peace. She also is executive director of the Supportive Housing Association of New Jersey, which she said has been providing supportive services plus affordable housing for 40 years.

"You take the services someone needs, you give them an affordable place, a safe place to live, and they respond by becoming healthier," Riley said. "They start to thrive. They become active in their community, and they live their best lives, just like we all want to do."

To highlight the sometimes-invisible nature of homelessness, Hughes described meeting a cashier at a local Whole Foods store during a recent shopping trip who, after exchanging pleasantries, told her, "I work for the richest man in the world. And nobody in this place, nobody that I've worked with, knows I've been without a home for five years."

In closing, Hughes also offered a prayer, in which she asked "God who created all beings and loves all creation" to pour out a spirit of compassion on the Supreme Court. She closed by praying, "And in this great nation, full of so much, plenteous resources, we ask that you open all our hearts so that when we see a person in need of a home, rather than judge, we look at them the way you would look at them and ask, 'How can I help'? Amen."

## Diocesan Announcements

### Clergy ministry transitions

#### Departures

- **APR 30 - The Rev. Sheelagh Clarke**  
Priest-in-Residence, Holy Innocents, West Orange