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ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Newsletter – September 2020

A Message from the Reverend Diane Wong, Rector

With social distancing and being on Zoom as the way we live now, how can we be church? How can we build and strengthen St. John's without being able to come together in-person? How can we do God's work of outreach?

These questions led me to sign up for the 3-part Faith-X webinars; "Reopening Church in a New Reality." Faith-X has the mission of helping congregations survive and thrive in turbulent times. A few weeks ago, I attended part 1 of this series - "Re-Visioning in a Changing Context". I'd like to share the gist of the webinar with you so we can all reflect on the questions that we have about being church at this time.

While we are used to following Jesus and doing the work of Jesus through the church building, the reality is, we are being called to be "less centered in our buildings and more grounded in the world." **"The place that God calls us is the place where our deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meets." (Frederick Buechner)** **How has the world's deep hunger changed in our community due to the pandemic?** Data can help us find out who is in our community and what they may need and want, and therefore help us focus our outreach and ministry. e.g., Neighborhood Missional Intelligence Report contains data of our community re: age groups, racial categories, transportation needs and patterns, percentage of people who live in poverty and/or receive food stamps, the percentage of unemployment, percentage of people with and without health insurance, and the percentage of people with and without internet access, etc. These figures give a picture of what is going on in the community and how people in our community are being affected by and are at higher risk due to Covid-19.

For example, one community came up with ideas for outreach based on their data - offer home school supplies, stock the local food pantry, offer job search support, buy coffee for the 1st ten customers one day a week, backpack meals for kids, rent assistance, and creating Internet hotspots. **What data would help us understand the need of our community?**

As a parish, we also need to see how we nurture the faith of our people, which means to grow in their discipleship. According to data, different age groups have shown different church attendance patterns during this time, and have different spiritual needs. This is a good time to think about small groups or house churches to meet the different needs in the parish. There can be small groups on evangelism, service, bible study, social justice, prayer, community, and even worship; and invite friends to join. The pastor and the congregation will make sure there is leadership in each small group and help provide resources for each group. Each group also needs to be

grounded in the mission and vision of the congregation. **What do people at St. John's need and want? What do we need to get small groups started?**

Two aspects of church will not change whatever situation we are in - reaching out and addressing the needs of people in our community, and reaching in to nurture the faith of our parishioners. Data and small groups could help us do that.

The second part of this webinar series is **Leading a Hybrid Congregation**. I hope some of you will attend this webinar on 9/16 so we can plan together on being church in this new reality.

Blessings,

Diane+

Sunday Services

For this fall, we will continue to have Sunday services at 10 a.m. on Zoom. The service on September 27th will be held outdoors, in the garden at the Sisters of St. Anne's, in celebration of the Season of Creation.

If you are interested in doing a reading for our Sunday worship service, please let Rev. Diane know. Thank you.

Meet Our New Church School Coordinator

I am Chirusa de Mel and I will be your new Church School Coordinator. I have been teaching at St. Peter's Church in Cambridge since 2015. I graduated from Stonehill College in 2018, and my passion is to work with children. My parents are originally from Sri Lanka, and my father is the Priest in Charge at Church of the Good Shepherd in Dedham, and my mother worked at St. Peter's Episcopal church as a Children's Minister.

We are very glad about this opportunity for St. John's and St. Peter's to collaborate on both our Church School ministries. Church School will be at 10:30 a.m. on Sundays.

Update on Re-gathering

The Re-Gathering Committee has been meeting regularly since May to organize plans for us to re-gather in the building in the midst of this pandemic. We have implemented a Stage 1 plan that involves safe steps for having people in the building to conduct business. We have a log book in the downstairs entrance and request everyone coming into the building sign in for contact tracing purposes. We are asking everyone to always use hand sanitizer and wear face masks in the building at all times as well as follow cleaning procedures in areas where they are working. There are bottles of hand sanitizer around the building as well as spray bottles with approved surface disinfectants in various rooms.

We have also met with our Diocesan Re-Gathering Shepherd to go over our future plans for how to re-gather in the Sanctuary for worship services. So far, the Vestry has approved these plans and we are in the process of getting approval from the Diocese to move forward. Our hope is to offer services in which there are parishioners in the Sanctuary and virtual streaming on Zoom for those who wish to stay at home.

We still have a good bit of work to do to get to that point. We are upgrading the Wi-Fi signal in the Sanctuary as well as planning how we can safely bring people in to the building and seat them safely in the pews. Needless to say, will be different. There will be social distancing, no singing by the congregation, face masks and hand sanitizing are required, and wine cannot be served at the Eucharist. We are also working on a way for people to notify us that they want to attend in-person services on Sundays; this is required to ensure we don't have too many people in the Sanctuary and also have a list of individuals who attend for contact tracing.

Right now, we are hoping to begin services in the Sanctuary in either late October or early November. We would ask that you start to think about whether attending an in-person service is best for you or whether you would continue to join us on Zoom.

We know folks miss being able to attend in-person services and when we do re-gather, we want to do it in a safe and orderly fashion/ We will be providing more details and updates, about our timetable as well as required safety precautions, in our weekly service announcements and in notices to the congregation as we move toward in-person worship in the weeks to come.

If you have any questions please don't hesitate to email or call any one of us.

Thank you,

St. John's Re-Gathering Committee

Rev. Diane Wong, David Wilcox, Dorothy Mallam, Cate Barr, Christine Carney and Donna Sullivan

Year-Round Stewardship at St. John's

By Dorothy Mallam

Last year the Vestry committed to year-round stewardship. We want to be grateful every day for the abundance in our lives and to commit to being the best stewards we can of our church, our community and of God's amazing Creation. We want to celebrate the good stewards in our Parish. During the past six months we have faced challenges in main-taining our church community, in adapting to new realities, and in articulating our mission under the cloud of Covid-19. It is very easy to get discouraged.

However, if we look back, we can see that with God's help, even in these trying times, we are facing these challenges and being community in purposeful ways. Our parishioners started our year-round stewardship with increased giving to St. John's, so that we might fulfill our goals. Before we had to all quarantine ourselves in March and worship online, we were focusing on how our actions as a church and individually could slow climate change. We did away with single-use plastic water bottles. We were taking steps to use fewer plastic and paper products at coffee hour. We were making our heating zones more efficient, and we were about to engage a composting company, so that we could send some of our garbage back to the earth.

After we began to have church services on Zoom, we formed a book discussion group to discuss Saying Yes to Life, by Ruth Valerio. The book group was well attended and many ideas for good stewardship flowed from the discussions. We want to continue our goals and vision of protecting our environment even when we are doing church online. To be mindful of and to express our thanks for God's Creation, we are planning an outdoor Sunday worship service at the garden of St. Anne's Convent on September 27th, when we will learn more about how we can buy renewable energy for the church. A committee is meeting to decide where and what additional plants to put in the front of our church. All trees play an important role in combating climate change. During sermon time on Sunday, September 6th, those present came up with the "**13 Commandments**" that we'd like individual parishioners and the parish to adopt to protect our environment.

During the Season of God's Creation, we will have conversations and share ideas about how we can become better stewards. We will continue with our book group to utilize it both to build community and to deepen our relationship with God. It is our goal for the coming year that we focus on the care of the environment, looking at climate justice and also how we care for one another and our faith. May it be a time of renewed hope and commitment to year-round stewardship at St. John's!

Our "13 Commandments" to Protect the Environment

1. Bring your own bags to the store
2. Bring a trash bag on your walk
3. Walk instead of driving to nearby places
4. Use reusable bottles and tableware
5. Conserve water
6. Explore plant-based diet options
7. Use cloth over paper for meals and clean-up
8. Buy at local farmers markets; shop local; eat local
9. Use less resources - turn off the lights, give away items you no longer need; consider used objects and clothing
10. Buy from companies that have sustainable ways of producing the products we buy
11. Vote for candidates who will protect the environment.
12. Plant native plants and remove invasive plants
13. Recycle paper. Use the backside too.

Conservation Efforts at St. John's

By Jan Ford

Late spring and into early summer, several St. John's members read Saying Yes to Life and participated in a book discussion focusing on the theme of the protection and care of God's creations. There were many suggestions and examples discussed in the book, many of which were major commitments. However, there are many small and easy changes we can make at home. The Audubon Society and the Sierra Club have compiled many of these and we offer some that you might consider adopting in your life to help preserve God's amazing creations, from the Earth itself to the plants, animals, water and mankind that inhabit this amazing planet.

1. Create less waste by using cloth rather than paper napkins.
2. Conserve water:
 - a. Repair leaky faucets
 - b. Install water-saving showerheads
 - c. Only run dishwashers and clothes washers when you have full loads
 - d. Turn off the water while you are brushing your teeth.
3. Although your computer is asleep, it is still using energy. Turn off both the computer and monitor at night.
4. Use reusable containers rather than plastic bags and wraps for storage.
5. Use reusable lunch bags rather than paper bags.
6. Use LED light bulbs. If you have old fluorescent bulbs (CFLs) be sure to recycle them safely as they contain mercury. Wanamaker's Hardware in Arlington Heights accepts all CFL bulbs.

Upcoming Zoom Book Discussion Group

By David Wilcox

Following on the heels of our recent book discussion group in the spring, when we read Saying Yes to Life by Ruth Valerio, we are organizing another book discussion for the fall. Our focus will be on one of Marcus Borg's books, Reading the Bible Again and for the First Time: Taking the Bible Seriously but not Literally. Borg, a distinguished New Testament scholar and theologian, presents a wonderful perspective for all of us as he frames ways in which the Bible can speak to us and our faith. As we read and discuss this book, we hope Borg's perspective can awaken new ways of understanding the Bible and how it speaks to us about issues we are all facing in our lives today.

The Book Group will be hosted on Zoom, starting October 8th at 5:00 p.m., and we will be discussing Chapter One. We are also going to try and order copies of the book from the Book Rack in Arlington. So, if you would like to join the discussion group and want us to order a copy of the book for you, please contact Dorothy Mallam at mallamdorothy@gmail.com.

We will be meeting on Zoom weekly each Thursday at 5:00 p.m. and hope you can make time to join us in reading this wonderful book, as well as sharing your thoughts and reflections with the group.

St. John's Garden – Gratitude

Many thanks to Cate Barr, Vern Brown, Jan Ford, Vicki Ford and Mary Jo Larson for all their efforts to weed and tidy up the garden and front yard. It certainly looks more inviting and lets folks know we're still here, even if only virtually. Thanks as well to our waterers - Charlotte Pierce, Cate Barr and Vicki Ford.

Good News Gardens, and the Agrarian Ministry of the Episcopal Church

By Charlotte Pierce



The Agrarian Ministries of the Episcopal Church bring together all interested and involved in agrarian activities on behalf of their communities to exchange ideas, ask questions, share stories, provoke action in service of the Episcopal Branch of the Jesus Movement. We are a group representing a variety of agrarian ministries of the Episcopal Church, including the Good News Gardens, mentioned here.




We know this already, but Rev. Diane's always got her eyes and ears to the ground. Noticing my passion for vegetable gardening, she suggested that I check out the new Good News Gardens/Agrarian Ministry initiative of the Episcopal Church. Involvement in this initiative has been transformative for me, and increased my engagement not only in the larger church, but in our parish.

The Agrarian Ministry is a place for all interested and involved in the ministries of gardening or farming for beautification, or food justice, for environmental improvement, and for sheer enjoyment. This is where we exchange ideas, ask questions, improve our skills, share stories, provoke action. This group is part of the Episcopal Branch of the Jesus Movement; and Good News Gardens is one of the initiatives.

Membership in the initiative gave new meaning to my 2020 gardening efforts. Drawing on my past on a small farm in Washington State, I had found two neighbors who were willing to let me plant small sunny spots in their yards, since ours is so shady! Another Arlington woman with MS who can't work her garden also asked me to develop her spot. I got a job harvesting for the Lexington Community Farm CSA (workshare), and since it's more than my family can use, we give some away to others. I've joined the St. John's Gardening Committee to keep the parish garden watered. There's a tremendous sense of satisfaction and purpose that these activities have generated.

It is my hope that St. John's can plant a food garden next year. I would be happy to shepherd this effort. An Arlington EATS worker I spoke with while watering one day said, "that would be awesome if Arlington EATS patrons could get some fresh vegetables directly from the garden."

Monthly Good News Gardens newsletters include messages from leaders in Episcopal Agrarian, Evangelism, Creation Care, and Justice ministries. Names to look for include Rev. Melanie Mullens, Jerusalem Greer, Bishop Michael Curry, and Brian Sellers Peterson. Members receive practical advice and links on growing and sharing the bounty, access to the Way of Love in the Garden Bible Study, and prayers for growers. There's plentiful community support via the initiative's Good News Garden webinars and monthly convenings, and open office hours from the Church's Creation Care & Evangelism Ministry. It's a grower's/gardener's/farmer's cornucopia!

	<p>Point your phone camera at this QR code to visit the Facebook page of Agrarian Ministries - Episcopal Church. (https://www.facebook.com/groups/2564507933827285)</p>
	<p>Point your phone camera this QR code to visit the website of Agrarian Ministries - Episcopal Church (https://episcopalchurch.org/good-news-gardens)</p>
	<p>Point your phone camera to this QR code to visit the “Food Not Lawns” website (https://foodnotlawns.com)</p>

“As the realities and repercussions of COVID-19 continue to unfold, one area we know will continue to be affected is our food supply. The issues surrounding food justice are broad and often complex; from the use of land to the treatment of field workers to the shipping of goods to the refilling of our food pantries, right down to how we choose the food that goes on our own tables - these are all systems in need of just and proactive responses in the best of times.” - *Good News Gardens website*.

How to Join in the Good News Gardens Movement:

1. **Plant:** Commit to planting more than you would under average circumstances in order to share the bounty. This may mean you plant one window box of herbs when you have never planted any, or you add an extra row to your garden or an extra hen to your flock.
2. **Pray:** Commit to praying daily for our church and our world to form loving, liberating, life-giving relationships with all of Creation through the better use of our land – personally and communally. Not sure where to start? Don't worry, we will be sending a monthly email with scripture, prayer, and practical resources.
3. **Proclaim:** Commit to proclaiming the love of God through word and example by sharing your Good News Garden commitment, status, and story via social media channels, and personal testimonies (A great place to begin is by joining the [Agrarian Ministries Group](#) on Facebook). Click [here](#) to download a folder of shareable images and files, including postcards and yard signs.

St. John's Anti-Racism Discussion

by Mary Jo Larson

In June, around the time of Juneteenth, Mary Couch hosted a June Zoom discussion of anti-racism that many of us attended. We prepared for the discussion by taking Harvard's Implicit Bias test and we watched some videos at a website identified by Mary (see the links below). The discussion was painful but rewarding.

I have been reflecting on how to keep urgency in my life for the work of anti-racism and the social movement of Black Lives Matters. Most of us agree that silence or no action by white people around these issues is complacency, and this complacency means we continue to exercise our privilege by not changing the practices of present-day institutions (local, state, federal government, schools, police, banks and lenders). We may be ignorant of how these institutions have unjust and harmful policies and practices to non-white communities and thanks to Black Lives Matter and other groups we now have resources to teach ourselves.

I continue to learn from other members at St. John's. Christine Stevens shared the title of a book which deeply moved her and I also found well done, Ruth King's *Mindful of Race: Transforming Racism from the Inside Out*. I can also recommend William Darity's new thought-provoking book, *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century*. Both books helped me understand that 'racist individuals' are not the target of anti-racism protests, but rather the very fabric of our everyday social contract with black and brown communities. We do not have a fair playing field in our country, and being born black vs white pre-determines so much of one's future choices, education, health, wealth, etc.

To me the challenge is, how do we in Arlington pay urgent attention to changing the playing field? How do we walk in another's shoes every day, not just Juneteenth? Can we remember that white privilege permits us to be ignorant of how our social fabric is racist, and white privilege permits us to not talk about urgently-needed changes? I welcome an opportunity to continue the discussion that we began in June.

Want to try the test?: <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>

Want to see the website recommended by Mary?:

<https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2017/02/us/first-time-i-realized-i-was-black/>

Update from Neighbors Eating All Together (NEAT)

Hello from the NEAT Team! As you may know, we have not been able to host a community dinner since the virus. However, our Team has met regularly to try to pivot and transition into our new way of life. We are planning to donate and work with both MinuteMan High School and Something Savory to help them cook and package meals which we could give to ArlingtonEats to pass along to our community. We are also updating our web page, Facebook page and posters to reflect our new non-profit status and to communicate with our community that we are still an active group who want to contribute to our neighbors. As always, we are accepting donations, volunteers and suggestions. Please don't hesitate to contact me directly at lpmanion@gmail.com or our new NEAT email at info@neatarlington.org.

Laura Manion, NEAT President and St. John's Parishioner

Your Support of Our Mission to Partner with Programs in Guatemala is Welcome

by Mary Jo Larson

While we could not travel to Guatemala in April 2020 as we had planned, we are still receiving reports from our partner, Guatemala Aid Fund, on conditions at Fatima's Children Home and in Solola where the new Community Center project is underway. Guatemala has a "shelter in place" order that has increased the need for additional outcome funding from donations to replace the usual income-generating projects that the program runs.

If you would be interested in a backyard discussion or Zoom meeting about Guatemala and what our future trip plans might look like, please contact Mary Jo Larson (mjlarsons44@gmail.com).

Want to do some gift shopping and support GAF at the same time? Check out the new GAF Etsy website for beautiful handmade Guatemala gifts, large and small.

https://www.etsy.com/shop/GuatemalaAidFund?ref=search_shop_redirect

If you are able to make a donation to GAF to support the programs directly, follow this link:

<http://www.guatemalaaidfund.org/donate.html>



Remembering a Pioneer

By Frank Foster

Proper for the Liturgical Commemoration of the Rt. Rev. Barbara C. Harris, First Woman Bishop in the Anglican Communion

While reading Bishop Harris's autobiography on Wikipedia recently I noticed that the Rt. Rev. Deon Johnson, the Eleventh Diocesan Bishop of Missouri, and the Rev. Sandye Wilson, a friend of Bishop Harris, had written the collect below to commemorate Bishop Harris. This was first used in Missouri on June 13, 2020 - the day of Bishop Johnson's consecration and the day after what would have been Bishop Harris's 90th birthday.

I share it with you since I found the collect to be quite helpful in my own prayer life.

Collect

Everliving God, in every generation you cause fresh winds to renew, refresh and refine your people and in your Word summon us to live courageously as Easter people in an often Good Friday world. Defend us in our day to make no peace with oppression, that boldly following the example of your servant Barbara Clementine Harris, chosen bishop in your church, we may strive not for ease or fame but fully to follow and walk with you all along our pilgrim journey, through Jesus our Savior Amen.

Milestones

September birthdays: David Wilcox, Amy Meadows, Miriam Davison, Jan Ford, Meaghan Sullivan, Jane Commons

October birthdays: Rin Barr, Christine Carney, Charlotte Jefferson, Barbara Hayes, Emelia Blankson, Andrew Nyamekye

Arlington EATS Market

St. John's remains the location for the Arlington EATS Market, but the Market is closed to shoppers. They are busier than ever during the pandemic. Volunteers are coming in to sort and bag food, and to deliver food to residents.

Arlington EATS and the Town of Arlington will deliver shelf stable food to any Arlington resident in need. To receive food, call the Arlington Food Hotline at 781-316-3400 or go to arlingtoneats.org/requestfood.

AEM Donations

AEM is now accepting donations on Tuesdays 1 p.m. - 4 p.m. AEM puts out a table on Lombard St. for donations. Please wear a mask and be sure to keep a good distance from other donors and volunteers.

If possible, please stick to the following items for donations:

- ** Cereal (especially Cheerios!)
- ** Gluten Free Items (pasta, snacks, soups, etc.)
- ** Shelf stable soup
- ** Peanut butter alternatives (i.e., Sunbutter or Almond butter)
- ** Snacks (regular sizes, please)
- ** Soy Sauce
- ** Shelf Stable Soy Milk or Almond Milk
- ** Brown Paper Bags
- ** Sunscreen
- ** Incontinence products

Please do not donate soda, sports drinks, medications, jumbo or single serving sizes.

Financial donations of any amount are also welcome. Checks can be made out to Arlington EATS Market and mailed to AEM at the church. Or you can contribute online at their website: www.arlingtoneats.org.

**St. John's Episcopal Church
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**Rev. Diane Wong's office hours: Saturdays, 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at St. John's.
Please feel free to arrange with Rev. Diane for other times to meet.
Her cell phone number is 617-417-8102. Her email is dianeckwong@gmail.com.**

**Church Office hours: M, W, Th 10-1 ; F 1-3. Church Office phone: 781-648-4819
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