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## ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Newsletter – March 2021

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### A Message from the Reverend Diane Wong, Rector

As I write this, we have reached the half-way mark of Lent, which prompts me to ask myself how I am doing with my Lenten practice, and I have to confess, “not good.” You may remember from the Ash Wednesday service that my Lenten practice is to end my day at 11:30 pm. I even set an alarm to let myself know it is time to stop whatever I am doing. Some of you thought 11:30 pm was too late, so I reset the alarm to 11:00. Whether it is 11:00 or 11:30 pm, this is not working out as well as I would have liked.

I kept wondering why this was not working out and I finally understood. Each day when I stop doing work, I like to watch detective shows or something that I enjoy as a way for me to relax and to not think about work. Ending my day earlier means I am shortening my relaxation, and that’s why it is hard for me to do.

For me to arrive at this realization says maybe my Lenten practice is not a total failure after all. Now I can see that my relaxation time is my self care time, and I can name the time I spend watching shows that I enjoy as my self-care time without feeling guilty. I don’t have to feel bad, or feel that I need to be doing other things more “constructive” or “holy”; self-care time is holy.

In one of the Day by Day reflections that I read, the writer who enjoyed writing was reminded by his friend that writing was “God’s good pleasure for you.” The writer also referred to the character in the movie Chariots of Fire, the Olympian Eric Liddell, who says, “When I run, I feel God’s pleasure.” I hope my enjoyment in watching detective shows is God’s good pleasure for me.

Lenten blessings,

Diane+

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## **Holy Week Services – All on Zoom**

**Maundy Thursday – April 1<sup>st</sup> – Holy Eucharist – 7 p.m.**

**Good Friday – April 2<sup>nd</sup> – Service at 12 Noon**

**Easter Sunday – April 21<sup>st</sup>**

**Holy Eucharist Rite II at 10 a.m.**

### **Notes from Bethany House of Prayer**

by Joe Curro

One of my great honors and joys is to serve as a member of the Board of Trustees and Clerk for Bethany House of Prayer, a ministry of the Order of St. Anne in Arlington Heights.

Many at St. John's are familiar with Bethany House of Prayer as the site of vestry and parish retreats. Most are familiar with the beautiful grounds and chapel, either from our outdoor service at the garden and labyrinth in September or from our period of exile from our church building during construction work.

Bethany House of Prayer offers -- in addition to guided parish gatherings -- spiritual direction, a wide range of retreats and quiet days, and opportunities to gather together in contemplative practice. Like so many other institutions, Bethany has seen our work impacted by the past year's pandemic, with most activities moving online.

Despite the trials of COVID-19, there have also been new opportunities. The move to virtual modes of delivery has allowed Bethany House of Prayer to engage with far off places, such as the Diocese of North Carolina. It has also made it possible to enjoy once again the leadership gifts of Bethany colleagues and others who have moved away.

Closer to home, we have taken advantage of the unaccustomed emptiness of St. Gabriel's House on Appleton Street to undertake some major renovations, with a goal of improving accessibility for those facing mobility challenges. The most visible change will be the addition of a wraparound porch, which will allow for relaxation and programming to take place on the outside of the building. The next time we have a parish retreat, we can look forward to a more comfortable and inviting space.

More information will be going out about these improvements in the future, along with an appeal for financial assistance, and I am happy to talk to anyone who might want to help with the project's realization.

On a separate note, the Sisters have also decided to take down most of another building on the campus, the only remaining school building that is still under their control. (Other school buildings belong to Youth Villages and are being leased to McLean Hospital.) The gymnasium will remain, and it is hoped that post-pandemic this might provide flexible space in the future for retreats or other activities.

To learn more about Bethany House of Prayer and its offerings, please go to <https://www.bethanyhousearlington.org/>.

## **Calling the Midwife in the Midst of the Pandemic**

by David Wilcox

In the past year many of us have sought out a range of ways to cope with the profound interruptions in our lives that have arisen in this pandemic. Some have perfected their sourdough recipes, worked on crafts, caught up on reading, or streamed hours of dramas on Netflix or Amazon. All of these diversions have offered a welcome antidote to restrictions on travel or socializing with others.

The BBC series *Call the Midwife* provided just such an antidote for me and continues to do so as I carefully ration my viewing so I don't binge my way through the nine seasons that are available for streaming on Netflix. I'd heard about the series from others before the pandemic began but eschewed tuning in after watching one episode. My initial reaction was it seemed perhaps a bit too saccharine and sentimental for my tastes. That has changed. Why? I'm not sure, but I do think the constrictions of pandemic life have played a big part.

The series, set in East London after World War II, is a drama about the life and work of a group of midwives serving with nuns from the Sisters of St. John the Divine to provide midwifery and nursing care to London's poor. Call me sentimental but the dramas offer a compassionate, hopeful window into the work of the midwives and the day-to-day dramas of the East End. As the pandemic has stripped us of our ability to actually get out and lend a helping hand, the series is a reminder of the joys and struggles of service. One of the many curses of the pandemic is that in the midst of so much suffering, it has been impossible to actually go out and serve others for fear of either exposing others to the virus or catching it ourselves. At the same time, one is also deprived of the connection with others and the feeling of offering something one has to someone who needs what we have to offer.

I heartily recommend the series, and I also recommend the trilogy on which the series is based. Written by Jennifer Worth, the series is a wonderful window into life after the war for London's poor and immigrant communities. Worth was a lay midwife and nurse who worked with the nuns and she chronicles, through a captivating narrative, her work in communities in London's East End such as Stepney, Poplar and Whitechapel. The stories are wonderful, Worth's service admirable, and the reader gets a glimpse of England in the 1950's as the country recovered from the war while facing a host of social issues.

As we sit confined in our homes waiting for our vaccination appointments and opportunities to return to the world, I'd encourage you to sample Call the Midwife either in text or on the screen. Savor the wonder and rewards of service depicted in the stories and see what they offer to you now and what course they might chart for you as we wait to once again get out into the world and offer a hand to those in need.

### **Making Palm Crosses**

We will be making palm crosses on Zoom on Saturday, March 27<sup>th</sup>, at 2 p.m. Please mark your calendar for this intergenerational activity. If you know how to make palm crosses and are willing to show us at the Zoom session, please let Rev. Diane know. We will also let you know when the palms are available here at the church. Thank you.

### **Alewife Deanery Assembly - Keeping Faith in a Changing World**

Tuesday, February 23, 2021 (Zoom meeting)  
Summary by St. John's representative, Cate Barr

After opening prayer and introductions, a summary of the Mission Strategy was shared and then we broke out into groups for 30 minutes of discussion to respond to questions pertinent to the Mission Strategy, "Embracing Brave Change."

- 1) The last many months of COVID-19 have forced us as worshipping communities to distill what the essence of our church is for us—what it means to be a particular congregation or community following in the way of Jesus. What essential elements have emerged in your faith community? **All parish representatives expressed that they missed seeing each; worshipping together, catching-up in person during coffee hour after service.**
- 2) What about your worshipping community are you most proud of? Why? **Attending virtual services on Sunday! I shared on our technical solutions at St. John's (better sound in the sanctuary). New ways of doing outreach like Episcopal Relief at St. Paul's and the Food Pantry and Prison Ministry at St. James; staying engaged with some of their regular activities. Parishioners attending virtual services from away including England, France, and Tanzania! Because of good or even better weekly attendance, many parishes expressed interest in on-going virtual ministry after the pandemic.**

- 3) What one thing do you wish our diocesan leadership knew about your congregation or faith community? Why is this important to you? **St. James: Anti-discrimination campaign and wanting to grow their parish. St. Paul's in Bedford read Sacred Ground: A History of Racism. I noted our parish having become much more outwardly inclusive.**
  
- 4) What do you think your parish needs from Diocesan Council to more deeply engage in the mission strategy goals of our Diocese? **Diversity programming and suggestions; growth and development programming; resources shared and regional to engage our children. St. Paul's in Bedford recounting their experience with Indaba with other churches. Here's a link I found on this: <https://www.diomass.org/mission-strategy-indaba-2019> . All Saints in Belmont asking "What does membership mean?" Resourcing parishes with mission strategy grants. Resource sharing lists.**

And then we shared the input from the small groups; each of which had a note taker. **St. James reported they've created Care Clusters as outreach for each other and Prayer Partners on Facebook live so that folks who are zoom-phobic can still bond with their rector. "When the time comes, it'll be hard for folks to make it into church."**

Here's a link to the complete mission strategy: [www.diomass.org/new-mission-strategy](http://www.diomass.org/new-mission-strategy)

## **Update from Neighbors Eating All Together (NEAT)**

By Cate Barr

Since December, we have continued our collaboration with Something Savory Catering and Events and Food Link, developing a soup and meal program that distributes fresh cooked food to local community organizations. We are grateful to Highrock Church for the use of their kitchen and for generous grants from Arlington EATS and St. John's Episcopal Church to help us keep cooking for now. Our most recent distributed meals have been turkey stew received from Blue Ribbon BBQ and pesto pasta created with pesto from Wegmans. We're encouraged and happy to report that the distribution area reached by Food Link is ever expanding and has recently included:

- HFI, shelter serving families in Waltham
- Somerville Vets
- Medford Community Cupboard

That's about half. Upcoming, the rest are likely going to:

- Chestnut Manor, Arlington senior housing complex
- Winchester Housing Authority
- Some families we serve in Watertown

Also, we continue to work on our new website which is almost live and ready to receive donations—thank you for keeping NEAT in mind with charitable giving now during Covid and soon when we'll be able to again serve seated dinners. Please also follow us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/NeighborsEatingAllTogether> for our latest updates!

Here are a few recent pictures from NEAT:



**Above Left:** Johnny Levins, chef and co-owner of Something Savory Catering and Events in Arlington preparing tomato and roasted pepper soup in Highrock's kitchen in February.

**Above Right:** Cate Barr packaging cooled squash bisque in January—this pitcher made all the difference!

## Mission Tithes Program – Guatemala Aid Fund

By Mary Jo Larson

St. John's was successful in obtaining a Diocesan Mission Tithes Grant in 2019 and with it became a partner with Guatemala Aid Fund (GAF). GAF is an Arlington non-profit organization that supports effective programs in Guatemala City and Solola district on education, environment, employment, and empowerment. Bethany Eisenberg is the President and founder, and she is also a dear friend of St. John's, providing support to launch our renewed youth program and speaking to the Church School children on many occasions. As a result of the grant, Mary Jo Larson organized a team of mission travelers for April 2020 which included St. John's members Vicki Ford and Rev Diane Wong, and Carol Stephenson, a member of an Episcopal church in Rhode Island and her daughter. Many other St. John's members expressed interest in a later trip. We also arranged to rent an Air BNB in October 2020 for guests from Fatima Children's Home in Guatemala, the Director, a program director and young 'graduate' of Fatima's. We had successfully raised donations from St. John's through our Equal Exchange fundraisers and passed on small donation from the grant funds. Covid-19 arrived in mid-March after we had our airplane tickets in hand and an exciting itinerary planned for our visit which meant all plans had to be canceled, with the hope we can travel sometime in the future.



Nevertheless, Bethany views St. John's as an important partner and collaborator and is so grateful for our continued support. Mary Jo Larson is on the board of GAF to help with grant-writing and getting the word out, and individual congregants have continued to generously donate. Fatima's programs were also dramatically affected by the pandemic, which has slashed the new funds coming in for program development and the children's home/school. Despite this, both GAF and Fatima's had many accomplishments, and some of them are summarized here:

- Provided a loving home and school for more than 80 children at Hogar de Ninos Fatima
- 150 families attended classes and counseling sessions at the Parent Training & Family Counseling Center
- More than 425 children were reached with nutrition support, wellness checks, and health supplies
- Educational programs were expanded in rural San Jose Chacaya municipality, reaching 475 students and increasing attendance from 2 days to 4.5 days per week
- Gave jobs and job training to more than 20 construction workers in Solola and 5 child care workers.

- Secured an agreement with a local landowner to preserve native lands, habitat, and waters in San Jose Chacaya for future generations.

Please read the 2019-2020 GAF report card and consider a generous personal donation by going to the GAF website at <http://www.guatemalaaidfund.org/>.

### **Sunday Services**

We are continuing with Sunday services at 10 a.m. on Zoom. If you are interested in doing a reading for our Sunday worship service, please let Rev. Diane know. Thank you.

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**March Birthdays:** Billy Herman, Donna Downing, Bill Ford, Don Webb, Tom Davison, Savannah Curro

**April Birthdays:** Michael Boulet, Julie DiMilla, Claire Dornin

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### **Arlington EATS Market & Donations**

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](http://arlingtoneats.org/requestfood).

AEM is now accepting donations on Tuesdays 1 p.m. - 4 p.m. AEM puts out a table on Lombard St. for donations. Donations of the following would be especially appreciated:

- \*\* 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](http://www.arlingtoneats.org) .



**St. John's Episcopal Church  
74 Pleasant Street  
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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](mailto:dianeckwong@gmail.com).**

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