



Alleluia. Please No Explanations Inside the Church. Alleluia.

A Letter from Bishop Rob

I think it a truth almost universally held among preachers that the Easter Sermon is the most challenging of all to preach. What can be said that could possibly enhance the colossal meaning of Jesus rising from the dead? How can you explain that history-changing event that would make sense to one who does not believe or one whose faith is crowded by the quite reasonable doubts that a body can rise up after such a brutal death? As one mystic said, approaching Easter is like coming to take a drink from Niagara Falls with a paper cup. And yet, people whom we may not see during the rest of the church year come to those living waters, hoping to get at least a spray of that Resurrection hope.



On a stone wall of the church in the Garden of Gethsemane in Jerusalem is a framed sign that simply says, "Please: No Explanations inside the Church." This is to discourage the countless tourist guides with their portable amplifiers from telling their customers that it was on this rock that Jesus sweat blood in his prayers on the night before he was crucified, and it was

under this exact olive tree that the Roman guards arrested him, and where someone lost their ear but had it healed. The custodians of the Basilica of the Agony and the Church of All Nations would just as soon allow people to pray in quiet contemplation in that space, rather than have that sacred site drained of its meaning by such "explanations." I wonder how many times I have attempted to explain the mystery of Easter morning, to make it more palatable to our reason and common sense, rather than just allow the Good News to be the Good News — in all its irrational, incomprehensible, and world-overturning glory?

Metaphor, analogy, poetry, and symbol can all help our finite minds get a handle on the infinite truth that God's love is stronger than death and that the death-defying love shown in Jesus can be ours as well. When I was in seminary, so long ago, with a freshly minted degree in literature, I firmly believed that the only way to read the Bible was like any other book, as a system of signs and symbols that was somehow separate from history. I felt more sophisticated and learned, even condescending upon my classmates and professors for their fascination with concrete, tangible history. Whatever happened or didn't happen in that Jerusalem garden didn't matter. It was still true in the most important sense.

As Bob Dylan once sang, "Ah, but I was so much older then. I'm younger than that now."

Now, after years of witnessing the scourge of contagion and disease, both physical and psychological, I actually need to believe that God so loves our bodies, our flesh, that God would choose to take them on in a human person of the Jesus. I actually, boldly, believe it necessary that we take stock that our bodies, including our brains and hearts, have access to God's overwhelming health and life because

"Letter from Bishop Rob" continued inside...

Easter Season and an Ongoing Celebration of Creation

At the diocese' 2019 annual convention a resolution was unanimously passed titled "Earth Day at 50: Celebrating Creation in the Easter Season." The resolution acknowledged the importance of care for the earth to disciples of Jesus and encouraged congregations to focus on their connection to their local environment, stewardship of resources and ecosystems, and the particular challenges of life in the midst of climate disruption.

The Earth Care Commission invited—and continues to foster and support—congregations to deepen their connections with their local environment. Our churches are spread across the state of New Hampshire in a number of different ecosystems and bioregions. Just as Jesus healed those who came to him through physical touch and relational intimacy, the healing of our earth begins with the places we come into contact with. Recent initiatives include:

- ❁ The Earth Care Commission will be offering a series of weekly emails during the Easter season and throughout Spring that will share resources such as scripture, collects, stories, tips, and activities helpful to both congregations and individuals. Please watch for a sign-up link in eNEWS, or contact AshleyJane Boots at ajboots@nhepiscopal.org.
- ❁ The "Solar Saints," aka Doug Smithwood and Susan Fuller, have been doing work with parishes seeking to become more energy efficient, holding a workshop with presenters from the EPA to benchmark energy use for tracking and managing usage more effectively. 15 people from St. Paul's, Concord, All Saints, Wolfeboro, Church of the Good Shepherd, Nashua, Grace Church, East Concord, All Saints, Peterborough, and St Andrews, Manchester participated.
- ❁ St. Thomas, Hanover has established a "St. Thomas Green Team" and are actively engaged in reducing their carbon footprint.
- ❁ St. Paul's, Concord, following a Lenten discipline of reducing disposable plastic use, is having a "Blessing of Creation Care Tools" where parishioners bring in the reusable grocery bags, straws, water bottles, and other items that are helping them to better care for creation.
- ❁ In addition, to-date, diocesan energy audit grants have been awarded to Christ Church North Conway, St. Peter's Londonderry, St. James Keene, and Epiphany Newport.





How Can You Participate?

While the resolution was designed to connect with the Easter season and the 50th anniversary of Earth Day, the important work of earth care knows no season. Congregations are invited to plan creative projects or events around the interests, needs, and concerns of their parishioners. Examples might include, but are certainly not limited to:

- ❁ Prayer and worship outside: nature prayer walks, an outdoor service
- ❁ Earth Care-related events: guest speakers, film showings
- ❁ Programs of study and spiritual practice: book discussion group, prayer group, Bible study
- ❁ Adapting liturgies to encourage broader environmental stewardship: composing special “Celebrating Creation Prayers of the People,” or a blessing of the bicycles

In addition, the diocese is actively participating in “Sustain Earth, Our Island Home,” a new tool to support anyone who wants to make more life-giving choices about how we inhabit the earth. The Carbon Tracker is a web-based application that helps individuals, households, and congregations measure their carbon footprint and take steps to intentionally design a sustainable life (sustainislandhome.org).

As Bishop Rob notes, “Damage done to the earth grieves the very heart of God, the same God who loved the world so much that he gave his only son to save it. Christians stand in need of repenting from sinful habits of reckless consumption and lack of concern for those who share this life now and for those who come after us.”

Join with other Episcopalian households in the restorative work of tracking and reducing your carbon footprint by using the link above. To learn more, contact Deb Baker at deborahba@yahoo.com.

Additional Episcopal Church Creation Care resources can be found on our website, at nhepiscopal.org/environment-issues. For more information contact the Coordinator for the Commission for Earth Care, Carolyn Stevenson, at cspaddler@myfairpoint.net.



Ministry Transition Updates:

- ✿ Temporary leave of absence: **The Rev. Susan Eibner** will be serving the congregations of Union, Trinity, and Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Claremont, and St. Luke's in Charleston on an interim basis, as **the Rev. Richard Davenport** takes a brief medical leave of absence. Healing prayers for Richard and the congregations during this time.
- ✿ **St. Thomas, Hanover** will soon be calling a new curate. A cohort of strong candidates are now being interviewed. Please keep St. Thomas and the candidates in your prayers.
- ✿ **Curacy positions: St. Paul's Concord and Church of the Good Shepherd Nashua** are each seeking a curate. Curates are soon-to-be ordained or newly ordained who wish to continue their priestly formation by serving alongside a seasoned rector. If you happen to know a perfect candidate(s), please contact the Rev. Canon Gail Avery, Canon for Transition and Community Engagement at gavery@nhepiscopal.org.
- ✿ Since Convention 2019, the following people have been made Postulants to the Priesthood:
 - ✿ **Joe Rose**, Grace Church, Concord
 - ✿ **Aaron Jenkyn**, Epiphany, Newport and St. Andrew's, New London
 - ✿ **Michael Reinke**, Church of the Good Shepherd, Nashua
- ✿ **Kathy Boss**, All Saints, Peterborough and **Greg Baker**, St. Paul's, Concord, have been made Candidates for the Priesthood.
- ✿ The Diocese' next ordination date is scheduled for Saturday, June 13, 2020 at St. Paul's, Concord, NH.

For more information about ministry transition please contact the Rev. Canon Gail Avery, Canon for Transition and Community Engagement at gavery@nhepiscopal.org.

Let Them Stay: Interfaith Prayer Vigils for

Rev. Canon Gail Avery, Canon for Transition and Community Engagement

Two Tuesdays a month, I make it a priority to gather at 9:00 a.m. with other faith leaders in front of the ICE building in Manchester. It's the least I can do to show my solidarity with those seeking asylum in the US and waiting to have their cases heard — hearings that will end either in conditional freedom, or detention and eventual deportation.

No matter the weather, we gather in prayer and then walk in silence seven times around the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement Office in hopes that the wall of immigrant injustice will come tumbling down, like the wall did thousands of years ago in Jericho. A *shofar* horn is also blown, announcing to those who are reporting that they have our support.

Our Holy Scriptures are filled with stories of migration. Last August during our 4-day



For Immigrant Justice

Community Engagement



immigration solidarity walk to the Stafford County Deportation Center, in Dover, NH, organizer Arnie Alpert of the American Friends Service Committee reminded us that Adam and Eve were kicked out of the Garden, Abraham and Sarah were called out of Ur, and Moses left Egypt in search of the promised land — a land rich with milk and honey. And every Christmas season we hear that soon after Jesus' birth, Herod sent out a decree to slaughter infant boys, forcing Mary and Joseph to flee Bethlehem. In search of sanctuary for their son, the Holy Family escaped to Egypt.

Even if native to this country, we *all* take part in a migratory process that is at the heart of our human condition. Like birds staging late in August, we are always looking for abundant food sources needed for the next stretch of our journey. We come in search of a better place to live. We dream of a community where we can belong — a place of safety with plenty of resources; where we can see ourselves working and raising a family. We imagine that there is something better out there...a place where we can thrive. And so, we go.

Which got me thinking: why are some immigration stories more valid, more important, more regarded, more legal, and more supported than others? Why is one immigration story privileged over another? Why are some people (through our eyes, not the eyes of God) looked upon as more worthy of our welcome?

In Leviticus 19:33-34, God's command to us is clear:

When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

The author of Hebrews also says, "Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured." (Hebrews 13:1-3)

GET INVOLVED Would you like to be involved? Please join us at our twice monthly Interfaith Prayer Vigils for Immigrant Justice.

Below are other resources and ways to become part of the immigrant justice movement and make a difference right here in New Hampshire.

LOCAL PARTNERS

- ✿ American Civil Liberties Union: aclu.org/issues/immigrants-rights
- ✿ American Friends Service Committee, NH Program (Quakers): afsc.org/office/concord-nh
- ✿ Ascentria (formerly Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service): ascentria.org/locations/new-hampshire
- ✿ Granite State Organizing Project/New Hampshire Solidarity Network: granitestateorganizing.org/nh-solidarity-network
- ✿ NH Alliance of Immigrants and Refugees (NHAIR) miracoalition.org/en/home/52-nh-alliance-of-immigrants-and-refugees/113-about-nh-mira
- ✿ New Hampshire Council of Churches: nhchurches.org/solidarity
(Be sure to check out their *Local Immigration Solidarity Teams* toolkit.)
- ✿ NH United Church of Christ and NH Unitarian Universalist Church bail bond ministries: uuactionnh.org/nh-bail-fund
nhcucc.org/conference-ministries/justice-witness-ministry/immigration-mission-group
- ✿ NH Voices of Faith: facebook.com/groups/InterfaithVoices
- ✿ Upper Valley Interfaith Project: unitedvalleyinterfaithproject.org/immigration
- ✿ Welcoming NH: welcomingnh.org/resources/

EPISCOPAL CHURCH RESOURCES

- ✿ Episcopal Church Office of Government Relations/Episcopal Public Policy Network: episcopalchurch.org/files/ogr_advocacy_refugee_and_immigration_overview.pdf
episcopalchurch.org/OGR/migration-refugees-immigration
- ✿ Episcopal Migration Ministries: episcopalchurch.org/episcopal-migration-ministries

ADVOCACY

- ✿ Senator Maggie Hassan
New Hampshire Address
1589 Elm Street, 3rd Floor, Manchester, NH 03101
(603) 622-2204
DC Office Address
330 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, DC 20510
(202) 224-3324
Hassan.Senate.Gov
- ✿ Senator Jeanne Shaheen
New Hampshire Address
506 Hart Senate Office Building Washington, DC 20510
(202) 224-2841 • (603) 647-7500
Shaheen.Senate.Gov
- ✿ Congressional Representatives:
govtrack.us/congress/members/NH#representatives
- ✿ New Hampshire State elected officials:
citizenscount.org/elected-officials/nh-senate

Disclaimer: These organizations are not affiliated with The Episcopal Church of New Hampshire. They are provided to further your interest and/or participation. If we have missed any resources that might be helpful, or if you have any questions, please contact The Rev. Canon Gail Avery, Canon for Transition and Community Engagement at gavery@nhepiscopal.org or 603-224-1914.



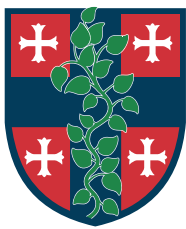
Thank You

for Responding to Our Reader Survey



Thank you to all who participated in our recent newsletter reader survey! Over 350 people responded to share their thoughts. Among those responding, we saw a strong attachment to the print newsletter — for most, it is a source of spiritual inspiration, and an important way to stay in touch with diocesan happenings. We learned that Bishop Rob’s letter is highly valued by readers, as are ministry transition updates. People also reported enjoying learning about ministries and special projects occurring at congregations around the diocese. As a result, we will be making some editorial changes to the newsletter, but no dramatic changes to its overall scope or publication schedule.

If you receive more than one copy of the newsletter at your home, have moved, or find that we are mailing to a person who has passed away, please email AshleyJane Boots, at ajboots@nhepiscopal.org, with the information (name and address) so we may update our database. Also, please know that we are working on making the newsletter more readily accessible online — as a PDF on our website. Thanks again for responding!



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“Letter from Bishop Rob” continued from front page:

of God’s taking on our human flesh in Jesus. I more and more seek to know the resurrection of Jesus in humankind as I have seen more and more suffering, despair, hunger, addiction, death, and the general vulnerability of the human condition. I can hear my “spiritualized,” learned, and clever 20-something-self object to my current, more child-like, belief in what our creeds proclaim. I can only say to that self, “Wait and see. God’s love and power is bigger than you can ask or imagine. The body matters so dearly to God that he would not leave it in a cold dank tomb.”

God’s love is so enormous that it would enter the grave to pull us all out, even from our paltry attempts to rationalize or explain. Alleluia!

Faithfully Yours in Christ’s light,

The Rt. Rev. Robert Hirschfeld



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While writing the Easter newsletter, **COVID-19** was transforming virtually every aspect of our daily life, from work and shopping to worship. As we do not know what the future holds, we have crafted this issue of News From The Vine to focus on precisely that — a spiritual offering to help us all tend our own vineyard, demonstrate love and compassion for people and the planet, and deepen our relationship with Jesus.

Easter 2020

News From The Vine
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