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A Voice in the Wilderness

Newsletter of the Church of St John in the Wilderness
Copake Falls NY
September 2020

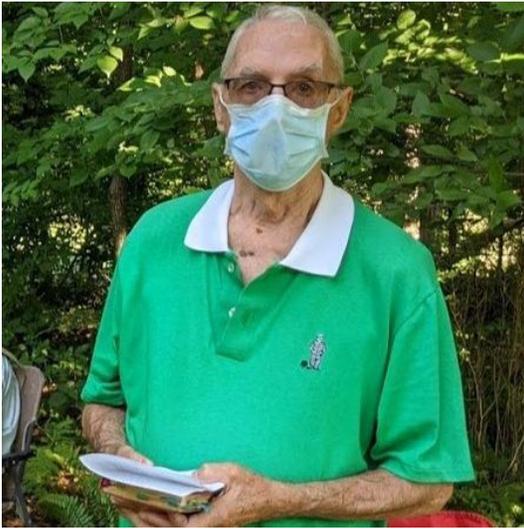
Reflections on the year of Covid 19

We thank members of the parish family of St John in the Wilderness who have generously shared their experience of life during the Covid 19 pandemic here in Columbia County.

Louise and Dale Peterson, Editors



Outdoor Sunday service on August 23



photos: Charley Musselman

Please note: An earlier emailed version of the Voice had incorrect text for the Rector's contribution. We apologize for the error. Louise and Dale

Rev. John Thompson, Rector

2020 has been an astonishing year. And it's not over. New and shocking things seem to keep happening as we move through the year. The covid-19 pandemic has changed all of our lives. Starting in March New York City became the worldwide epicenter of thousands of illnesses and deaths from the pandemic. Then in an amazing reversal, New York State went from the highest to the lowest transmission rate in the country for coronavirus, a blessed relief for many in this hard-hit state. After some early mistakes, good leadership in this state and generally good compliance among the citizenry has greatly reduced the incidence of the virus here. Though of course, we must continue to be careful as the virus still exists in every state and around the world.

I noted in May here that every state in the country had begun (at varying rates) a phased reopening of social and economic activities. I also said I hoped we were doing so wisely, continuing to listen to the people who know something about the virus (in science and medicine). Alas, poor leadership in many states and at the federal level regarding covid-19 has contributed to increases in the virus, so that New York State now requires people from 36 states who come here to quarantine first. Many excruciatingly difficult decisions continue to be made (and often amended or changed) regarding, for a prime example, how to do school.

Since I wrote in May, there was the cold-blooded killing of an unarmed black man, George Floyd by a white police officer. The videotape of this inspired the largest, mostly peaceful protests since the 1960s in this country and around the world against racist police brutality and racist vigilante violence. This terrible event woke up a lot of white people to the ongoing brutality of racism against black people. Black people were and are well aware that endemic and systemic racism has always been a part of the United States.

And right now in this astonishing year of 2020, unprecedented fires are consuming millions of acres in California, and also Oregon and Washington State.

It's been a very hard year. Natural events like a virus and fires caused by lightning strikes have been exacerbated by poor leadership around the pandemic and regarding climate change. Racism, bigotry and economic injustice are not natural disasters, but disasters resulting from human selfishness and sin. African-Americans, Latino/x and indigenous Americans have died at significantly higher rates from the coronavirus. Connecting the dots reveals that racism, bigotry, economic injustice, and inequitable access to health care and health insurance as well as more minorities working as essential workers – all contribute to the higher illness and death rates from coronavirus.

When we deny reality or deny connections we get nowhere. As soon as we look at reality honestly, we can make progress. It's been a very hard year for this country and much of the world. But when we acknowledge the realities of racism, bigotry, economic injustice (which includes inequitable access to healthcare and health insurance), then we can move forward. And there have been many inspiring things in this challenging year of 2020. As mentioned, the millions of people (mostly) peacefully protesting for racial justice. Also the courage, generosity and love of so many medical and essential personnel in the face of covid-19. And along with the hardship of many things being

inaccessible or greatly limited during this time, many have experienced the blessing of more time in nature, in God's creation.

Christians, spiritual people, people of goodwill have always been called to acknowledge and overcome evil with good. We need hope in order to not give up and to be part of the solution rather than part of the problem. Though none of us are perfect, God gives us hope (and love and faith) in prayer and worship which we can channel to others and to all of creation. God gives each of us unique gifts and creative opportunities. The rich Judeo-Christian tradition has always (when integrated) combined the vertical dimensions of prayer, worship and spiritual experience with the horizontal dimensions of outgoing love and social and economic justice. As such, there will soon be (as announced) an exciting new (zoom) book group on Ijeoma Oluo's bestseller, *So You Want to Talk about Race*. Hope you can join.

*In peace,
John+*

Wendy Langlois, Senior Warden

For me, Covid-19 pandemic started on Monday, March 16, 2020. That was the day we locked our doors at work. Cleaning supplies were delivered and protocol explained. I learned I was an "essential worker," who would've guessed? I was sent home to work on Friday April 3, 2020, the day before my birthday. I always think of it as the best gift I could've received. Like the day President Kennedy was shot and the day the terrorist planes hit the Twin Towers, March 16th & April 3rd will stay in my mind. Here we are almost six months into the pandemic. The flow of time feels a bit different.

My husband & I have never spent this much time together. Looking back, I treasure the memories. I knew my daughter was a good & loving person, but I never realized how loving and how big her heart was - not only to us but to others as well. I missed not being able to hug her, always being six feet apart. My heart went out to people less fortunate than me, whose circumstances were so different than my own. We had the opportunity to stay home, we continued to have our income and our groceries were delivered to our porch. My daughter, India, took such great care of us. We felt very safe. I felt blessed but also I felt guilt. I live in this beautiful area. I took all that for granted before. When my work day was over I hiked the trails at Taconic State Park. I've lived here since 1977 and never had the time to do that. Truth be told, I never felt the need to do that. Hiking cleared my head, gave me peace & time to think. Between CNN news almost constantly on the TV & Gov. Cuomo's daily updates, we were kept aware of the reality of the

pandemic. We saw & heard how so many folks were suffering all types of losses. We watched the very brave health-care workers in NY and across the country put themselves in harms way day after day. We watched the numbers on the right hand side of the TV screen, keeping creeping up higher & higher.

My personal experience of the Covid-19 pandemic is mixed. By that I mean some very positive experiences came out of it. We became better human beings. We all took care of each other. It made me wish that we'd always remember how good it felt to care for each other and after the pandemic was over, we wouldn't forget, we'd keep taking care of one another. We found creative ways to keep in touch, to educate children and worship. We zoomed.

I'm still nervous in groups. I want to go to the Taconic Wayside Inn for my burger & fries, have a glass of wine and be with friends, but won't; I'm not ready for that yet. I want to hug my daughter, family & friends, but can't. Our family calls 2020, the throw-away year. It means, we just have to accept that this year is not going to be a normal one. All the seasonal & holiday activity might not happen and we need to be patient & careful. We have to do our best to stay well & help others stay well until we can get back to the "new normal" whenever that day may be.

When I say my prayers at night, I used to ask for help & guidance. I'd ask for blessings on my family & friends, etc. Lately, my prayers are just saying "thank you." I start at the top – thank you for shelter.....thank you for food - and I work my way through everything I take for granted. It's a very long list. Ok, I do ask God for one thing when I say my prayers; I pray that He be our strength and our light on this path we're on. I pray He will bring us all safely to the day when we have a vaccine that works well and we don't have to wear masks, wash our hands often and most importantly, stay 6 feet apart. Can I get an Amen!

*In Fellowship,
Wendy Langlois*

Karen Flynn, Treasurer

Hello fellow parishioners. Hope you are all doing well as we enter the phase we at Fairview Hospital describe as "the new normal". It certainly has been a very hectic and interesting time for frontline healthcare workers and healthcare leadership.

In mid March, as the threat of Covid 19 was becoming apparent in China and then devastated Italy, Fairview Hospital and Berkshire Health Systems went into full Emergency Operations mode for Pandemic Response. On a daily basis the command center integrated information from various BHS, community and State sites. Virtual meetings began to share information, collect pertinent data, discuss stock and needs for various types of medical equipment and operationalize plans. Although our parking lots looked like ghost towns, behind the scenes we were rearranging cafeteria service, putting up barriers and hand sanitizing stations, arranging for greeters at doors and developing all sorts of procedures to safely care for Covid 19 patients. Multiple rooms were retrofitted for negative pressure units and the search was on for sources of PPE. Techniques for safe conservation and re sterilization of PPE supplies were implemented. Education was ongoing to reeducate all staff regarding necessary airborne precautions and enhanced cleaning.

As you can imagine, many of our staff were very concerned about their own health risks and the risk of transmission to their families. Several staff actually moved out of their own homes due to concerns about spreading the virus to family. Fairview had many healthcare workers who were either considered to be in a high risk group or had small children at home with no daycare plan in place.

During the early days many facts about transmission remained unclear and the changing recommendations from the CDC and other health organizations kept us on our toes. Testing options at this time were very limited and if a test was approved we found that results often were not reported for 5-7 days. This often led to increased need for isolation for patients and their contacts. As you can imagine anxiety was a companion of the pandemic.

As the pandemic gripped NY and Boston areas, we were mandated to provide the state with our plan to double our capacity using outpatient spaces, personnel and rental equipment if necessary. It became a challenge because most hospitals have spent the last 25 years converting to a mostly outpatient system. At this point we were watching migration of urban dwellers to their country homes and we were certain it was just a matter of time before we were battling the pandemic locally. Thanks to the quick actions of the leadership in the Northeast this was prevented although unfortunately local nursing homes reported the highest infection and death rates.

Although this time has been isolating and difficult for all of us, I believe that all of our sacrifices have helped to save many lives. As we begin to safely reopen I remind people the pandemic is not over. We are all weary but please don't let down your guard. Thank you to all who are doing their part in our

community, our church, on the front lines and behind the scenes. In my view we are all "essential."

Sincerely, Karen

Jean Peck

“Since January, 2019, I have been living in an assisted-living apartment in Brentland Woods, which is part of the Episcopal Senior Living Community in the Greater Rochester, NY area.

Life has changed dramatically since March of this year. Visitation has been restricted, and only employees and medical professionals are allowed into the facility. All staff and visitors have their temperature checked upon arrival. Staff members are currently tested for COVID-19 weekly (testing was more frequent early on), and each resident has been tested at least once.

To date we have had NO positive tests in our facility! For several weeks, all residents had meals delivered to their apartments, but more recently we have been able to eat meals in our dining room - two people only at a table, and two separate seatings to accommodate social distancing requirements.

At the outset, family visitation was restricted to “window visits”, which were less than ideal for those of us on the second floor. “Porch visits” can now be scheduled, thirty minutes, with all parties masked and seated six feet away, but still NO HUGS!

We are all VERY well cared for each and every day, and for that we are grateful. I do hope everyone at St. John’s is doing well. I miss you all!”

Jean Peck
3831 East Henrietta Rd
Henrietta NY 14467
(585) 321-3612



Marya and Bob Dodd

Lost: a season of Tanglewood, a few days in the Adirondacks, Marya's twice-a-week swims in Great Barrington, and frequent visits with our daughter in Fairfield.

Gained: lots of time for reading (in particular Jon Meacham's uplifting *The Soul of America* and Jeff Toobin's book on the Mueller probe), watching TV news, and enjoying Puccini's *Il Trittico*. When the walls seem too close, we saddle up and explore the Taconics and Berkshires.

To date, Cv-19 has spared us, our kinfolks, and nearby friends.

*Gratefully,
Marya and Bob*

Zita and Vinnie Kobos

We have been very fortunate during this time in many ways. In the early days of February our daughter and granddaughter moved in with us on the farm. They had been living in a very tiny apartment and moving to the farm gave them much needed breathing room. Babysitting Kaylin has made the days speed by.

Zita's 94 year old cousin passed away recently, but she was able to visit her home in Troy the week before everything was locked down. Vinnie built a garden fence, Zita reupholstered 20 porch cushions and worked on many cross stitch projects. Flower and vegetable gardens have kept us busy. The horses, chickens and dogs have also kept us well entertained and busy.

We are blessed to live in our little bit of paradise. Vinnie and I say at least once a week that this pandemic has not really upset our lives. We do miss church people but this will not last forever. Thinking positive that better days will come soon.

Zita and Vinnie

Lucy Eldridge

Our weekly Centering Prayer group at St. John's continues to meet. During the early months of the pandemic, we met via Zoom, and for the last month or so, we have been gathering simultaneously on the Rectory porch and via

Zoom. I have found our time for prayer especially meaningful during this grave moment of national upheaval due to the world wide pandemic and of important efforts to create a more just American society.

It seems to me that pursuing a prayerful, peaceful approach to life makes great sense in the best of times and especially in the worst of times. I am reminded of the writings of Thomas R. Kelly, the Quaker mystic, who wrote *A Testament of Devotion*, 1941. In Kelly's chapter on Holy Obedience, he states: "The heart is stretched through suffering, and enlarged. But O the agony of this enlarging of the heart, that one may be prepared to enter into the anguish of others! Yet the way of holy obedience leads out from the heart of God and extends through the Valley of the Shadow."

With the rise of the nationwide awareness of systemic racism affecting American society and protests leading the way to demand change, one can turn to the inspiring examples of leaders going back as far as slavery itself. Harriet Tubman, c. 1820-1913, a "conductor" on the Underground Railroad, managed to make over 300 trips conducting slaves north to freedom. She wrote at one time, "Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world." Frederick Douglas (1818-1895) wrote of Tubman, "Excepting John Brown—of sacred memory—I know of not one who willingly encountered more perils and hardships to serve our enslaved people than Harriet Tubman."

And now we can leap forward to the present day, and welcome the leadership of Julia Jackson, a mother, now suffering after the police shooting of her son, Jason Blake, in Kenosha, Wisconsin. In a recent press conference, she prayerfully asked for a peaceful approach to healing our nation's wounds and for equality for all: "Citizens, police officers, firemen, clergy, politicians, do Jason justice on this level and examine your hearts,... We need healing—prayerfully, emotionally and spiritually—I also have been praying even before this for the healing of our country.... Let's use our hearts, our love and our intelligence to work together to show the rest of the world how humans are supposed to treat each other."

Lucy Eldridge

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Newsletter of the Church of St. John in the Wilderness (Episcopal)
Copake Falls, New York 12517
The Rev. John Thompson, Rector

Wendy Langlois (1/21) Warden
Elen Freeston (1/22) Warden

Vestry

Charley Musselman (1/21)
Peggy Anderson (1/21)
Lucy Eldridge (1/22)
Jane Peck (1/22)
Virginia Johnson (1/23)
Milbrey Zelle (1/23)

Richard Peck, Clerk of the Vestry (1/21)
Karen Flynn, Treasurer

Eucharists (Email stjohnw@fairpoint.net for details of services at this time.)

Sunday, 8:00 AM (spoken)
Sunday, 10:00 AM (choral)

stjohnw.org

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