

St. Mark's Messenger

September 2021

FATHER JOHN'S REFLECTIONS

July was the hottest month in recorded history throughout the US, and August is certainly going to be a contender, too. Thank God for AC in the church! As August ends, we see the signs of fall: students return to school, Penn State students move-in, Grange Fair tents and RVs swell the population of Centre Hall for one week, and it begins to feel like Autumn. We celebrate Labor Day weekend, and then on September 29, we will celebrate Goose Day.



That's the old rhythm of life, but something is new in central Pennsylvania: the Delta variant of the coronavirus. It is more contagious than last year's version, and the CDC will soon approve a booster shot for all of us. Kathryn and I will be wearing masks when we are indoors – but our society lacks the appetite for another mandate requirement.

As I write these words, the hospitals in Dallas are full once again, and the seriously ill are not just the elderly but people in their 30s, even children. **If you feel more comfortable wearing masks in church, do so. Some Episcopal churches near us are already requiring it.**

Penn State will host a super-spreader event at its first home game on September 18 against Auburn, always a contender for another national championship. It will be a sellout, and the idea of social distancing in Beaver Stadium is laughable. Since it's a night game, lots of folks will be drinking all day, and I doubt that anyone will be wearing masks or refraining from shouting and singing.

Did I say, “super-spreader”?

Mt. Nittany Hospital is already discussing reductions in elective surgeries. In other states, the conditions are already dire.

In Arkansas there are no vacant ICU beds. Period. In the ICU, it's not the bed, it's the level of staffing (doctors, RNs, respiratory therapists) that patients require. And yet in Florida and Texas, the governors are proclaiming anti-masking mandates, arguing that it's an individual choice. It's odd that they don't make the same argument about seat belts or booster seats.

Florida and Botswana now have the same level of positivity.

Mifflin County's positivity rate is not nearly as high as in December 2020, but it is creeping up. Our vaccination rate remains below 40%, a fact that I can confirm by my monthly conversations with folks who come to BBT. Their reasons for non-vaccination are flawed or non-sensical (the vaccine contains a chip, it alters their DNA, it hasn't been tested enough, etc.). My favorite excuse is this one: "God will protect me." My answer is always the same: "That's why God sent us vaccines in record time."

Our worship was enriched in August by the musical gifts of Josh Lee and Miranda Shoop, and I hope that in September will have a clear direction for music. The likelihood of finding an organist is very small, but there are fine, experienced musicians who would be delighted to join us. We just need to find the right one.

I know from my work on the Diocesan Fair Share committee that our 2022 Fair Share is likely to decrease, which will be good news for us. Because of the threat of the Delta variant, I have NO idea how the Diocese will hold its convention in October.

I remain concerned about attendance, and you should be, too. Folks like Jackie Walk brings her oxygen tank with her faithfully to church each Sunday, and Lynn Stricker brings his walker to lots of the Wednesday services, regardless of how hard it is for him to ascend the steps on Water Street. One indicator of parish vitality is easy to measure: attendance. And that's where we come up short.

Last Sunday we had our annual church picnic in the comfort of our parish house, and fewer than 10 of us participated. If you look at these statistics, how do you explain the difference between attendance in May (117) and July (78)?



April = 84 includes Wednesdays, Easter Sunday, 21, Great Vigil 12
May = 117 includes Pentecost 26, includes Wednesdays
June = 107 includes Wednesdays
July = 78 Average 19.5 Wednesdays = 24 Average 6

I look forward to seeing 25 people at our Sunday services. Will you be there?

Father John+

MUSIC IN AUGUST AND HOPES FOR SEPTEMBER

We are all grateful to the gifts of Josh Lee and Miranda Shoop in August. What a fantastic pianist he is, and when you have Miranda leading us in the hymns, the whole church fills with glorious music. I especially enjoyed having the chance to hear Josh's postludes – they were a few moments of quiet surrounded by the beauty of our church. It was holy time.

Good organists are very, very scarce, and if we are unable to find one, we will be very happy to have an excellent pianist who can lead us in worship and accompany our soloists. Please pray for the right church musician to find us. We have interviewed several possible candidates.

O God, whom saints and angels delight to worship in heaven: Be ever present with your servants who seek through art and music to perfect the praises offered by your people on earth; and grant to them even now glimpses of your beauty and make them worthy at length to behold it unveiled for evermore; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

COLLECT FOR LABOR DAY

Almighty God, you have so linked our lives one with another that all we do affects, for good or ill, all other lives: So guide us in the work we do, that we may do it not for self alone, but for the common good; and, as we seek a proper return for our own labor, make us mindful of the rightful aspirations of other workers, and arouse our concern for those who are out of work; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen

– Collect for Labor Day, the Book of Common Prayer, p. 261

MOTHER HUBBARD'S CUPBOARD, OUTREACH, AND BREAKING BREAD TOGETHER



We have not received word from Northwest Bank about a possible grant. We are working with a foundation in Chicago for a grant to support MHC. The goal is to have sufficient funds for Mother Hubbard's Cupboard that we do not need to worry about occasional shortfalls in giving. Panera's will resume delivery of bread and pastries the last week in August.

July numbers for MHC

Total individuals- 197

Total families- 100

New individuals- 4

New families- 2



For BBT, we served subs from Michele's on August 24 to 50 people, and in September we'll have fried chicken from Giant. It is extremely likely that we will resume in-person meals because of the threat from the Delta variant and the low rate of vaccination in Mifflin County (about 40%).

We know that everyone misses the fellowship of the meals, but the time is not right.

Through our Jubilee Ministries program, we helped two people who were facing shut off notice of electric power on 4 August and two others with gasoline cards.

Thanks so much for the loyal volunteers who help each month.

COMMITTEE REPORTS (CEMETERY AND COLUMBARIUM, PASTORAL CARE, PROPERTY, AND SAFETY)

The focus for the Property Committee has been the ADA compliant bathroom, to which it can be reported that we have received a quote from Crider Mitchell. We

hope to receive multiple bids, but good contractors are totally overwhelmed due to a late start because of Covid and a rush of available money for that "pet" project.



Before the new bathroom can happen, we need to strengthen the joists under the selected site. The present joints were damaged by the flood of '72 and have rotted as a result.

In other work done, Pro Landscaping sprayed the trees in front of the church. This should be a yearly process.

Cemetery and Columbarium Report

- One full burial on 14 August 2021
- \$200 payment received toward three grave spaces on 8 July 2021
- The persons still making payments on the three grave sites are interested in purchasing

more sites.

- The committee wants to place a sign on the Green Avenue sign, "Pet Cemetery Available."

PRAYER LIST

Joyce Hart continues with her treatment following her surgery at Holy Spirit. While her spirits are good, she tires quite easily, so *she does not want to have visitors right now*. What pleases her greatly are cards and letters. She is staying with her daughter, Lydia Pauchnik. Please send cards to 1001 Mountain Springs Lane, McClure, PA 17841.

We ask God's tender mercies and healing presence for Patty Attivo, Jacqueline Benevento, Ralph Bitner, Dennis Bossinger, Ellen Bryant, Bob Briar, Lisa Briar, Shirley Brown, Tyler Burris, Dottie Casner, David Cochrane, Lew Copenhaver, Heather Creighton, Shirley Dieterling, Shirley Ferguson, Richard Flood, Marcia Folk, Joyce Hart, Ian Q. Holmes, Josh Hohol, Dolores Houser, Angela Kaler, Bruce Kinsey, Judy Kline, James Krepps, Martie Marquez, Pam Lawson, Doris McKee, Marsha Lynch-Mock, Austin James Moore, Steve Myers, David Moore, Virginia Nace, Jim Neal, Gabriel Newman, Amy Reeder, Makenzie Shearer, Vickie Shoemaker, Joseph Smith, Danny Snyder, Arline Suleswki, Dan Stearns, Steven

Sunday and Family, Laura Tate, Henry and Jackie Walk, Evelyn Wilson, Bill Wilson, Willa Silverman, and Stella Wright.

SEPTEMBER BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES

4—Michele Harden Lasher

6—Michelle Bitner

14—Carol Henry

15—Diann Pinkerton

17—Evelyn Wilson

18—Theodore Wilson

O GOD, OUR TIMES ARE IN YOUR HAND: LOOK WITH FAVOR, WE PRAY, ON YOUR SERVANT *N.* AS (S)HE BEGINS ANOTHER YEAR. GRANT THAT (S)HE MAY GROW IN WISDOM AND GRACE, AND STRENGTHEN OUR TRUST IN YOUR GOODNESS; THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD. AMEN.

IN CASE OF AN EMERGENCY DURING CHURCH, WHAT WOULD WE DO?

This question is one that we never want to think about, but in this world, the Vestry believes that we must be prepared. We have smoke alarms to warn of us of fire, and when the alarms go off and the lights flash, they would wake the dead. A call is automatically made to the fire company, and we should have a response very quickly.

But what if there were a deranged person who brought a handgun into the church? It's not impossible as we know from Sandy Hook Elementary School, the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, or at a Bible Study class in Charleston, South Carolina.

As Robin Wilson could tell us, the schools practice several times a year the “active shooter” drill. Teachers and students are trained in how they should respond, and our Safety Committee and Bishop recommend that we do the same thing.

In September I will have information in the bulletin about the procedures, and we will discuss it before the offertory so that we can answer all your questions. And one Sunday in September, we will practice it so that all of us know what we should do.