

Nov 9, 2020

Dear Parish family,

Wow, life is challenging. Hope you are all hanging in there. I so wish we could all be together but it looks like the church will be back online for awhile. Middletown is now in the red zone and although we had a wonderful in-person service for All Saints, gathering in person feels increasingly ill-advised. And this week Steve, our preacher and worship leader, has unanticipated pressing family obligations.

But **lucky for us**, we are nimble and have friends and believe in collaboration and can adjust on a dime. So, this Sunday we will worship again with St John's. Their wonderful young intern Lizzie is preaching, so we will get the benefit of hearing a vibrant young voice! I hope you will be moved to tune in and join for our own coffee hour on zoom afterwards.

But, regardless of this week's adjustments, I feel very strongly **that going forward, we need some new ways to be the church and grow closer together**. Especially now, when the escalating Covid situation and continuing political partisanship threatens to further isolate us from each other. **We can push back.** So, I am asking for your help.

What I'd like to have happen is the creation of small covenant groups of 6-10 people who will support each other spiritually on a monthly basis. These meetings will start with a short reading of some kind. The text you decide to share could be the scripture for the week (such as in Dwelling in the Word), a Mary Oliver poem, a paragraph from something you've read that has moved you in some way, or a favorite piece of music. The point is to *dwell in something together* and then share thoughts and feelings and questions about it and listen to other people share. I recommend sharing the burden of leadership by rotating who picks the readings every month. The leader for the month then ends with a prayer or a poem or the Lord's Prayer. This is just a suggested outline. Together you can adjust the rules for your group.

Please include present or former members of CHT. You are also welcome to include people from the wider Episcopal Church or from your own friend or family group. Feel free to invite someone who *has nothing whatsoever to do with the church* as long you are convinced the group could come to matter to them. The main thing is that these groups matter and are supportive *to you*. This what I mean by covenant. **There is nothing I need from you more than this.**

Scheduling can be tough but consider lunch times, breakfast times, Saturday mornings at 8 with coffee, cocktail hour with wine and cheese, Sundays at 5, Mondays at 10 after the kids are in bed: consider weird times. Meetings are only 40 minutes. (That's how long free zoom meetings last. As the leader you will need to get a free zoom account to open the meeting or pick someone to be in the group who already has one! You can decide to extend meetings if you choose too.)

But these groups are for *the least of these which is us*.

And listen, if any of this makes you feel ill with apprehension, the first step is **just to phone a friend and ask them to help you gather an awesome group.**

(Go ahead: Ask ANYONE you feel called to. Ask Valerie, Emily Harrison from Perk (who expressed interest), Maryellen Shuckerow of St Vincent de Paul, someone from work, a favorite member who has moved away, your aunt Marge, Bishop Ian, your atheist colleague, someone who intrigues or challenges you, Pat Jackson...Just pray and ask and find your 6!)

Let me know if I can help in any way. And please send the names of your group members to me ASAP so I'll know who is set and can reach out to help initiate other groups.

Thankfully,

Mary+

Lord's Prayer from the New Zealand Prayer Book

*Eternal Spirit,
Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,
Source of all that is and that shall be,
Father and Mother of us all,
Loving God, in whom is heaven:*

*The hallowing of your name echo through the universe!
The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world!
Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!
Your commonwealth of peace and freedom
sustain our hope and come on earth.*

*With the bread we need for today, feed us.
In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.
In times of temptation and testing, strengthen us.
From trials too great to endure, spare us.
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.*

*For you reign in the glory of the power that is love,
now and for ever. Amen*