

# NEWS



PHOTO BY CATHERINE GUILLES

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church collected these backpacks for the Arlington Partnership for Affordable Housing and prayed a blessing for them Aug. 26.

## Backpacks with a Blessing

Faithful support of students.

BY CATHERINE GUILLES  
THE CONNECTION

When some children in Arlington go back to school next month, they'll bring more than notebooks and pencils. Their backpacks will have special tags attached, courtesy of churches that gave the backpacks — and the students wearing them — a blessing for the new year.

"We thought it would be a fitting start to the school year for people to carry their faith into their daily life," said the Rev. Ann Barker, rector at St. John's Episcopal Church in Glencarlyn. Her congregation is holding its Blessing of the Backpacks on Sept. 9.

Besides giving children — and interested adults — pocket crosses and tags saying "This backpack has been blessed by a congregation that loves and supports this student," St. John's will have parishioners say a special prayer.

It's "a request for God to bless their time in school and to bless the use of their resources and [for students] to behave in a faithful manner at school — be attentive," Barker said.

Backpack blessings have been around for several years but are a new ritual for some Arlington churches. Cherrydale United Methodist Church and St. Michael's Episcopal Church in Westover are holding their first ones on Sept. 2 and Sept. 9, respectively.

"It's something I've done at other churches in the past where I've served," said the Rev. Beth Magill, rector at St. Michael's. "It's an opportunity to invite children to expand their imagination of their



PHOTO BY THE REV. ELIZABETH FOSS

**Cherrydale United Methodist Church will be handing out these backpack tags.**

faith beyond the walls of the church."

The church will give out tags reading "Blessed to be a Blessing."

"We'll talk about what it means to give blessings and receive blessings," Magill said.

A backpack blessing can also reassure children, said the Rev. Elizabeth Foss, pastor of Cherrydale United Methodist.

"We have a number of children who are worried about going to school," she said. The tags, which say "Blessed are you" and quote Matthew 5:12 ("Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven"), along with congregational prayers, will let them know that "our church community supports them" and be "a reminder of God's promises."

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Cherrydale held one blessing at its service Aug. 26 for the 29 backpacks it collected for the Arlington Partnership for Affordable

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PHOTO BY THE REV. BETH MAGILL

**St. Michael's Episcopal Church will be handing out these backpack tags.**

## Backpacks

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Housing and will hold another for the congregation Sept. 9.

Parishioner Anne Dailey, who helped coordinate the collection, said the message on the tags, "God's Got Your Back," complemented a Scripture reading at the service from Ephesians 6, which instructs Christians to "put on the whole armor of God."

"The blessing of the backpacks and the tags, that's kind of your 'armor' to get you through the school year," she said.

Dailey hopes the children served by APAH like the tags, which will be in the backpack pockets. "It's their choice as to whether they want to put it on," she said.

St. Mary's Episcopal Church in the Old Dominion neighborhood also donated 25-30 backpacks and tags to APAH, with a message from Joshua 1:9: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. The Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."

It will give out roughly 170 tags at services Sept. 9, said the Rev. Amy Slater, senior associate to the rector.

"People like something tangible," Slater said. It's "particularly important for kids — they can look at it if they're having a bad day."

All the pastors said people who don't normally attend their churches are welcome to come for the backpack blessings — and they hope children ultimately get a message of love.

"I'm hoping they can become more fully who God created them to be," Magill said.

## "FLOURISHING AFTER 55"

"Flourishing After 55" from Arlington Office of Senior Adult Programs for Sept. 9-15.

**Senior centers:** Lee, 5722 Lee Hwy.; Langston-Brown Senior Center, 2121 N. Culpeper St.; Walter Reed, 2909 S. 16th St.; Arlington Mill, 909 S. Dinwiddie St.; Aurora Hills, 735 S. 18th St.

**Senior trips:** Maryland Seafood Festival, Annapolis, Md., Sunday, Sept. 9, \$21; A Day in Ocean City, Md., Tuesday, Sept. 11, \$37; A Day at Rehoboth Beach, Del., Friday, Sept. 14, \$35; Dulles Day Festival and Plane Pull, Dulles, Saturday, Sept. 15, \$6 (intergenerational). Call Arlington County 55+ Travel, 703-228-4748. Registration required.

NEW PROGRAMS:

**Volunteers needed to read with preschoolers**, Monday, Sept. 10, 1 p.m., Aurora Hills. Details, 703-228-5722.

**Getting the most out of Medicare**, Monday, Sept. 10, 10 a.m., Walter Reed. Register, 703-228-0955.

**Senior ice skating**, MedStar Capitals Iceplex, Ballston Mall, level 8, Mondays, 8:10-9:20., Wednesdays, 8:30-9 a.m. Details, 703-228-4771.

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## Present and Future Danger



By KENNETH B. LOURIE

Having recently been infused three weeks after my last treatment, no guarantee given certain lab results, I am now on track to have one more infusion before my Sept. 26 CT scan. The plan is, per my "Progressing But So Am I" column (8/15/18), to triple the amount of medicine I will have received before my next scan. This will compare quite favorably to the one infusion I received prior to my July 25 scan.

Moreover, as I've considered the previous quarter's infusion schedule trying to understand possible reasons for the 10-percent-ish tumor growth which occurred, I've come up with a hopefully plausible explanation. Other than that's what cancer so often does, that is.

As my previous years of scans continued to show "stable," my oncologist and I kept increasing the interval between infusions trying to strike a balance between treating the cause and me living with the effect. Over these years, we've gradually extended those infusion intervals from every three weeks, to every four, to five, to six and most recently to seven-week intervals, all the while maintaining my quarterly CT schedule.

Apparently, we've now struck out, so to speak and for the moment at least, we're in sort of a limbo. (Hopefully the bar isn't set so incredibly low that we can't slide under it.)

As for minimizing the growth, could the solution be as simple as more medicine?

As to what my oncologist thinks of this assessment, I've not mentioned to him as I've only recently theorized it (maybe he knew already and that's what contributed to his suggestion that we follow this course of treatment/action).

We did discuss changing medicines, but he was afraid of the side effects it might cause. We also discussed if he'd had other patients who had experienced tumor growth after a period of stability — like me, who after increasing the frequency of the previously stabilizing drug showed stable once again. He said he had — so, rather than presume all is lost, we've agreed to go forward into the great semi unknown. An "unknown" that will likely end in late September when my next scan's results will be reported.

Now that you know the foundation for this column, let me address the substance behind it. There is a scenario which worries me. It's premature I grant you, but it's difficult to play dumb all the time, especially when it involves cancer/your life.

Still, if I've learned anything from my oncologist, it is that discussing scenarios before the evidence is confirmed is a bit of a fool's errand, so waiting until the actual results are in is better. More accurate anyway.

Despite what I've been told, this patient might not be able to be so patient. Ergo: What if my late September scan shows growth — again? What if, even after tripling the amount of medicine I infuse, the tumors grow, maybe even grow more significantly than ever before?

I'd have to say that development would be a problem and a bit more disappointing than July's scan results. If that result in fact occurs, would that square me at a crossroads? I would think. Would that result obliterate the false sense of security I may have had? Hardly. Cancer patients don't have a sense of security, false or otherwise. We have a sense of inevitability.

Somehow, over the next month, I must find a path forward through this cycle of potentially impending gloom. Right now, nothing has happened. Right now, nothing has been determined. I don't feel any different than before and I don't believe I have any of the symptoms my oncologist has advised me about. I still have an appetite and I'm certainly not losing any weight.

I expect to have one more infusion before this next scan, and to feel the usual post-chemotherapy side effects that I do and then recover and feel as I do today: pretty well. One month, exactly, from the date I'm writing this column, to the date of my next scan and hopefully just a few days later for the results.

What worries me most is, sometimes the human body has a mind of its own, and despite the best of intentions and treatment, it is, to quote my late mother, "Enough already."

Kenny Lourie is an Advertising Representative for The Potomac Almanac & The Connection Newspapers.