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Permit No. 724

Summer 2021

News From The Vine

A Publication From The Episcopal Church of NH



Letter from Bishop Rob

Dear Church of New Hampshire,

Four times every year, during the seasons of Advent, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost, those who are in the process that may lead to ordination as deacons or priests are required to write the bishop "Ember Day Letters." The Ember Days are devoted to prayer for an increase in the ministry, both lay and ordained, in the church — so called, presumably, because we witness the power of the Holy Spirit to enflame and enlighten a burning sense of vocation for serving God and the world in God's name.

For this summer edition of "Tending the Vine," I am choosing to share with the wider church a letter I sent to the Postulants and Candidates for Holy Orders in response to the letters I received from them in this most recent Ember Season. I am careful not to divulge any issues that are shared in confidence with me, but the letters I usually receive are so edifying and inspiring to me — and I consider it such a profound privilege to accompany these wonderful servants of our Lord in their respective journeys — that it seems like a hoarding to me not to share my impressions with the whole Episcopal Church of New Hampshire.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Customarily, I like to respond individually to your wonderful and carefully composed Ember Day letters. My intent has been to stay in close contact with each of you — and have each of you know that I read and pay attention to the particular movement of the Holy Spirit in your peculiar life. The word peculiar is not meant here in the sense of weird or strange, though, let's be honest, we have each chosen a vocation that is unconventional and even odd in the eyes of the dominant culture. Though quite possible, there's no guarantee that you will enjoy making a full living from this vocation alone. You may or may not enjoy the culture's respect. I once showed up in my bishop's shirt and collar at a meeting of the city burghers in Concord and was asked if we were to dress up for Halloween. Moreover, the soul's bidding to show up for ministry rarely observes the calendar's neat grid. It is a peculiar way of living that calls *peculiar* persons. By using that word, I mean to honor and celebrate your own special gifts, your eccentricity, irregularity, and distinctiveness.

That said, I'm choosing to deliver a "mass" response to you all in this extended Pentecost Ember Season, because the Spirit seems to be composing a mosaic among you.¹ There are leitmotifs that seem to course through the corpus of the letters I received among you this season, and I want to share them with you, while honoring the confidentiality you trust me with in writing me.

First, each of you is being called to a ministry that you are already engaged in. None of you is waiting until you receive the laying on of hands to be engaged in proclaiming God's love to those who are vulnerable. One of you refers to another as being "our John the Baptist — our voice crying out in the wilderness." Actually, the role of the Baptist is one each of you are fulfilling, since, as far as I can tell, each of you show an eagerness to point away from yourselves to moments when Jesus Christ shows up among us. And like John the Baptist, each

"Letter from Bishop Rob" continued inside

¹ I am currently listening to a wonderful piano composition written in the early days of the pandemic by Richard Danielpour for the pianist Simone Dinnerstein entitled *An American Mosaic*. It features 15 piano miniatures that honors the presence of ministers, rabbis, homeschooling parents, and healthcare workers. I hope you can find it and listen to it this summer.



A Call To Narrow The OPPORTUNITY GAP for New Hampshire's Children

A few years ago, inspired and guided by Robert Putnam's book *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*, the Episcopal Church of New Hampshire established the Our Kids Commission. Our Kids is committed to helping New Hampshire's congregations step into the "opportunity gap" for low-income and vulnerable children and their families throughout the state — the "opportunity gap" is the widening disparity in household income, educational levels, and access to services and programs which are creating rapidly diverging life chances of children in rich and poor families.



“I have probably spent around \$1,000 (\$500 from Our Kids and \$500 in the church account), primarily for Market Basket gift cards distributed to families of local school kids in Weare where food insecurity is an issue. Kids need to eat to learn, as you well know, and hybrid education was compromising access to food programs in the schools. I've coordinated with the school social worker for the Elementary and Middle School in Weare in this effort.”

The Rev. David Ferner, Vicar, Holy Cross, Weare

Bishop Rob's charge to the Commission was, and continues to be, "To find and serve the Child Jesus in our communities by helping congregations move away from asking how can we get more young people from our community in the doors of our church to asking, how can we go out the doors of our church to serve the needs of young people in our communities?"

Ed Doyle, the Our Kids Commission chairperson said that, "Prior to COVID, Our Kids offered grants to fund a variety of specific programs such as camps and enrichment opportunities designed to help address the opportunity gap." Suddenly, in March of 2020, everything shut down. "With all the cancellations and closures, we knew that funding traditional children's programs was on hold for the immediate future. We had nothing to fund because the pandemic shut everything down."

Still, Our Kids was determined to do something to help.

So they began working with congregations and looking more closely at the needs of public school districts as they scrambled to adapt and adjust to school closings and online and hybrid learning.

The idea that evolved was brilliant in its simplicity. The immediate needs of local at-risk children could be best seen and known by congregations, at the local level. The Our Kids Commission decided to offer \$500 grants for individual congregations to use in what ever way they felt would best serve the needs of the children in their communities. Very flexible. No strings attached.

In 2020, over half of New Hampshire's 46 parishes participated in the grant program. "Last year, we knew that food security had become an issue in many communities," noted Ed. Public schools provide a surprisingly large number of free/reduced school lunches to at-risk children from low-to-moderate income households. And with the sudden closing of schools, many families struggled to afford the additional at-home meals.

In 2021, approximately the same number of congregations have applied for the funding. Ed

adds, "We know that schools are working to reopen and face a number of challenges. Public schools in particular are under pressure because funding is tight. Our parishes reach out to the public schools in their area and ask simply, 'What do you need?' They know best where the needs of the kids are highest."

Our Kids funding has helped efforts that range from youth mentoring partnerships with the local high school in Littleton to coordinating with elementary and middle schools in Weare to provide grocery store gift cards to families in need, to working with a youth program in Peterborough called Avenue A to help teens stay connected and build resilience.

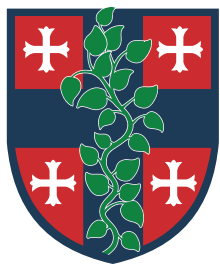
The Our Kids program is focused on the state's public schools because of state funding issues and concerns about growing inequities and the opportunity gap — this is where Our Kids believes it can make the biggest difference.

Ed emphasized that funding is still available for 2021. "As fall approaches, the new school year will present new challenges. Schools and various youth and enrichment programs will open more fully, and be in need of our help just as much as ever." For more information, please contact the Rev. Canon Gail Avery at Diocesan House, gavery@nhepiscopal.org.



We are working with Avenue A, an organization that is working with middle school and high school students in the Monadnock region... as a way for teens to connect with each other and to be resilient. Many of our parishioners are involved with teaching art classes, leading hikes, supporting through "teen talk," open mic, and tutoring."

The Rev. Jamie Hamilton, Rector, All Saints' Church, Peterborough



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SIGN UP FOR ENEWS!

A regular e-newsletter is sent to church members, clergy and lay leaders, delegates, wardens, and retired clergy. Anyone who is interested may join the mailing list by emailing their interest to officeassistant@nhepiscopal.org.



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of you has risked something in telling uncomfortable truths on behalf of the Kingdom of God. Whether it's an urban feeding and housing ministry, the creation of new communities of prayer and work, dreaming of establishing a monastic community in New Hampshire, serving tender-aged children at home or at school, resettling in regions that the economic engine of society continues to neglect and overlook, or finding yourself struggling to be the light of Christ in a corporate juggernaut that often seems to operate with values that are counter to the Gospel (when even the church seems like that juggernaut!), each of you are already practicing the presence of God where you are. It is truly astonishing to read about. I only wish that anyone who despairs about the church being "cracked open" could read a sampling of the letters I get to read to get the sweet fragrance of the oil with which each of you is already anointing the world.

Second, if you are on the fringe of the world, you are also on the fringe of the Church, at the foot of the Cross, and this is a beautiful place to be. You are places among people and communities — sometimes even families — where the church's message of God's eagerness to hear our prayers has been, at best, warily accepted, if not rejected outright. And yet, wondrously, the same people who have rejected being identified with an organized religion, are also persons who recognize in you a particular — again a *peculiar* — gift for prayer, a connection to the Divine. One cannot help but be impressed, in reading your letters to me, by how your witness — sometimes spoken, sometimes wordless — invites a relationship with Jesus Christ. I pray your ordination — the outward and visible sign of this gift of yours — does not diminish this power so evident in you.

Finally, I want to reveal one lens through which I see and watch each of you. You face many peculiar questions in this ordination process. Our church believes that a vocation arises and is acknowledged not merely by an individual, but by a whole community. One question I asked myself when each of you first came into my office at 63 Green Street was this: "Is this a person I would want to show up at my deathbed to pray

for my soul as it leaves this mortal coil? Is this a person who I could trust with my (again, *peculiar*) family at that hour? Is this a person who I could trust to assure me and my loved ones that this end, as final as it may seem, is not the end? Could this person share the Gospel with conviction and grace?"



Now, I am not thinking this will come anytime soon! I have more miles to put in my single sculling shell up and down the Merrimack, and on my bicycle. I expect to have more Easters to celebrate in the various *peculiar* churches in the Granite State. So my question is less about me than it is about what you are already doing. The Church, the Body of Christ, is always dying. There are aspects of it that are always being crucified, that are dying, and being carried in a spiced tomb. A goodly portion of our work as ordained ministers is grief work

as the church that we grew up with is changing more quickly than we either want or can control. Maybe that's why clergy wear black.

But the changes we are witnessing are real and they deserve pointing out: new reaches in old communities, restorations of broken relationships, new boldness in our witness against injustice and oppression, refreshing eagerness to share more openly the Gospel of Jesus Christ in ways that many Episcopalians were taught were unseemly or too enthusiastic. You are chaplains at the deathbed of the old church, which compels you to be heralds of the Resurrection at all times. And you're doing precisely that — just like the saints and apostles you've read about in seminary or at the School for Ministry.

And so yes, I want you, *peculiar* you, here, by our side, as we rise again in Jesus.

With my gratitude and admiration in the Risen Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'R' followed by 'B' and 'H'.

+Rob

The Rt. Rev. A. Robert Hirschfeld



Based on responses from a recent convention delegate survey, this year's 219th Annual Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of New Hampshire will be held entirely online:

**Friday evening,
November 5, 2021**

**Saturday morning,
November 6, 2021**

Nearly 50% of respondents said they were not comfortable attending an in-person Convention unless masks and physical distancing were in place. To

do that, it became clear that the diocese would need to plan an event in a venue large enough for physical distancing as well as plan for a hybrid online experience. The cost of this — both in terms of time and money — would have been significant. And of course, no one knows if infection rates will surge again this fall.

All are Invited to Worship and Bishop Rob's Annual Address

Quite a few people shared how much they enjoyed the online experience of Convention last year. An online Convention will once again provide an opportunity to invite the whole diocese to come together for worship on Friday night and for the Bishop's address on Saturday morning.

The Diocese's Short-Term COVID-19 Response Team, with leadership from the Revs. Chip Robinson and Curtis Metzger, have faithfully provided insight and guidance through this extraordinary year. On June 23, 2021, Bishop Rob issued an update to the diocese's COVID-19 guidelines.

As we eagerly return to in-person worship, the Bishop's letter is reprinted here:

As the Pandemic Loosens its Grip, New

June 23, 2021

Blessings to All,

I offer my profound thanks for the leadership of our clergy, pastoral leaders, and wardens during the last 14 months as we have grieved and grown together through this pandemic. I am grateful for their — and your — faithful willingness to stay home and limit in-person gatherings while we have also created opportunities to worship virtually, focused on formation, and found new ways to serve neighbors. I am amazed by the ways that, together, we innovated and even thrived during this time! I know how tired we all are. I also trust that the joy of beginning to regather will refresh and replenish us all.

I am writing today to announce that as of this date the diocese will no longer require churches to follow diocesan-wide restrictions for in-person gatherings in the Episcopal Church of New Hampshire. Given high rates of vaccination among our church members, the availability of vaccination to everyone age 12 and older, and the low rates of COVID-19 across our state, we will no longer impose requirements around masks, distancing, singing, or distribution of Holy Eucharist.

The guidelines we have posted on our COVID-19 webpage will continue to serve as a resource for local church decision making. All of us now have access to information about vaccination and best practices. You, our church members, are able to make well-informed decisions in support of your personal health and the well-being of our congregations. I have asked the Short Term COVID-19 Response Team to reconvene as needed and we may re-impose restrictions on gathering if infections rates rise to unsafe levels again.

Just because our church leaders are not required to mandate masks or distancing does not, however, mean they can't continue to implement these requirements at a local level. Church leaders will continue to monitor local virus rates and make decisions based on the needs of your community. Clergy and church leaders who conclude that practices such as masking, distancing, outdoor worship, or communion in one kind will better serve their local context have the full support of the Diocese.

We are thrilled to announce that Friday's guest preacher will be the Rev. Katherine "Katie" Nakamura Rengers, Officer for Church Planting Infrastructure at The Episcopal Church. The Rev. Katie is a strategist, a practical thinker, an entrepreneur and a pastor, and is focused on networking new ministries, developing resources, and organizing trainings to support the development of new ministries of all kinds across The Episcopal Church. After Bishop Rob's address on Saturday morning, delegates will focus on the business portion of Annual Convention: elections and resolutions.

Visit the Convention Webpage

Information and updates about Convention can be found on our website at www.nhepiscopal.org/convention, including Convention rules of order, the delegate handbook, important dates, nomination and election information, and resolution guidelines. This webpage will be updated frequently, so check back often!

Please Join Us!

We hope to see you for the church-wide worship services on Friday night, and Bishop Rob's Annual Address on Saturday morning. Please contact Convention Co-Coordinator, Shelli Gay, Executive Assistant to the Bishop, or Tina Pickering, Canon for Ministry Development with any questions at sgay@nhepiscopal.org or tpickering@nhepiscopal.org.



The Rev. Katherine
Nakamura Rengers

COVID-19 Guidelines for In-Person Worship

Please pay special attention to the following:

- ✪ Although churches may decide to no longer require masks it should also be clear that masks are welcome for those who prefer them. Let's establish a culture where people are comfortable wearing masks, for any reason.
- ✪ Churches may now offer wine in the common cup (intinction is discouraged however). If wine is offered, churches will make sure that it is understood that communion in one kind is entirely appropriate. Let's foster a church culture where people are comfortable crossing their arms on their chests as the wine is distributed, for any reason.
- ✪ Clergy and church leaders will consult directly with families with children under 12 before they make decisions about how to approach mask wearing, distancing, or worshipping indoors. Let's nurture a culture where children are protected, even if we need to wear masks in certain situations.
- ✪ Churches will continue to offer online worship options as they are able. Let's promote a culture where people feel like welcomed worshippers whether they are in-person or online.

I want to express my deepest gratitude to the Short Term COVID-19 Response Team, with leadership from the Revs. Chip Robinson and Curtis Metzger, for leading our response to the pandemic. I also want to express my gratitude and thankfulness for the faithful kindness, patience, and love for others you have all demonstrated during this time.

I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you... And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

-Philippians 3-4, 9-11

Faithfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "A. Robert Hirschfeld".

The Rt. Rev. A. Robert Hirschfeld



Transition Ministry Updates

There has been a lot happening in your diocese! Our Church here in New Hampshire has deep roots, and is sprouting new life — new ways of following God are continually emerging in our vineyard. The following transitions and celebrations are joyful reminders that the Episcopal Church of New Hampshire is vibrant, dynamic, and always seeking to discover and follow God's path.

The Rev. Nathan Bourne has accepted a call as Rector of St. George's, Durham. Nathan started at St. George on June 1. Many thanks to the Rev. Celeste Hemingson who served as Interim Rector.



*The Rev. Jason Wells,
Transition Priest-in-Charge*

The Rev. Jason Wells has accepted a call as Transition Priest-in-Charge at The Seacoast Shared Ministry — Christ Church, Portsmouth, and Trinity Church, Hampton. Jason started at The Seacoast Shared Ministry on July 6.

Aaron Jenkyn has been appointed Lay Vicar at Epiphany Church, Newport, beginning June 4. The Rev. Jay MacLeod has resigned as

Priest-in-Charge at Epiphany and continues as Rector at St. Andrew's Church, New London.

The Rev. Robin Thomas Soller has announced her retirement from Trinity Church, Meredith. Her ministry concluded on July 31. Blessings and gratitude for years of service and care!

The Rev. Jamie Hamilton has announced her retirement from All Saints Church, Peterborough, effective September 30. Blessings and gratitude for years of service and care!

(Left to Right) First row: the Rev. Kelly Sundberg Seaman, the Rev. Sarah Rockwell, the Rev. Greg Baker, the Rev. Cricket Cooper, the Rev. Nancy Meyer, the Rev. Guy Collins, and the Rev. Dr. James Weiss. Back row: the Rev. Stephen Rugg, the Rev. Ed Frost, Bishop Rob, the Rev. Michael Reinke, and the Rev. Michael Greene.



(Left to Right) Canon Tina Pickering, the Rev. Liz DeNauw, Bishop Rob, the Rev. Liz Preysner, and Dr. Headley "Lee" White, Acolyte.

The Rev. Kelly Sundberg Seaman has resigned from Emmanuel Church, Ashland, Holderness, Plymouth as of July 15. Kelly continues as Dean of the School for Ministry.



*The Rev. Jamie Hamilton
(courtesy, Benton Photography)*

Stephen Rugg was ordained to the diaconate on June 12. Stephen will serve as Deacon-in-Charge at Emmanuel Church, Ashland, Holderness, Plymouth.

Elizabeth DeNauw was ordained to the diaconate on June 11. Liz is serving St. Stephen's, Colebrook, and will become Priest-in-Charge

at St. Stephen's when she is ordained to the priesthood later this year.

Elizabeth Preysner was ordained to the diaconate on June 11. She will be serving as School Chaplain at St. Andrew's School, Middletown, Delaware.



The Rev. Robin Thomas Soller

Ed Frost was ordained to the diaconate on June 12. Ed will continue to lead Christ the Way, a new Episcopal Missional Community in Manchester.

Michael Reinke was ordained to the diaconate on June 12. He will continue to serve as the Executive Director of the Nashua Soup Kitchen and Shelter in Nashua.

If you are interested in learning more, or happen to know of someone seeking a new call, please contact the Rev. Canon Gail Avery, Canon for Transition and Community Engagement, at gavery@nepiscopal.org