



THE BT TIMES

We are Better Together
July 2020

Getting Back Together . . . Eventually

Time stands still. The lockdown in Maryland starts on March 12 and we all get very busy stocking up on groceries and hand sanitizer. Governor Hogan closes schools for two weeks – we didn't really think that they would stay closed. Pastor Stewart is on sabbatical and is coming back for Palm Sunday, which is April 5. But he comes back early because of COVID-19. Easter comes and goes.

Now it is June 24. Nothing is the same.

We have become accustomed to standing in line. Keeping social distance. Wearing face masks. The Orioles are not losing. We have cancelled travel, birthday parties, postponed funerals, and we no longer have Sunday dinners. Lives have been lost. Tears have been shed. Employees have been furloughed, and high school graduations have become drive-through events.

But we are still church. The Sunday services are on Zoom, there's a virtual coffee hour, and each week a few more people come to sit under the big tree on Tuesday and Wednesday mornings, to pray.

Parishioners are calling parishioners. Books from the library made their way from Cedarcroft Road to your street. Our congregation donated thousands of dollars to help others during this crisis. Pastor Don has revealed his remarkable talent for speaking, and singing, to the young (and old!) with his puppets, who have endeared themselves to all of us.

It is June 24. What shall we do now?

We have a plan. Starting next Wednesday, July 1, we will have a small healing service at 10:30 am, with communion. On August 9, we will have our first Sunday morning service with communion in Hart Hall at 9:30 am. We are working on addressing all of the issues at hand, from social distancing, to air circulation, to newly revised protocols for ushers to help us avoid bottlenecks upon arriving and leaving. We will livestream the service for those who would like to continue church from home, and we will keep virtual coffee hour at 10:30 am, so that we all can catch up.

We are flexible, nimble, and our primary concern is keeping everyone healthy. If there is a surge in cases in Maryland and we have to postpone being together in person, we will. We are still church. We are still a community of faith. We have each other, and we are here for you.

Incredibly important things are happening every day – the world is changing. Indeed, in many ways it already has. Faith, love, patience, and truth, will see us through.

Carolyn

P.S. I'll be out of the office from July 6-17 but Pastor Stewart and Pastor Don will be here, keeping things rolling along. Pastor Stewart plans to be on vacation July 24-August 7.

A Sermon from Pastor Stewart

June 21, 2020 Matthew 10:24-39

*God grant us the courage, the wisdom and the strength,
always to seek the truth, come whence it may,
cost what it will. Amen.*



Don't you just love the picture on the bulletin cover? That memory of our kids from all walks of life, all ages, all colors, all energy levels, with all the visions and hopes for the futures they and we are dreaming for them fills my heart with joy. It is indeed the Holy Family of God right there on the stage in Hart Hall. And, this Thursday, is June 25, six months from and until Christmas, so I thought I should remind you of that.

But there's another reason this picture is on your bulletin cover. I started to tell you in last week's sermon, but here is the rest of the story. We're looking at moving a few things around to finally get the altar rail from Holy Comforter installed. I went digging in the archives last Saturday afternoon to see that this space used to look like. And I found the great black and white pictures, some of the interior around 1920 and then the 50's and the 70's. The altar used to be up against the wall, and there were choir stalls facing a center aisle. We still have them. The back pews are in Hart Hall, and our acolytes sit in in the others. It's an ongoing project. Maybe we'll make some adjustments soon. We'll see.

I scanned the photos into my computer and went to put the folder back in the cabinet in the library when I saw the next manila folder labeled (Nativity Mens Club - Suwannee Jubilee 1950). And when I opened that folder I found this. (*I held up the actual picture.*)

Yes, that is a picture of a minstrel show on the stage in Hart Hall complete with 27 white men in black face and what looks like a fine group of musicians. The backdrop says Suwannee Jubilee, I suppose a reference to "Old Folks at Home", a minstrel song about slaves longing for the 'good life' back on the plantation written by Stephen Foster in 1851.

The picture looked familiar to me. When Ginny North was organizing the archives maybe six years ago, I vaguely remember that she showed it to me. I shrugged my shoulders. Evidently, they used to get away with that, I thought. And Ginny filed it away again. Indeed, we are not the only church who used to do minstrel shows. I'm sure they got a big crowd and lots of laughs and maybe even raised some money.

But that was then, and this is now. And while part of me wanted to shred that picture immediately or just shove it back into that file for someone else to deal with, I had also already read the gospel for this morning. Jesus said to his disciples, "So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops."

Secrets are never helpful in an organization, and I don't think anyone was trying to keep this covered up. I don't want to know their names, and there is no blame to be cast. We are, thanks be to God and the work of the Holy Spirit, a completely different church now. But once I saw this picture in a new light, in the light of what we are experiencing in our country and world today, I could not unsee it.

The past cannot be covered up. The past cannot be excused. Even in context, it wasn't right. I have an archive in my head of the things I have done that I wish I could erase. I never meant to hurt or offend anyone, but I sure was ignorant on many occasions. I have laughed at jokes I should not have listened to and remained silent when I should have spoken up. And as one of my longtime friends said recently, "The older I get, the more ignorant I know I am and how ignorant I was. Where we go wrong is when we choose to remain in our ignorance. That is the sin." (*My childhood friend Rob Wall*)

And now we can do something about that. Because none of this is written down in our church history. What did the Church of the Nativity and what did Holy Comforter do in the rest of the 1950's, 60's and 70's? Where did we spend our money? Did anyone attend the March on Washington? Just how did our congregations become so diverse? Who were the first brave people of color who began worshipping in our churches? What are their stories? I think it's time we found out and wrote it down. It's got to be a good story, and I think it is Good News.

Because I've come to understand what Brené Brown says to be true. "We either own our stories or they own us. Only when we have the courage to own our history are we able to write a brave new ending to our story. This is true in our lives, our families, our communities, and our country."

I know some of your stories, and they are enough to make me weep. I have heard your stories of pain and heartache, of illness and struggle, of depression and addiction, and racism and abuse. Some of your stories would be enough for anyone else to lose hope. But I also know that you have not let your stories own you. You have found the courage, the actual heart, to write brave endings of resilience, success and liberation. And you are my inspiration to keep coming back to church even in the midst of challenging times.

We can use some brave new endings to some stories in our families, communities and country right now. And in 70 years when some crazy preacher goes looking through the file folders of our archives, I don't want them having to dig deep to find out what we did in this momentous time. What are we saying now or leaving left unsaid? Or what show are we putting on stage that will make our successors and grandchildren and great-grandchildren either proud or ashamed?

So, I want us to continue to listen to one another. We still have to hear each other's stories. We have to hold space in this amazingly diverse and loving Christian community. We have to hold space for pain and struggle and for the joy and victory.

And we need to learn about our past and our present. What *did* go on in Nativity, Cedarcroft and in Holy Comforter, Govans? Who *were* the leaders who moved and built and rebuilt our buildings and

our savings and mission? Why *do* we look like we do now? And what *does* God have left for us to do here? What is the rest of our story?

Well the story of God's love for us did not end on the cross. That story continued on the third day with an empty tomb. And God holds that promise for us too as individuals and as a community of love. We are promised and given even now, eternal life.

From that story then, we are called to LEAD. Because we have come from blackface minstrels on our stage to a beautifully diverse representation of the Holy Family of God on our stage. Because of who we are, and because of who God is, and because God is not done with us yet, we are called to LEAD others to this place and beyond.

So, will you join me? Will you hold my hand as we dig through those closets and filing cabinets? Will you listen to each other and learn from the saints who have gone before us? And with God's help will you join me as we LEAD others to know the abundant, inclusive, radical, forgiving, creative love of God? Will you?

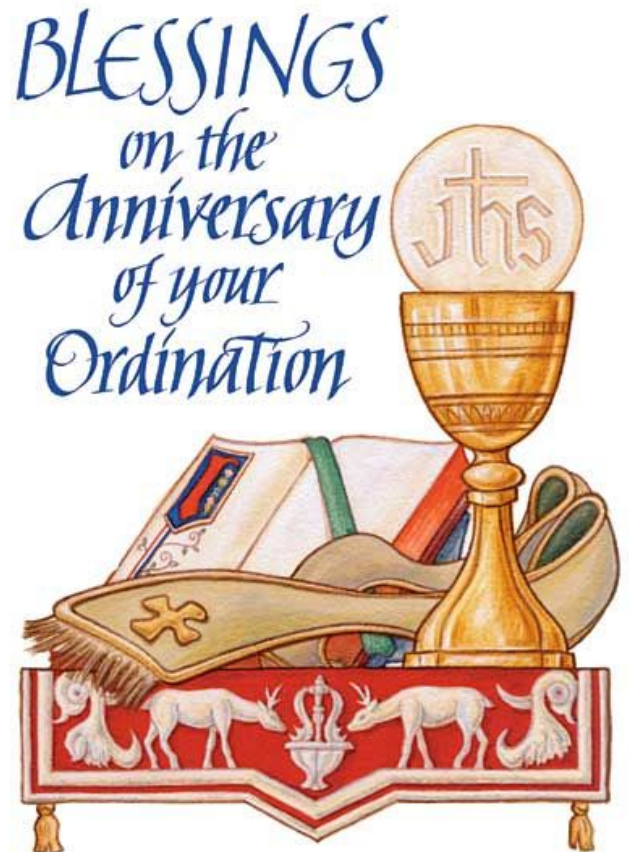
Dear friends at Nativity & Holy Comforter,

What a delightful surprise it was for me toward the end of the worship service last Sunday, when the congregation recognized the 45th anniversary of my ordination. I can still remember all those years ago, having friends and colleagues place their hands on my head for a blessing while the Bishop offered ordination prayers. Of course, these days we would have to be careful about keeping social distance, and masks might have muffled any prayers. But the same Spirit still lives among us, and still prepares us for new adventures in ministry.

Thanks as well for the church's generous donation to Manna House's Capital Campaign. It means so much to me for the church to support their ministry in this way.

May God's rich blessings guide us into the future in justice and compassion.

In Christ,
Pastor Don



A Little Education about Minstrel Shows

by David Neff

Last Sunday, Father Stewart told us about his discovery of a 1950s photo of the men's club at Church of the Nativity putting on a minstrel show in Hart Hall—27 white men in blackface. We are rightly taken aback by such images, but to understand the history, we need to know more than that white men put burnt cork on their faces before singing and dancing. We also need to know about the music and about the way in which minstrelsy stole performing opportunities from black artists.

One easy—but painful—place to start your education would be to look at part of an online concert that Joshua Banbury gave last Friday. Many of you know Joshua. He sang with our choir for three years while he was a student at Morgan State. Joshua's Juneteenth concert video has now been viewed almost 3000 times. It is good entertainment that samples the history of black music from its African origins, through the spirituals and work songs, the blues, jazz, and so forth. But in the middle of the concert, Joshua gives us a sampling of minstrel music: the most popular song in America 100 years ago was "Coon, Coon, Coon," in which a black man bemoans his skin color. (What Joshua didn't mention is that the composer was the same man who wrote "Let Me Call You Sweetheart." I'll never hear that song the same way again.)

It may be painful to watch and listen to this sample of one of the most popular minstrel songs, but I agree with Joshua that this has educational benefit for all of us. We need to know in order to understand our history.

Don't stop watching after that song. Next up: Joshua sings "Nobody," a heart-breaking song by Bert Williams, the first black man to have a leading role on Broadway and the first black man to have a leading role in a film. He was a pathbreaker for many black performing artists.

So here's the link for Joshua's concert:

<https://www.facebook.com/joshua.banbury.5/videos/3138187659573184/> If you don't want to watch it all the way through, his introduction to minstrel show music begins at 16:26. But I commend the whole 37-minute show.



COVID-19 Community Relief Fund

Thanks to your incredible and continuing generosity, we have raised over \$7000 for our neighbors who are dealing with the effects of the coronavirus pandemic. The Church Council has gone ahead and approved the distribution of the funds received thus far. Some of these are non-profits we have supported before but normally at the end of the calendar year. They will be especially grateful for our gifts now as fundraising in this time is especially challenging. Below are the receiving organizations.

Again, thank you for the way you have been keeping up with your pledges and even increasing your giving to support our own ministry at Nativity and Holy Comforter. We are blessed that so far, despite the decrease in building use income, we have not had a problem keeping up with our expenses. The Payroll Protection Program has helped enormously, and we hope that will be turned into a grant shortly. We will keep you posted.

Delaware-Maryland Synod Covid-19 Relief Fund	500
Diocese of Maryland Covid-19 Relief Fund	500
Bishop Claggett Camp	500
Mar Lu Ridge Camp	500
Baltimore International Seafarers	500
American Friends of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem	500
Lutheran World Relief	250
Episcopal Relief & Development	250
CARES Food Pantry / GEDCO	1,500
Italian Cultural Society / Be a Chef for a Day	1,500
Manna House	500
House of Ruth	500
Total	\$7,500

Meal Delivery

With the City and County opening back, our volunteers are shrinking and our dinners' requests are going up because our families don't have a normal to go back to. We are up to 604 dinners for tonight. We need your support now more than ever! The more drivers we have the shorter the routes are. Here is the link to volunteer (<https://signup.com/go/stZLSgu>) and here some pictures to give you a precise and concise idea of the impact of your service. Thank you so much for your support.

Monica Lapenta, Executive Director and CEO

Italian Cultural Center of Maryland. Be a Chef for a Day. www.ItalyMd.org

<https://www.facebook.com/ItalyMD/>. <https://m.facebook.com/BACFADBeaChefForADay/>

600+
HOT MEALS PER DAY
MON-FRI

200
GRAB&GO BAGS
OF CHILDREN'S
MEALS DAILY
(each bag has breakfast,
lunch, snack, and supper)
MON-FRI

28.446
WARM DINNERS
SINCE MARCH 24TH

143.557
TOTAL MEALS
SERVED SINCE
MARCH 24TH



A WARM MEAL
SHOULD NOT
BE DENIED TO
ANYONE

A MEAL COSTS

\$5

Team up
with your coworkers,
neighbors,
family members,
book-club-mates,
wine-club-mates,
and support a neighbor
that doesn't have a
„normal“ to go back to!

Italian Cultural Center | Be a Chef for a Day
315 Homeland Southway, Baltimore, MD 21212
Phone +1 410- 547 9934 - info@italymd.org

www.BaCfaDBeaT.org
WWW.ITALYMD.ORG

BE A CHEF FOR A DAY.
BACFAD

**GIVE
THE GIFT
OF A
WARM MEAL
TO A
NEIGHBOR**

WWW.BACFADBEAT.ORG

**Update
JUNE 22ND, 2020**

Ways to Help

GEDCO's CARES Food Pantry continues to run low on all donations. Please bring the following and leave on the wooden ramp entrance. We will get your donations delivered.

CEREAL, SOUP, SPAGHETTI SAUCE
CANNED TUNA, CANNED VEGETABLES,
RICE, PASTA, AND PRODUCE.



**Food Pantry
Donations Needed**



The Church of the
Nativity & Holy Comforter
419 Cedarcroft Rd.
Baltimore, MD 21212

VIRTUAL WORSHIP GUIDE

Wednesday Night Live @ 7:30 pm

Click this link

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82573335080> to join in our time of prayer, listening and reflection tonight on Zoom. Or call in by dialing 1-301-715-8592 then enter 82573335080#

Thursday Bible Study @ 11:00 am

Pastor Don leads this study and check in every week.

Click here to join

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88586024640> or call in by dialing 1-929-205-6099 then enter 88586024640#

Sunday Zoom Worship @ 10:30 am

Each week we include the readings, special music, a children's puppet message from Pastor Don, and a homily. Click here to join

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/91628746933> or call in by dialing 1-301-715-8592 then enter 91628746933#. We will be broadcasting live to YouTube as well at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCPj8grkDtrpeS5XjVrLymcfw>

Links to these services are found on our website at www.nativitycomforter.org.

Other Worship Opportunities

The Delaware-Maryland Synod of the ELCA broadcasts at 10:00 am at <https://demdsynod.org/digital-worship/>. The Episcopal Diocese of Maryland worships virtually at 11:00am at the Cathedral of the Incarnation at www.marylandepiscopalian.org.