

Clergy Q&A May 26-27

Bishop Porter Taylor talked about preaching in the time of COVID and opened his teaching with the poem "Kindness," by Naomi Shihab Nye.

Before You Know What Kindness Really Is

By Naomi Shihab Nye

Before you know what kindness really is
you must lose things,
feel the future dissolve in a moment
like salt in a weakened broth.
What you held in your hand,
what you counted and carefully saved,
all this must go so you know
how desolate the landscape can be
between the regions of kindness.
How you ride and ride
thinking the bus will never stop,
the passengers eating maize and chicken
will stare out the window forever.

Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness,
you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho
lies dead by the side of the road.
You must see how this could be you,
how he too was someone
who journeyed through the night with plans
and the simple breath that kept him alive.

Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.
You must wake up with sorrow.
You must speak to it till your voice
catches the thread of all sorrows
and you see the size of the cloth.

Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,
only kindness that ties your shoes
and sends you out into the day to mail letters and

purchase bread,
only kindness that raises its head
from the crowd of the world to say
it is I you have been looking for,
and then goes with you every where
like a shadow or a friend.

--Naomi Shihab Nye, from *The Words Under the Words*

A link to Bishop Taylor's notes for this talk can be found [here](#).

Two titles referenced by Bishop Taylor:

Joan Chittister: "[Scarred By Struggle, Transformed by Hope](#)"

George Packer: "[The Unwinding](#)"

Some chat responses to questions Bishop Taylor posed:

A question posed by Bishop Taylor was "How has Covid 19 impacted my preaching?" Covid 19 has changed my story selection for my sermons. More than that, Covid 19 gave me the opportunity to write to the congregation on Tuesday's and simply walk with them through this transition time between what was and what will be. This gave me an opportunity to open up a conversation that people were looking to have. As a preacher, sometimes people do not respond sometimes because if there is something they want to unpack or challenge, they realize it is your preaching craft, and do not want to disrespect you. From my Tuesday messages, people have reached out, shared, and exchanged information and stories of their own.

The homiletical approach described by Bp. Porter has a twin in the community organizing world called public narrative. Marshall Ganz teaches how to use the story of self, us, and now to be with the community to discern needs, advocate for those needs and reach consensus to take action.

Announcements

Canon Mary Thorpe inquired about the need for assistance with full service bulletins, since the BCPS, hymnals and other pew rack materials would need to be removed for Phase Two regathering. She asked those with thoughts about that or who would appreciate that option to email her at mthorpe@thediocese.net. One attendee noted the benefit of having digital bulletins available for people to read from their phones or tablets.

New schedule for weekly clergy calls: Mark Eastham discussed the fact that we will be shifting to Tuesday-only clergy webinars for the month of June and also sought the sense of the group

as to whether doing the clergy webinar every week during the summertime was our clergy's preference, or if a different schedule, like bi-weekly or monthly would suffice. Erin Kamran posted a poll which attendees took. Results (reported later in the meeting) showed the largest single group was for every other week, with weekly calls coming in second. Bishop Susan noted that this might shift if there was something important that needed to be conveyed or if circumstances changed in some other way.

Some comments from attendees: *"It will really depend on what is happening."*

"We don't feel that you need to provide programming every week. Just a quick 15 min update."

"They could be briefer with regathering updates in July and August."

"This weekly offering has been a sense of connection for me as solo clergy."

Q&A

The BCPs and hymnals need to be out of our worship spaces before we resume in-person worship? **Yes. This is in accordance with guidance we have reviewed from a number of sources, including the CDC.**

Is there an update on when sacramental actions like baptism may resume? **It will not be in Phase Two. As the phases progress, you'll receive further guidance.**

What is the plan for the ordinations of transitional deacons? **These will occur on June 15th in Richmond. Bishop Brooke-Davidson will conduct them, with each candidate for ordination having their own individual service. We are arranging for the necessary canonically required persons to be present, but there will be very few others. We hope to have the wonderful big celebration that ordination deserves at a later point in time.**

Will the ordinations be livestreamed? **The current thinking is that we will be recording those individual services to keep them intimate, but it is still under discussion.**

What about things like confirmation? **Bishops are working on all these issues, regionally, provincially, nationally. We want to be as flexible as we feel we can be within the bounds of our Canons. It's a work in progress.**

My church parish hall is a polling place and we have an election June 23. The Election Board has asked if we can also host election training, as we have in the past, on June 16th. If social distance, masks and cleaning of surfaces is observed can this training occur? **This should be a conversation with your local election officials. They will need to adhere to your protocols at minimum and you'll have to assess their plans, particularly those that include the gathering of small groups, which should continue to be limited to ten persons.**

When is the re-affirmation of ordination vows being planned for? A month or season, rather than a specific date, is what I am asking about. We are hoping it will happen in October, and we would love to do it at the fall conference at Shrine Mont. Much depends on the coronavirus and where we are in the fall. We are also considering the possibility of doing it on Zoom. Some of our colleague bishops did it that way. As with all things done on Zoom, it was messy, but we are considering it as a possible option.

When we regather...Is there ecclesial guidance around whether all aspects of the liturgy be conducted either in-person OR online? Is there a willingness to consider parishes offering (for example) part of the service online for all (Liturgy of the Word) and a portion of the service or abbreviated service in person? Absolutely! That kind of bringing together the best of what we're learning as well as the deep beloved traditions is something important and valid. We know that there will be those among our parishioners who will not feel ready to return to the church building yet. We know that there will be people who became part of your virtual community via online worship. We don't want to lose our sense of connectedness to people whether they are long-time members or new attendees.

What about other groups that use space in our church building? Can they return if they keep social distancing and wear masks and sanitize surfaces? Do they need to wait until June 10 to get diocesan guidelines? Again, this is a conversation between you and the leaders of those other groups. If they are groups that use your space for worship, the same rules that will apply to your congregation will apply to them. The same limitations in numbers will apply. The same guidance for sanitation and hygiene will apply. You will receive the guidance, per Bishop Susan, prior to June 10th, so you can have that conversation sooner rather than later.

In phase 2 it is noted that "Pastoral care to those in high-risk categories for contracting the virus remains restricted." Can you offer any guidance about what pastoral care to those who are not high risk might look like? And, also, if our local hospital allows visitation (at some future date) could we visit? It is a matter of assessing the risk to the person you are visiting and to you. All protocols of distancing and hygiene would have to be followed. As for bringing Communion, we would request that you only do it when someone is near death. Insofar as hospitals are concerned, find out from the hospitals what they require and follow their guidelines as well as ours. Remember that any place you go, you may inadvertently bring virus particles to, even if you are not infected yourself, and you may inadvertently pick up virus particles that you will bring home. Be wise and assess your risk.

Is it possible for our quilt club to meet in the church parking lot while maintaining distancing requirements? Speak to Bishop Susan directly about this.

For us, equally important to regathering in the church is enabling small groups (less than 10) to gather at 6' distance, with masks, outside, for short durations. In fact, this may feel more important. However, we are refraining under the "do not gather" rubric. Is this something that we need to work through the diocesan submit-a-plan process or a different process? **If these groups are necessary for the support of at risk individuals in your community (like twelve-step programs, for example), and if they are willing to follow the sanitation and hygiene protocols that the worshipping community will be adhering to, you may proceed if you are comfortable with it. For small groups that are parish-related, like formation or fellowship groups, you may not restart them in Phase Two.**

When will we receive the checklists and guidelines for regathering? **Earlier, we had discussed having something out there by June 10th. We now hope to have them to you sometime before that so that you can begin the work of planning – although many of you have already begun that – and considering whether you want to regather in Phase Two or wait for a later Phase. We may not be in a position to start receiving your petitions by June 10th – we have to prepare the area coaches for their important role assisting you – but you'll have materials to start your planning process.**

I know these are being recorded, but are Bp. Taylor's remarks available as text? Thank you! **You will find a link to them [here](#).**

Are there guidelines for opening church thrift shops? And do we need to apply to the bishop for permission to open our thrift shop? **This is one of those issues that the clergy and the vestry need to have a talk about. We are not requiring separate permission, but we know that it's pretty hard to do social distancing (six feet in all directions), which is still a feature of our next phase of regathering, in most thrift shops. Have a conversation among the leadership of your parish, keeping in mind that the important thing is keeping people safe.**

Additional: Mary also noted that Governor Northam announced today (5/26/20) that all persons are required to wear masks in an indoor public gathering space.