As the COVID-19 vaccine becomes available to more and more people and we can begin to see that famous light at the end of the tunnel, we asked several parishioners to send in personal reflections of how this challenging year had affected them. We wanted to know how they had coped and what had sustained them.

Having covered in three previous issues the good deeds parishioners had done, we were curious about parishioners’ insights and personal reflections. Reflection is, as we all know, an important ingredient of human growth as well as an essential part of prayer and of a life with God. We read often in the scriptures of Jesus going off by himself to pray alone. Matthew 14:23 tells us, “After he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray.”

Years earlier, Socrates told his listeners that “the unexamined life is not worth living,” and many years after Jesus, the great poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge put forth that “The one art of which people should be masters is the art of reflection.”

So, along with one piece about more wonderful good deeds done by CTK stewards, we share with you the reflections of several parishioners and the Mustard Seed staff.
On Good Friday 30 years ago, my mother, Marianne, was called home to the Lord after suffering from lung cancer. I was only 23 at the time and I was very sad to see my mother go. It was around that time that I learned of the scripture verse from Romans 8:28, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” I have relied on that verse each day since then to provide me with the hope that no matter what comes my way, God has a plan and to trust that God will somehow bring tremendous blessings out of circumstances and situations that would appear to be void of any good at all.

Over the past year, we’ve seen one circumstance after another come our way that on the surface would cause even the most faithful to wonder how God could bring good out of such dire situations. After all, what good could possibly come from millions of people suffering, dying, rioting, rebelling, and being separated from their loved ones. The prophet Isaiah (55:8) tells us, “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My way, says the Lord.” Thus, as each challenge over the past year has presented itself, I’ve found great comfort to know that even though I don’t always see how good can come from such things, I know that God’s ways are not of this world and through Him, good will triumph over evil.

If we look at history, we can see many ways that much good has come from seemingly terrible events. Is it possible that a global pandemic could yield a generation of people that are well trained at how to stop the spread of their germs which could lead to a dramatic decrease in the spread of diseases for decades to come? Is it possible that seeing a black man murdered on TV could lead to a complete reformation of how law enforcement handles suspects? Is it possible that the reality of how white supremacy still runs through the veins of many people in the world could possibly impact how people for generations to come could feel about people with different color skin? Is it possible that in order for our country to be united that we had to go through a period of time where we were the most divided? Is it possible that only by being separated from loved ones, experiencing the absence of social gatherings, and being restricted from worshiping the Lord with song, that when things return to normal that all those things (and more) will be so much more appreciated?

Although the events of the last year have disturbed my spirit and caused me to question what God’s plan is, I am filled with gratitude for the gift of faith that the Lord has graced me with as it allows me to continue to find hope and joy even when chaos surrounds me. Much like I look forward to rejoicing with my beloved mother in heaven someday, I am so looking forward to the day when we can gather together and rejoice while singing, “No storm can shake my inmost calm, while to that refuge clinging. Since Christ is Lord of heaven and earth, how can I keep from singing?”

“Self reflection is the school of wisdom.”
Baltasar Gracian

YEAR IN REFLECTION

By Ken Hedglen

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” Romans 8:28
By Marie White

In this year of isolation where we find ourselves, I was thinking about the word that describes how many of us are feeling. “Lonesome” comes to mind. We are separated from our loved ones near and far.

For those in nursing homes, in assisted living facilities or in the hospital who do not understand why we are not visiting them, this is a very lonely and confusing time.

For those who are first responders, this is an exhausting, frustrating time, being away from family members and having to be family for complete strangers in their final hours.

We are a social people. Not being able to see friends, attend sporting events, go out to dinner or enjoy a concert can leave us all feeling sad and depressed.

Despite that, one of the things that has sustained us is the kindness people are showing one another – neighbors, friends and even strangers. We Zoom with our families and our co-workers. We live-stream Sunday liturgy. We have drive-by birthday celebrations. We are writing letters again on actual paper instead of tablets. We are creating our own cards and artwork to send to relatives whom we cannot visit.

This virus has taken so much from us, but, thankfully, our faith has kept us strong and helped us to use our imagination in taking different paths to bring us through it. Now that the vaccine is available, we can finally see the light at the end of the tunnel!

God is in the Desert Too

By Donna Menard

The past year has been anything but normal. As with all things, we always have a choice in how we look at it. Like for most Christians as we entered the Lenten season last year, there was a profound sense of lost. Members of the small group bible study reached out to ask if we could do sessions by Zoom. After a few emails, we discovered that we could indeed! This group, which I have been involved with for about 20 years, became my church! We would read and discuss scripture, listen to music and share our stories.

While most of the world was separating, we grew closer. Once a week we would meet for an hour and a half and connect! We would share resources we had found.

Father Brendan McGuire was doing a Zoom retreat on prayer out in California. A few in the group have received Father Brendan’s homilies ever since his retreat at Christ the King years ago and so the information was shared with the rest of the group. In normal years we would do two or three six-week bible study sessions. Last year we completed four.

We discovered that God is in the desert, too, and He is only as far away as our arms keep him. This time of COVID-19 has been a gift of extra time to spend with our Lord and as we enter the Lenten season a year later, hope fills the air as the end of the desert is in view!

“We do not learn from experience. We learn from reflecting on experience.”
John Dewey

Kindness Sustains Us
Pandemic Pondering

By Cherie Binns

Everything we take for granted in our relationships with others has been challenged and changed as this pandemic passes its first year of impact. My “job” prior to this was doing in-person patient education programs around the U.S. teaching lifestyle changes that have helped me to successfully manage my own multiple sclerosis. Additionally, I serve on several national health care advisory boards that had me in Washington, D.C. a dozen times a year. All of that has gone virtual and it feels disempowered and a bit disconnected.

So, I took a piece of my own advice to my audiences, “Create…engage in a hobby.” As nurses, we are taught to comfort and teach wellness while we try to facilitate healing. I began making my own clothes when I was in third grade, so the sewing machine was an old friend. I settled on mask making. I took a commercial mask that was comfortable but did not stay in place and tweaked it multiple times until I got one that fit almost every face (including those with beards), was adjustable and had nose wires to keep glasses from fogging. In my head, I was keeping people well, preventing illness, and providing comfort with the fit.

Not only that but I was exploring a creative side of me in working with color and pattern. My sewing machine became my canvas and I created.

As I have started sharing these with members of the parish, I discovered a blessing that I never anticipated. I began to have conversations with people I had never more than exchanged greetings with in the past 30 years as a parishioner! I started hearing stories of their struggles and joys and have begun to think of and pray for individuals in our parish family as the conversations come to mind. This is an unexpected blessing that has come out of this very dark time in our history and I understand in a deeper way the advice I have been giving to people to create, to volunteer, to tend their spirit. I live that advice probably more fully than I ever have and it is bearing fruit.

As of this writing, over 4,000 masks have been made and distributed. Most weekends lately there has been a table in the parish hall with masks. They are not for sale. Feel free to take what you need and if you are able and wish to contribute toward materials, that is appreciated.
Helping the Hungry and Homeless at the Peace Dale Dinner Table

By Elise Hedglen

Like many Christ the King parishioners, I have often been concerned about the plight of the hungry and the homeless. When encountering homeless people on the street, or when passing by in my car, it would tug at my heartstrings and I would pray for them, sometimes offering something to eat if I had it.

Eventually, my husband Ken and I felt called to do something more, and we put together care packages or “blessing bags,” as we heard them called, with snacks and personal care items. We keep them in the car for the times we see someone in need on the streets.

At about the same time, we became aware of a local conference of the St. Vincent de Paul Society based out of St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Wakefield, and decided to get more information. We felt the Lord was calling us to this wonderful ministry dedicated to serving neighbors in need, and are now proud to call ourselves Vincentians!

In December, our St. Vincent de Paul Society conference became involved with the Peace Dale Dinner Table program at the Peace Dale Congregational Church, which has provided a home cooked meal every Wednesday to anyone in the local community for the past five years. We began by helping Peace Dale Dinner Table with the Wednesday meal, then planning and preparing the meal ourselves. In January, our St. Vincent de Paul conference added and assumed responsibility for a second meal per week, on Fridays.

The meals are now served as takeout due to COVID-19. Previously, they were served at the parish hall, where guests could enjoy a meal and companionship. The various meal preparation tasks include planning, prepping, cooking, picking up bread donations, baking dessert, serving/packaging meals, bagging meals/bread/dessert, runners to bring meals out to cars for pickup, delivery for those who cannot pick up, and clean-up. The meal program had to shut down last year when COVID-19 restrictions became necessary, but started up again in October for take-out. Since then, the number of requested meals soared from an average of 70 per week to over 170, a 140% increase.

Rhode Island Community Food Bank researchers have found that 25% of households are worried about having enough food, the highest level of food insecurity reported in Rhode Island in 20 years. As our St. Vincent de Paul conference meal coordinator and Treasurer Craig Marciniak puts it, “Families are making hard decisions on whether to pay bills or to eat. The cost of food has increased, and people are not able to find employment.”

The Rev. Fred Evenson, pastor of Peace Dale Congregational, has said it is the church’s mission to help the hungry and the homeless. This is in line with the mission of St. Vincent de Paul and we are so thankful to be able to be a part of this important and wonderful meal program which does just that.

Ken and I have been parishioners at Christ the King for nearly 20 years. We have been members of the Thursday night bible study for almost that long, and have participated in three Alpha programs at CTK, a series of interactive sessions exploring the basics of the Christian faith. We are Eucharistic Ministers, volunteer to cook meals for Welcome House, and I have recently joined the CTK Friday book group, which has been fabulous. We live in Wakefield and have four children, Andrew, Alex, Austin, and Abbie.
“Reflection is the lamp of the heart. If it departs, the heart will have no light.”

Abdullah ibn Alwawi al-Haddad

By Kathy Pesta

During these sometimes dark and difficult times, it may be helpful to remember that each of us is more a part of others’ lives than we may realize, that our presence, our words and our actions reverberate in wider circles than we imagine. Just think about the big and small ways, the simple and profound ways each of us may have touched others.

You are in someone’s happy memory as a first school crush. You are in the background of someone’s favorite birthday photo. You are in a treasured compliment you once gave that you’ve never known resonated deeply and is replayed often; you are part of the heart of someone who relies on your strength more than you realize; you are in the collage of wonderful school memories of many people.

Your laughter is heard often on someone’s mental soundtrack, your kindness continues to inspire, your good deeds are part of someone else’s conscience. Your strength in adversity continues to this day to point the way for someone who has never told you so. Even what you perceive as failure has taught others how to rise up and try again as you have done. You are a guiding light to someone you have never guessed holds you as such. You are the sweet calm that helps someone breathe more easily. Your helpful words and actions have traveled with people around the world.

So, if on some days you feel lonely and down, remember that all around the globe, positive aspects of your life, no matter your age or circumstances, are helping others feel happier, stronger, and more hopeful. You are God’s light, shining brightly!

Mustard Seed is a quarterly newsletter of Christ the King Parish in Kingston, R.I. Its mission is to celebrate the good stewards in our midst and to inspire others to deepen their commitment to stewardship.

Co-editors: Kathy Pesta, Marie White
Production Editor: David Smith
Contributors: Cherie Binns, Elise Hedglen, Ken Hedglen, Donna Menard, Kathy Pesta, Lisa Rodier, David Smith, Marie White

We need your help in finding all the people in the parish who do so many great things. Please contact us at any time:
Kathy Pesta (kathyp9195@verizon.net)
Marie White (mbwhite422@gmail.com)
By Lisa Rodier

Last April, I tore a page out of one of the free booklets that are often available at the doors of Christ the King; likely it was the Living Gospel, though I’m not sure. The message was quite lovely and inspirational; I shared it with some close friends and taped it to the wall of my cloffice (yes, my office is in a closet).

That April 4 devotional was entitled “I Believe in Unicorns.” The author vividly detailed how unicorns missed Noah’s ark because they were busy shepherding all the other animals to safety. They wrote that these unicorns possessed the characteristics of the human spirit to which Christians should aspire: compassion, goodness, integrity, trust, wisdom, strength and fearlessness, and that they believed that unicorns today are the individuals who guide us through the raging and deep waters of tragedy, anchoring us in courage, love and hope.

As our world slipped further into the throes of the pandemic, stories abounded of heroic health care workers serving the front lines. Often exhausted, sometimes succumbing to disease, facing death every day, yet somehow carrying on. Unicorns.

In July, I experienced a serious adverse reaction to a yellow jacket sting. In the wee hours of a Sunday morning, my husband, thinking that my life was slipping away before his eyes, called 911, and, not thinking anyone was on the line, called our neighbor who was at our house almost before he hung up the phone.

Fortunately, 911 heard his plea, traced our address, and soon two EMTs showed up at our home.

From the 911 operator, to my neighbor, to these heroic EMTs, masked and gloved, who tended to me as I lay helpless and unmasked on the floor, I felt humbled and fortunate for the care that they provided to me. I like to think that on that day I was paid a visit by my very own stable of pandemic unicorns.
“Take in Peace What Gifts the Gods Will Send.”
Homer’s Odysseus

A LESSON FOR AMPHINOMUS

By David Smith

My new friend Odysseus, disguised as an old man, counsels his rival Amphinomus to realize our common mortality and turn away from violence:

So I will tell you something. Listen. Listen closely. Of all that breathes and crawls across the earth, our mother earth breeds nothing feebler than a man.

So long as the gods grant him power, spring in his knees, he thinks he will never suffer affliction down the years. But then, when the happy gods bring on the long hard times, bear them he must, against his will, and steel his heart. Our lives, our mood and mind as we pass across the earth, turn as the days turn …

As the father of men and gods makes each day dawn. I too seemed destined to be a man of fortune once. And a wild wicked swath I cut, indulged my lust for violence, staking all on my father and my brothers. Look at me now.

And so, I say, let no man ever be lawless all his life. Just take in peace what gifts the gods will send. (The Odyssey, Book 18, 149f)

Of course, the crafty Odysseus may just be softening up the rival, but he offers empathy as a good starting point for dealing with the capriciousness of the gods and the savagery of humans.

The ways of our God are no less mysterious, as we learn from both the Old Testament and the Gospel, but Christ’s command is much simpler, and more demanding, not to just avoid violence, but to actually love one another. In doing so, we can learn to live in hope.

By David Smith
In his Rhode Map online newsletter, Boston Globe’s Dan McGowan asked Ocean State readers to send in their memories of when they realized how serious the pandemic would be. His first example of such a moment was “cancellation of the Big East Tournament.” In his March 1 newsletter, McGowan played back readers’ comments, including this one:

The Big East Tournament was one casualty, but cancellation of the A-10 at the Barclays Center was what really mattered. We were in New York City to watch the URI game when the message was sent out that the games were cancelled. We were staying with our son in Hempstead, a hot spot, and he said, “get out of town.” The next thing we knew Gina was saying, "Knock it off!"
– Rosemary and David Smith, Narragansett

Well, everything was canceled last March, and the virus was far more serious than blows to our fandom. To take advantage of available time and to escape the dreary news of the day, I took up a long postponed project to read The Odyssey. Notice I did not say re-read as the first time around was accomplished with Cliff Notes, Classic Comics, “community support” and the luck of the indolent.

As I worked through the saga of violence and revenge, fueled by a cadre of petty and jealous gods, the death toll in the U.S. and around the world, from the virus and from political violence, kept pace with the slaughter from Troy to Ithaca. And most unsettling, was the randomness of it all. In the last week of December, a cousin in his mid-sixties died of COVID-19, while another cousin, almost 30 years his senior, recovered after four days in an ICU.

As the father of men and gods makes each day dawn.

And so, I say, let no man ever be lawless all his life.

Just take in peace what gifts the gods will send.

(The Odyssey, Book 18, 149f)
To everything there is a season
and a time for everything under heaven.

Ecclesiastes 3:11

A Time to Love:
New Parishioners
Matthew and Kathleen Oliverio
Helder Cabral
Scott Raynes and Kristin Rodgers and family
Paul and Karen Tarasevich and family
Scott Campbell and Holly Pavao and family
John and Janet Daigneau and family
Kevin and Melissa Barrett and family
Patricia Daigle
Amy Paliotti and family
Kevin and Erin Casey and family
Steven and Anna Kent and family
Robert and Kathleen Murphy

A Time to be Born:
Baptisms
Diana Rajnikant, daughter of Kevin and Mehca Bodurtha
Tucker Nathaniel, son of Timothy and Alyssa Thorpe

A Time to Die:
Deaths
Donley Taft
Jeannine Denecour
Peter Rysk
Doris Metivier
Barbara Feeley
Edward Kleczek