

# Saint Michael's Covid Chronicle

## October, 2020

### Welcome to our St. Michael's Covid Chronicle!

*Craig Hammond*

When I was a kid, this is how I usually woke up: *"This is Peter Tripp, the curly headed kid in the third row, sayin' 'Warm up that coffee Mama, cause I'm comin' upstairs."* This was a DJ way off in NYC 100 miles away, signing off on his morning radio show. I was 10.

These days I'm thinking of a lot of solitary, single wake up calls that happen to me. It could be a Japanese koto meditation. It could be a single refrain of Barber's Adagio. It could be the single moment I open my eyes. It could be the cry of a loon or a child or of a voice crying in the wilderness, *"Prepare ye the way of the Lord,"* over and over again. Or of a muezzin on the Mekong River calling me to worship. Or of that one phrase of Jesus, *"Come unto me, all ye who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest."* Or of a single spider's thread in my way as I pass through a doorway, or a single pebble dropping into the ocean, changing our world.

In these times that's what's going on with me. In the times we're in, what's your wake up call that gets you going for your day and inspires you? And what is it that is sustaining you? Some of us at St. Michael's have created this thread, an e-version in chronicle form of what we as parishioners are experiencing during this very difficult time of uncertainty, fear, sorrow, grief and separation from one another. We seek comfort, strength, resilience, love and hope in our faith in God incarnate in our lives, alone and also in community. Recently I asked for words from a cross section of our parish right now, and what follows are some of your words. Now that we've gotten started, **please, everyone and anyone, send me words that are helping you get through these trying times.**

Given the terrific personal stories you've shared so far, we're going to keep this Covid Chronicle going. Our plan is that each of our next issues will be occasional, as we hear from you, perhaps monthly and until we are out of the woods and pandemic-free. As you'll see, there are all kinds of forms possible - poetry, lyrics, prayer, a memory, a parable, a wish, and more - in a way from you in the pew, with and for people with whom you'd love to share your pew right now. Please send your inspirations either to me by email ([ach39450@gmail.com](mailto:ach39450@gmail.com)) or to Jeanie at the church office, [jeanie@stmichaelsvermont.org](mailto:jeanie@stmichaelsvermont.org) or 16 Bradley Ave, Brattleboro. Here's a few requests. Write your compositions into the body of your email or in Word. Keep them brief, like a few paragraphs maximum. Just tell your story, or a moment of your story. Add photos if you want. Again the Chronicle will only be available via the internet, but if you think someone would like it who doesn't have email or access to the internet, let us know and we will mail one. In peace and with blessings, enjoy it! Let's get started.

## *From Jay Pomponio*

When COVID time began and suddenly there was no more work at Sam's, some difficult challenges, but ones we could meet, began. Food shopping was the first challenge and I started really cooking again, not baking so much for obvious reasons, but exploring food for our low-fat vegetarian diet. Then came learning Zoom to keep up with church services. At the same time, there was more time to read, and immediately I read books about plagues by Defoe and Camus and a historical novel about Henry VIII, "Wolf Hall," that my read-aloud partner and I share each week. Knowing how to Zoom connected me with more reading, this time with a book group at a distance where we read a history of 14th century Europe chronicling the wave of bubonic plague which probably killed at least a third of Europe's population. For relief, I also read more of my favorite genres: classic mysteries and detective novels. Thank heaven for AbeBooks, my Kindles, and the poetry emails that I receive each day.

There was more time to garden with Larry when the weather moved us into summer; perhaps you've seen some of the flowers at Christ Church services. Too, more time for crafts: I made two afghans for wedding gifts. I still have one more to go. More time for TV and NPR and classic movies on Turner. And MSNBC and Rachel Maddow. Yes, beginning early each day, a constant barrage of devastating news about the climate-changing world in a maelstrom of destruction, but something more: well-reasoned political commentary with implied civics and American constitutional history lessons, information about epidemiology and immunity, a deeper understanding of our racist origins and Black Lives Matter and the flaws in our democracy, things I never learned in school. And I must not forget newspapers and magazines and a greater appreciation for the vitality of a free press. We have some hope in the Times and the Post, the New Yorker, the New Republic, and Nation.

We now can meet our friends as long as we physically distance. I email friends every day. And Larry will be coming home soon. But always the existential angst diseasing our psychic atmosphere: COVID 19, which shows no sign of going away soon. Every time I put on my mask and wash my hands, I must acknowledge that other people have been challenged and will be challenged in more grievous ways. Looking ahead and in the rearview mirror we see needless suffering and death.

And finally, Pray and Vote!

## *From Whitney Nichols*

Hi Craig,

During this time of loss and isolation, I have come to identify as an older person (mid-seventies) with disabilities, yet I continue to have a voice.

The pandemic is proving to be a pervasive challenge and a mixed blessing. Last week Shawna Bah, Implementation Manager from Brattleboro Support and Services at Home (SASH), and I met outdoors at my Richards Building apartment and discussed program options. I made a successful transition from Shelter-Plus Care subsidized housing with supports from Groundworks Collaborative to a less restrictive Section 8 program through Brattleboro Housing Authority and SASH.

My present issues include loss of stamina due to a lack of physical exercise. Moderate hearing loss and tinnitus are problematic. In order to stay focused I need to sit in a quiet and secure work space, at my desk, with consistent internet accessibility in order to stay connected with the outside world.

Shawna is helping me to reconnect with BMH. I'm revising my Advanced Directive since my younger sister Nancy died in April. Her legacy helped me to make a considerable contribution to the Groundworks' building campaign.

Windham County Dental Center is providing me with affordable dental care. I have had four extractions because of lack of preventative care over time and the side-effects of psychometric medications and xerostomia.

The longer nights and depression are a distraction. The national political discontent is almost unbearable! On a positive note I experience less transportation stress because of virtual meetings with the State Independent Living Council (SILC), Vermont Coalition to End Homelessness (VCEH), the Retreat Consumer Advisory Council (CAC), etc.

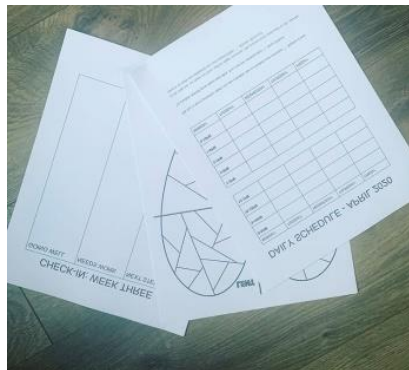
I am working on maintaining other longer term supports. I miss my direct connection with my St. Michael's spiritual family. It is unlikely that it will ever be the same!

The passing of Ruth Bader Ginsburg is affecting me in a number of personal and unexpected ways. We are about to lose some of her mission of advocacy and social justice and preventative healthcare. I'd like to mention that a friend of mine, Linda Greenhouse, wrote an obituary on RBG for the NY Times on 09/21, and an OpEd piece on 09/24. Linda and I traveled together on a tour that I led to Ecuador and the Galapagos in 1979.

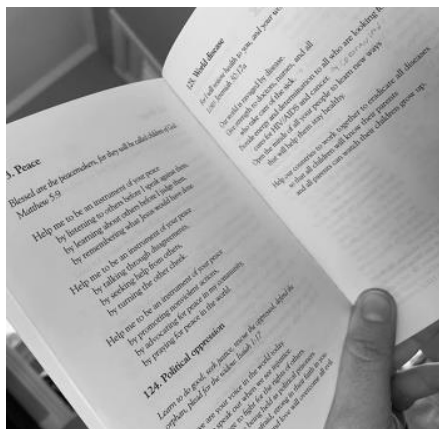
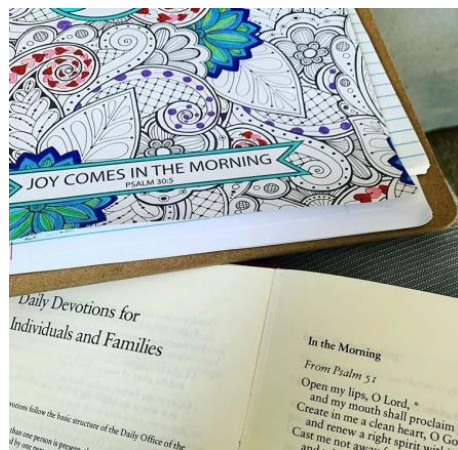
I pray that "Covid Chronicles" will help maintain our spiritual connection and I consider it a work in progress!

## From Christy Fritz

As quarantine began in the late Lenten season, I became grounded by creating a collaborative daily schedule and having weekly check-ins with my little family of five.



A steady rhythm to our new way of life started to emerge, and I found an anchor during uncertainty in sharing deep conversations, warm meals, and light-hearted dance parties. Another comforting practice was the Daily Morning Devotions in the Book of Common Prayer. I also prayed while coloring. It was helpful to remember that no matter the day's events, I could almost always find joy in the morning.



Making time for lament has also been a soothing balm to my soul. Prayers for peace, justice, and health have held me during sorrowful times.

Recently, I joined the zoom morning prayer group and have been encouraged by knowing that where two or three are gathered, God is with us.

I'll close with a quote from artist Morgan Harper Nichols that I am so grateful to recall at times when I am overwhelmed during this time of temporary hardship.

***"Even though you are here in the wild of changing things, and you do not know what tomorrow will bring, you can still loosen your shoulders and make intentional time to breathe. "***

I have become more aware, especially during this season, of what a gift and privilege it is just to breathe.

## ***From Mayu Allen***

When Massachusetts entered phase two of the reopening plan back in end of May, I was one of the first ones to go back full time since using government cash assistance such as unemployment benefits may make my immigration status at risk when renewing my green card in the future. The company allowed me to be in an isolated room where there is a great ventilation system. As much as I love being alone and focusing on my work, I was feeling a little too alone so I started listening to different podcasts while I work. One podcast I found particularly inspiring is NY Time's 'Modern Love.'

These essays talk about all kinds of different love; they bring me so much different emotions like warmth, appreciation, compassion, sadness, loss, hope, laughter...etc. Those well refined personal essays allow me to connect with my inner feelings and teach me different perspectives every time. After listening to each episode, I feel my love waiting to be shared with others and grateful for everything and everyone I have in my life; then I go home to hug my loving husband David and dog Copper. Too often we tend to focus on what we do not have, but focusing on what we already have enriches our life and being grateful makes us full and makes me smile.

## ***From Brian Hammer***

### **Covid, BLM, and China-US Relations Crisis**

I recently finished re-reading Bill Holm's *Coming Home Crazy: An alphabet of China essays* (1990), his deeply human portrayal of his encounters with people in China, both Chinese nationals and expats, in the late 1980s. Today, as the US (and the world) struggles (again, still) with multiple pandemics, Holm's vivid stories are indeed telling and poignant. Told in the context of food, music, literature, and a good beer, they are among the few truly human tellings of what it meant to be Chinese in the city of Xi'an at that particular moment. They are at once empathetic, compassionate, humble, and imperfect, yet not patronizingly Orientalist. And Bill Holm writes of this while reflecting deeply on what it means to be Icelandic, Minnesotan (from Minneota), Lutheran, cis-gender straight male, poet, farmer-cum-literature professor, non-believing lover of hymns, and libertarian organist, who falls head-over-heels in love with his students in China. Holm draws on human connections that few White Americans muster when they write, think, or act in relation to "China" today.

Holm's book brings to life the complexity of identity and the insight that "belonging creates and undoes us both" (reference: *On Being* podcast/radio program). It's a book that allows one to feel points of tangency with today's conversations about race and racism, social inequity, national identity, openness to the unfamiliar, and the prospect of change in a community. I felt enriched for having revisited Holm's brilliance on a page. It is especially meaningful that both Bill and I grew up just down the road from one another in Minneota, Minnesota.

*From Elizabeth Vick*

## **Water**

The Covid pandemic has made me feel hyper-aware and anxious, even during previously quotidian, mundane experiences like grocery shopping or passing someone on the sidewalk. Add watching the evening news of fires, politics and protests to this mixture and YIKES! - it is hard to sleep!

I have become grateful in a way words can't describe for the gift of water over the past few months. My husband Craig and I spent most of the summer at a small lake in Marlboro, Vermont, in a cottage near the water. The spiritual healing and the sense of calm that I experience there on that pond are deep and powerful. Kayaking on the water, observing the light on the waves, shoreline and clouds and spying on insects, fish, loons and herons take me to a place which is timeless and primal. Swimming on a calm morning, when I can be at eye-level with the lake surface, I feel the water's softness make way for me as I move (not terribly fast) towards the far side. The trees on the shore are my compass; my rhythmic strokes and breathing and my sense of being embraced by the water are my only focus. I am immersed in Nature's beauty. This is my prayer of praise and gratitude.



South Pond, Marlboro VT

*From Susan Potter*

### **ZOZOBRA, ANYONE? ("Burn your Glooms!" ritual)**

Zozobra ("Old Man Gloom") is a 50-foot high giant marionette effigy that is built and burned during the annual Fiestas de Santa Fe in Santa Fe, New Mexico and marks the Fiestas' start. As his name suggests, he embodies gloom; by burning him, people destroy the worries and troubles of the previous year in the flames. Anyone with an excess of gloom is encouraged to write down the nature of his or her gloom on a slip of paper and leave it in the "gloom box" in the weeks leading up to the burn.

Once nightfall arrives, fire dancers come out to perform. A "fire spirit dancer" also comes out dressed entirely in red with a flowing headdress and carrying two flaming torches, symbolizing Old Man Gloom's arch enemy. She is accompanied by the small "glooms," which are children dressed in white dancing alongside her. The fire dancer's role is to scare away her little companions, as she represents the light that sends away the gloom and bad energy of the year.

Some of us New Englanders are unaware of this ritual – but while we may not literally burn our "glooms," it can be satisfying to imagine it. Although it's normally an annual ritual, mentally burning our glooms whenever we feel the need might just provide some very welcome relief!

*From Imogene Drakes*

During the pandemic, I have been spending my evenings catching up on the latest news from family and friends all over the world. I have been able to share in the little triumphs and challenges in a more meaningful way. I am sure that when Covid is gone, I will be trying to maintain the same level of engagement.

What do I do for fun? I play music from my youth and childhood and remember happy memories. I no longer have many of the original records or CDs, so I listen to them on YouTube. Bob Marley's music is always hopeful and so it always lifts my spirits. My favorite album is "Positive Vibrations." Besides Reggae, I also listen to soca, for example, Kes the Band singing "Savannah Grass."

*From Joan Pinella*

**ABOU BEN ADHEM** by *James Henry Leigh Hunt*

About Ben Adhem (may his tribe increase)  
Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace  
And saw, within the moonlight of his room,  
Making it rich and like a lily in bloom,  
An Angel writing in a book of gold.  
Exceeding peace had made Ben Adhem bold  
And to the presence in the room he said  
"What writest thou?" The Vision raised its head,  
And with a look made of all sweet accord  
Answered, "The names of those who love the Lord."  
"And is mine one?" Said Abou, "Nay, not so,"  
Replied the Angel. Abou spoke more low,  
But cheerily still, and said, "I pray thee, then  
Write me as one who loves his fellow men."  
The Angel wrote, and vanished. The next night  
It came again with a great wakening light,  
And showed the names whom love of God had blessed,  
And lo! Ben Adhem's name led all the rest!

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Aside from its lovely messages of faith, hope, love and peace, love for humanity and Ben Adhem's humbleness, this poem has a very special place in my heart. In elementary school (I don't remember what grade), our class was given this poem to memorize. I studied it and one day asked my mother to hear me recite it. Each of us was in disbelief when she told me she had been given this poem to memorize.....and she was born and educated in Scotland! She had always loved it. It seemed such a profound coincidence. From that moment on, it became a favorite to each of us. These days I can barely remember where I placed my keys (and many other things) but I can still "recite" this poem.

*From Judy McGee*

This has not been a good year for me. Hot water tank replacement, main hot water pipe leak that has damaged my floors and caused all insulation to be removed in that area. Waiting for contractor to come. Hopefully before more colder weather. On the plus side, I have really loved doing church through Zoom and the birth of my 2nd great grandson on my birthday. My family helping me when needed.

I am not much for being out and about so staying home has not been a hardship. I am grateful for my Marine grandson visiting before he left for Japan. I read a lot, watch tv and keep in touch with others on my iPad and Chromebook. Stay safe....miss not seeing people at church in person. Hopefully we will someday get through this and be physically together again.



*From Cliff Wood*

**Digging, September 26, 2020**

When Craig Hammond suggested that writing could help as we experience isolation and idle time during this pandemic, I immediately thought of a favorite poem by a favorite poet. In Seamus Heaney's poem, "Digging," gardening is a metaphor for the pinning of one's soul on paper.

Gardening has been a solace for me and a safe place in these hard times. I have poured the emotions of missing my children and grandchildren into the good earth on Orchard Hill. It is digging in the dirt that I visualize my six-month-old grandson, Michael Jon, whom I still have not cradled or seen the joy in his big brother, Tristan's, face as he holds Mikey. I may miss the Bat Mitzvah of my oldest grandchild, Orly, on January 20, 2021, a seminal moment in her life. I miss the California girls and boy, Annie, Izzy, and Sammy, who send emails of one or two sentences and tons of love.

I have always been a gardener. It goes back to my roots and to my paternal grandfather, who was a poor dirt farmer in McKinney, TX. I wish each of you could see my garden, still untouched by frost and full of color and blossoms. I now fully appreciate the wrought iron sign in my mother's garden: "One's heart is closer to God in a garden than anywhere else on earth."

"Between my finger and my thumb  
The squat pen rests  
I'll dig with it."

Seamus Heaney, "*Digging*"



Ricker Pond, Groton State Forest, late September 2020

**Who Knew?**

September 25, 2020

Who knew?

This lover of inside joys  
would find delight outside,  
would come to know the squirrel with the bushy blond tail,  
the clever chipmunks, swift and cunning, tormenting our dogs,  
would relish mossy pond beds, dry now and deep,  
could grow familiar with pink variations of petunias, geraniums, and peonies.  
But mostly, who knew the pleasures of dining outside  
would banish doubt and worry,  
would deepen trust and love  
sitting around 3 6 ft tables, a sanctioned distance apart,  
nearly every weekend,  
sharing lunch or dinner or just real face time,  
attending to friends, neighbors, and others in our lives,  
a way to welcome, celebrate, and know.  
Labor Day brought my Hospice client and his family,  
three of them and two of us,  
    socially distant, mostly wearing masks  
except to savor the barely pink portions of leg of lamb  
    my husband nursed all morning  
    and in its turn my special blueberry pie.  
Sanctuary, there on a golden afternoon  
with laughter and care,  
maneuvering my client's wheelchair  
across uneven ground,  
loving his smile and hearty appetite,  
grateful for his flickers of memory  
unexpected from the hollow depths of dementia.  
The best place, the richest time.  
Who knew?

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**Here we end our first issue of the Covid Chronicle. Please send in what's helping you these days.**

*"And I never started to plow in my life  
That some one did not stop in the road  
And take me away to a dance or picnic.  
I ended up with forty acres;  
I ended up with a broken fiddle—  
And a broken laugh, and a thousand memories,  
And not a single regret."  
— Edgar Lee Masters, Spoon River Anthology*