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The Rev. Julie E. Calhoun-Bryant,
Priest-in-Charge

January 16, 2024

Dear People of God,

I have missed you! The recovery from the Covid related viral pneumonitis is much slower than I had hoped and so I will not be with you on January 20 and 21. The Rev. Perry Mouncey will be at both churches this weekend. Lisa tells me that she served her diaconate at Emmanuel.

Emmanuel: There will be no Zoom. Kate Bell is taping the service for the website. My thanks to Barbara Crane for serving as a last minute substitute on January 6! Father Dan Handschy asked me to extend his thanks to the people of Emmanuel for welcoming him so warmly on January 13. He had a great time with you.

- The January 17 Vestry meeting is postponed one week to the 24.
- The Jan. 20 spaghetti dinner and game night will be postponed to Jan. 27.

St. Alban's: I will continue to hold a Zoom service on Sunday morning at 9:30 a.m. from home. We have had 14 people on Zoom as so many are ill, including communications tech David Houston, who normally handles Zoom and Facebook. The services are not being taped, unfortunately. Father Gaetz has very much enjoyed his two Sundays with the people of St. Alban's. (He's not available January 21.)

- Annual Meeting is January 28.

Mother Julie+

**Winter Mission Project
InterFaith Works Food Drive
For 25+ Local food pantries**

January - March

Pasta and Sauce
Canned Fruits
Peanut Butter
Jelly
Canned Vegetables
Soups/Ramen
Ensure
Cake mix/frosting



Canned Tuna/Chicken
Vegetable Oil
Cereal/Oatmeal
Baby formula
Pancake mix/syrup
Flour and sugar
Mayo
Shelf Stable Milk

A Priest's Response to Dear Abby

At the breakfast table most mornings I peruse Syracuse.com and read the advice columns. What I read in "Dear Abby" this Sunday morning was shocking: "Please keep in mind that none of us has a contract with God." This was part of her advice to a married woman who just learned that her spouse did not believe in "until death do you part." The conversation was in reference to another woman whose spouse was admitted to a care facility for advanced dementia and had begun a new relationship very quickly. The writer's spouse said that she would do what the other spouse had done and "get on with her life."

Here's the response I would give.

Dear Abby, whether or not you realize it, your words "Please keep in mind that none of us has a contract with God," are an affront to every believing Christian, Jew, and Muslim who have a covenant with God. As a Christian, it is my "contract with God" that defines my life. When I was baptized as an infant my parents were told in front of the congregation that I had been "marked as Christ's own forever." They were taught that this bond between God and me was indissoluble. Christians can ignore this bond, turn their back on this bond, rail against this bond, but they cannot destroy this bond. God has claimed us and nothing is stronger than the power of God.

At my confirmation when I was 15 the bishop asked me to reaffirm my commitment to Jesus Christ, to take on for myself the vows that my parents and godparents had made on my behalf. These are the three questions: Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Savior? Do you put your whole trust in his grace and love? Do you promise to follow and obey him as your Lord? I made this vow with my heart, mind, and soul. I made it knowing that I was partnering with Jesus Christ. I could only keep this vow with the grace and help of the Holy Spirit. We cannot hope to keep our vows to God on our own. It's simply impossible.

I was married to my husband of 37 years when I was 25 years old. I couldn't look at him when I was walking down the aisle because the enormity of the vow I was about to make was a bit overwhelming. I only made eye contact with him when I arrived at the altar. Before the priest and congregation my husband and I made our vows to one another before them and before God. Because this was a Christian marriage we were able to make these vows because we were taught that God's Holy Spirit would be the third partner in our marriage, enabling us to keep our vows with God's help.

So, Dear Abby, I have a contract with God. I count on God's grace, forgiveness, compassion, and mercy every day of my life. I cherish the knowledge that I am marked as Christ's own forever. Until my dying breath I will claim God's help to follow and obey my Lord.

Grateful to God