

Spiritually Speaking

Ephphatha - Be opened to the Lord

By Fr. Thankachan Joseph

Today we are invited to reflect on the power of Jesus available for those who are seeking it and are ready to share it with others. Jesus came to this world and lived in our midst to serve and save. He demonstrated His power in His willingness to serve others in gentleness and compassion. Are we ready to surrender ourselves to His holy will and serve others in humility and love?



Fr. Thankachan Joseph

The Prophet Isaiah (35:4-7) tells us that whatever happens around us, nothing will affect us without God's knowledge. Always His words are strong and often touch our feelings and spiritual sensibilities. He tells us today, "Say to those whose hearts are frightened: Be strong, fear not!" I suppose these words are real encouraging for all of us who have to deal with the COVID-19 menace. We can be upset, we can be lazy, and we can be against God. Whatever. But we can know that we don't have to be frightened. God is still going to seek us out and can bring us out of our anxieties and worries. We don't even know how God will come into our lives. Though we abandon Him, God can never abandon us. Today's first reading is a nice explanation for assurance and support to all who find their lives miserable. Isaiah gives us hope through his encouraging words, "Fear not, Be Strong."

The letter of St James (2 :1-5) is a message to not make a distinction between the rich and the poor. James frowns at the sin of despising the poor in favor of the rich. His words equally apply to all types of prejudices in our families, churches and society. So, to favor some people and disregard others based on their race, economic, social or religious background is a terrible evil against God and man. This evil afflicted the early church, which is why seven deacons were elected to avoid favoritism in the distribution of resources, in Acts 6. The message of James is still very relevant today because in our families, communities, churches, states and indeed all over the world, people still suffer terrible injustice because of who they are, where they come from and the color of their skin.

In the Gospel of Mark (7:31-37), Christ gives the gift of hearing. He pronounces, "Be opened" and the ears of the deaf man suddenly are able to listen. Perhaps we need to pray that our own ears might be opened, and we might be able to listen to the voice of God piercing through the chatter and clutter of our time. We pray that we might listen to God's voice coming to us in the poor, the lonely, the broken-hearted and the abandoned. Perhaps we need to pray: Open my ears O Lord, that I might open my heart so that I might follow your command. In the story of the deaf and dumb man whom Jesus touches and heals, Jesus gives a brief account of his life-story before and after the cure. He says the trouble with being deaf is that most people find deaf folks a nuisance. They sympathize with people who are blind and lame, but they get irritated and annoyed with people who are deaf. The result of this is that deaf people are apt to avoid others and become more and more shut in. When they can't hear, a lot of doors in the normal world slam shut. Turning on the radio is pointless. Watching television is often boring. Conversing with someone is next to impossible. When you are deaf, you are deprived of so much that others take for granted. You cannot hear the laughter of children, the singing of birds, the bleating of young lambs, the sound of wind in the trees, the roar of waters, the voices of friends, of words of comfort and encouragement, words of hope and advice. Many people find trying to communicate with the deaf too tedious. They haven't the time or patience or skills. It makes the deaf feel terribly isolated.

What about us? Do we help others speak; others hear? Do we direct others to God? Do we recognize that Jesus was fulfilling the prophecies? Jesus does not go about saying: "I am God, listen to me." Instead, Jesus performs works of mercy and compassion. Be open to God's divine presence. Anyone who believes in God everyday experiences the mighty power of God in his or her life.

Justice Court Report

Morrow County Justice of the Peace, Glen Diehl, has released the following Justice Court report:

- Jasmine L. Owens, 22, Heppner, was convicted of no ops, fine \$265, and failure to report an accident, find \$440.
- Juvenile, Heppner, was convicted of no ops, fine \$265.
- Anthony H. Mortensen, 20, Stanfield, was convicted of violation of basic rule, fine \$265.

Morrow County Health District to expand emergency services

The Morrow County Health District, at its regular monthly meeting in Heppner Monday night, approved a plan to improve and expand emergency services throughout the district. With the new plan, EMS full-time paid staff would be "available 24/7 in Boardman, Irrigon and Heppner. Ione will continue to be served by volunteer EMS staff as it is also cross-covered by Heppner's ambulance service," according to projections provided by interim CEO Emily Roberts.

EMS in Boardman would increase from four paid and four volunteer to eight paid the second and third years of the plan. EMS staff in Irrigon would increase from two paid the first year to two paid and six volunteer the second year, ending in eight paid staff by year three. EMS service in Heppner would remain virtually the same, with the exception of year three, which would add six volunteer staff.

With the new plan, projected employed EMS staffing costs (wages, taxes/benefits, uniforms/licenses) for Boardman would increase from \$95,301 for this fiscal year to \$157,628 for next year to \$173,143 in fiscal year 2023-2024. EMS staffing costs for Irrigon would increase from \$254,936.84 in fiscal year 2022-2023 to \$278,661 in FY 2023-2024. Wages, taxes and benefits and costs for uniforms/licenses for Heppner EMS are estimated at \$306,889 for fiscal year 2023/2024. Less call time, less call back and transfer pay, cost-based reimbursement, plus estimated additional revenue from higher level billing all figure in the estimated annual totals.

Concerning the district's COVID status, Roberts told the MCHD Board, "Despite the capacity issues regionally, the district does have capacity to treat patients at all locations, including the hospital." Roberts also said that in regard to COVID infection, the district has "an adequate

Masonic Lodge sign installed

The service club signs at the entries to Heppner had the signs for Masonic Lodge No. 69 added on Monday, August 30. Merlin Hughes, John Edmundson and Bill Ewing completed the installation of the signs that had been made by Bob Hager of the Wood on Wood business.

stock of PPE (personal protective equipment) and other necessary supplies and equipment."

In response to Governor Kate Brown's COVID mandate for all healthcare workers, Roberts added, "The District is working to ensure that all employees and volunteers are vaccinated (against COVID) or have received an appropriate religious or medical accommodation . . ."

Roberts also provided the board with a report on providers currently employed with the district and those the district is currently in the process of recruiting. She reported that Pioneer Memorial Clinic in Heppner had two tentative physicians, Dr. Rio Lion for employment from September of this year to August of 2022, who subsequently dropped out of the agreement, and Dr. Josh Siruck, from January of 2022 ongoing; a new tentative Family Nurse Practitioner, Jep Edwards, from October of this year to April of 2022; and physician Dr. Emily Jack from September of 2022 ongoing; plus an advance practice provider, current Physician's Assistant Danielle Mateleska.

Roberts told the board the district is in the process of recruiting a physician for the Irrigon Medical Clinic and currently has two advance practice providers currently on board, John Watson and Taylor Muenchow, both physician assistants. Ione Community Clinic currently has an advance practice provider on board, Family Nurse Practitioner Eileen McElligott.

A suggestion of hiring a naturopath to fill provider slots, was discussed, but was soundly negated by Physician Betsy Anderson via Zoom. Dr. Anderson, currently chief medical officer for the district, is scheduled to leave the district in December.

The board also learned Samarra VanDoorn, who has been serving as the interim director of Willow Creek Terrace Assisted Living since the resignation of previous administrator George Nairns, has been hired as administrator.

In other business, the board:

- approved a physician assistant service agreement contract addendum for Danielle Mateleska, physician's assistant at Pioneer Memorial Clinic. According to the addendum, "The change to an hourly rate of pay is intended to temporarily increase Provider's compensation to reflect additional work performed."

-approved a recruitment proposal for the district from Healthcare Recruitment Link.

-approved a support services renewal with Omnicell from October 1 of this year to Sept. 30, 2022, at \$8,196.

-heard a report from Home Health and Hospice Director Molly Rhea concerning quality measures.

-approved an estimate for \$12,060 from Allstott Construction, LLC, to rebuild the back deck on the duplex owned by the district on Gilmore St.

-learned from Human Resources Director Patti Allstott that new hires include: Tonja Lemmon, patient business office clerk; Rinley "Nikki" Lepon, who was rehired as a temporary housekeeper while a full-time housekeeper is on FMLA leave; Hayley LePage, who previously worked for the district as a certified nursing assistant, was hired as an RN. Allstott also listed the following employees who have had changes in positions: Jamie Houck, who added information systems director duties to her clinical infomatics analyst position (Houk was previously chief nursing officer for MCHD before she moved out of the district); Kate Sandoval, who transferred from the Irrigon Medical Clinic discharge coordinator to the IMC patient care coordinator; and Marie Romero, who transferred from the referral coordinator to the discharge coordinator position.

-heard from Allstott the district is seeking a Home Health and Hospice RN, a full-time hospital RN, a maintenance technician, the chief operating officer, a clinic director for Pioneer Memorial Clinic and a dietary director for Pioneer Memorial Hospital.

-received the following report from Chief Nursing Officer Kathleen Greenup, RN: Shanan Carter is slated to sit for NCLEX exam in early September and will then join the team as a new graduate RN; the district currently has an opening for a full-time RN; RN Rachel Hudson "is doing well and scheduled to come off orientation on Sept. 1"; Hayley LaPage, RN, was added to the per diem pool; the district has been filling shifts for one CNA who has been out on long-term FMLA; CNA Kaitlyn Zinter has been added to the CNA pool.

-learned from Greenup that a master COVID protocol for all staff has been linked directly to the Center for Disease Control; that

numbered clinic parking spots have been utilized to avoid patients gathering in the clinic lobbies; and visiting regulations have been scaled up.

-received the following profit and loss statement from Chief Financial Officer Nicole Mahoney showing a \$147,594 loss for the month of July and year-to-date: \$1,174,627 in gross patient revenue, \$114,618 in total revenue deductions, plus \$197,710 in tax revenue and \$18,858 in other revenue for \$1,276,577 in total operating revenue; less \$1,447,968 in total operating expenses, plus a \$23,797 non-operating gain.

-received the following report for Pioneer Memorial Hospital for July: PMH had three inpatient admissions for the month, one swing bed admission, three admissions for observation, two admissions for hospital respite, one swing (non-skilled) admission, 613 total outpatient admissions with emergency room, 98 emergency room encounters, 1,626 lab reports, 109 x-ray/ultrasound tests, 36 CT scans, four MRI scans, 36 EKG tests, no treadmill procedures or lower or upper endoscopy procedures, and nine respiratory therapy procedures.

-received the following clinic reports: Pioneer Memorial Clinic had 327 patient visits with seven new patients, 22 seen by a nurse and 26 no-shows; Irrigon Medical Clinic had 340 patient visits with nine new patients, 98 seen by a nurse and 54 no-shows; Ione Clinic had 56 patient visits, no new patients, 29 seen by a nurse and zero no-shows.

-learned that there were 155 Home Health visits for the month; three Hospice admissions with two deaths.

-learned that pharmacy had 1,563 drug doses for \$137,123 in drug revenue.

-received the following ambulance reports for July: Heppner Ambulance had 19 transports for \$31,774 in revenue; Boardman Ambulance had 17 transports for \$33,969 in revenue; Irrigon Ambulance had 24 transports for \$42,648 in revenue; and Ione Ambulance had no transports.

-held an executive session following the regular meeting.

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