



Pastoral Letter

March 12, 2020

Dear People of God;

It has been many years since we have been confronted with a situation like we are this weekend due to the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Yet the people who came before us managed this sort of thing and came through it. We will too. We are supported by prayer, by the presence of the Holy Spirit in our midst and by our love of one another.

We are in a state-declared medical emergency. We are also people who, through our baptism, have put our faith and hope in Jesus and the powerful love of God. We are called to live fearless lives — and not to be careless of others. Please be attentive and follow the directions of the Health Department and other authorities.

I am writing to let you know that I have been in communication with the clergy of this diocese and directed them to make some changes in our regular worship, and I have made it clear that I support the decisions they make along with you in how best to respond to this emergency. Some of our communities have decided it is best to close their building for a few weeks. Some are going to continue to hold services, though with modifications.

In an effort to keep people safe — both our neighbors and ourselves — I am directing that Holy Communion be distributed as bread only for the duration of the emergency. I have told the clergy that if they are not feeling well, they are not to serve at the altar. I've also made some recommendations about keeping our distance from each other at the peace, not passing the offering plates, and about coffee hour.

I ask that you, too, be careful if you are not feeling well. Please let us know so that we can provide pastoral support and care as best we can and pray for you.

Please be in touch with your neighbors. Please reach out to those who are alone. A phone call and a listening heart can do wonders to help.

In our congregations there may be people who need to stay home right now because they are at risk. Please think about how we can help them. If we don't have contact information, it would be good to gather and share that now.

I believe in the power of prayer, especially when people of faith join their united voices and lift their concerns to God. I ask you to join me in prayer that this moment will pass quickly, that the vulnerable and those in danger will be protected and that we may be a sign of hope to our communities.

We have posted resources for prayer and worship at home on the diocesan website (www.episcopalri.org). Prayers for the sick may be found on pages 458-460 in The Book of Common Prayer.

I commend this prayer, adapted from one written by Bishop Thomas Brown of Maine:

Jesus Christ, you traveled through towns and villages "curing every disease and illness." At your command, the sick were made well. Come to our aid now, in the midst of the global spread of the coronavirus. Heal those who are sick with the virus; may they regain their strength and health through quality medical care. Heal us from our fear, which prevents nations from working together and neighbors from helping one another. Be present with those in authority who are making hard decisions. Support the medical professionals, emergency responders and our caregivers. In your name Jesus we pray. Amen.

May the God who is Love itself, the one in we put our trust, and who is the ground of our hope, be with you today and always.

+Nicholas