

# The Episcopal Diocese of Southwestern Virginia

1002 1st Street SW, Roanoke, VA 24016 • P.O. Box 2279, Roanoke, VA 24009  
PHONE (540-342-6797 • FAX 540-343-9114 • TOLL FREE 800-DIO-SWVA or 800-346-7982  
[www.dioswva.org](http://www.dioswva.org)

March 12, 2020

Re: Pastoral Message Regarding Coronavirus

Dear Clergy & Lay Leaders:

Two weeks ago, in my Update and also in a separate email to clergy and wardens, I outlined a few common-sense guidelines for hygiene in the Eucharist as we have begun to confront the many unknowns of the coronavirus pandemic. This morning during our House of Bishops meeting, our Presiding Bishop spoke to the many challenges in front of us as Church. In his remarks, he acknowledged that there will be a variety of approaches, by bishops, clergy and churches, in our responses to the daily news about the spread of this virus.

The key question for our Presiding Bishop, as it is for me, and all of my brother and sister bishops, is how do we continue to be the Church, witnessing to the healing power and reconciling love of God in Christ Jesus while caring for the well-being of fellow parishioners and our neighbors.

Let me begin these few pastoral guidelines by being clear that **I am not calling for the cancellation of worship in our parishes.** In times of fear and panic, the Church is called to be a calm, healing presence as we witness to the hope, faith and love that we share in Jesus. I know that managing the fear and uncertainty in our communities will be challenging as we all figure out how to adapt to this health crisis. Adaptation means that circumstances will vary and evolve in each of our parishes' contexts.

As we adapt to what may well become the new normal for a considerable time, **I will support the well-reasoned decisions and practices that each of our clergy and lay leaders make for health and safety in their own context.** Some may continue to celebrate Holy Eucharist with boundaries that secure healthy practices, some may choose Morning Prayer (or The Holy Eucharist ending at The Peace without Holy Communion), and others may very well choose not to hold gathered worship for a period of time. These are just a few obvious adaptations. There will be many more and my staff and I will be open and available to assist you with needed resources and guidance. Please let us know of your adaptations so that we can share your learnings with others by emailing us at [info@dioswva.org](mailto:info@dioswva.org).

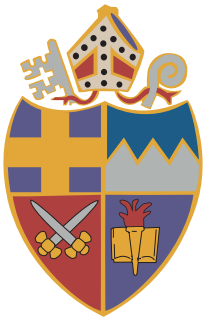
I write all of the above with the knowledge that the World Health Organization is cautioning against almost all public gatherings. We will all need to take care of ourselves and our families and make the best possible choices about how and what we will attend, both inside and outside of our parishes, for the weeks and months ahead.

## CONGREGATIONS

Abingdon, St. Thomas  
Altavista, St. Peter's  
Amherst, Ascension  
Amherst, St. Paul's  
Arrington, Trinity  
Bedford, St. John's  
Bedford Co., St. Thomas  
Big Stone Gap, Christ  
Blacksburg, Christ  
Blue Grass, Good Shepherd  
Bristol, Emmanuel  
Buchanan, Trinity  
Buena Vista, Christ  
Callaway, St. Peter's  
Christiansburg, St. Thomas  
Clifford, St. Mark's  
Clifton Forge, St. Andrew's  
Covington, Emmanuel  
Fincastle, St. Mark's  
Folly Mills, Good Shepherd  
Forest, St. Stephen's  
Galax, Good Shepherd  
Glasgow, St. John's  
Hot Springs, St. Luke's  
Lexington, Grace  
Lynchburg, Grace Memorial  
Lynchburg, St. John's  
Lynchburg, St. Paul's  
Lynchburg, Trinity  
Marion, Christ  
Martinsville, Christ  
Martinsville, St. Paul's  
Massies Mill, Grace  
Moneta, Trinity  
Norton, All Saints  
Pearisburg, Christ  
Pedlar Mills, St. Luke's  
Pocahontas, Christ  
Pulaski, Christ  
Radford, Grace  
Richlands, Trinity  
Roanoke, Christ  
Roanoke, St. Elizabeth's  
Roanoke, St. James  
Roanoke, St. John's  
Rocky Mount, Trinity  
St. Paul, St. Mark's  
Salem, St. Paul's  
Saltville, St. Paul's  
Staunton, Emmanuel  
Staunton, Trinity  
Tazewell, Stras Memorial  
Waynesboro, St. John's  
Wytheville, St. John's

## DIOCESAN MINISTRIES

Bishop Marmion Resource Center  
Grace House Learning and  
Training Center  
Phoebe Needles Center, Inc.  
Boys' Home, Covington  
Virginia Episcopal School,  
Lynchburg  
Westminster – Canterbury  
of Lynchburg, Inc.  
Stuart Hall, Staunton  
*One in Mission*



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Tomorrow I will host two Zoom calls, one with our clergy at 9:30 a.m. and another with wardens of parishes without clergy at 11:00 a.m., to listen to concerns and think together about how we might respond to this virus in our common life.

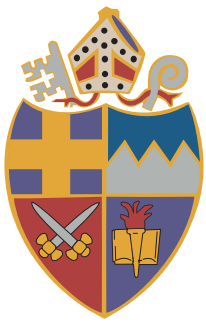
The following are a few more instructions and notices for the next few months as we learn our way into the realities of this virus and its transmission.

## Regarding meetings and events:

- In our diocesan life we will be cancelling all nonessential meetings in person and use Zoom and other technologies to the fullest extent possible. This will apply to everything from board meetings to youth events. Our staff will be evaluating and responding to all of the many ways that we work and meet together in groups large and small. We will keep you up to date on specific cancellations and alternate plans.
- Parishes should also cancel nonessential meetings and programs. Other ways of distributing information and meeting should be arranged for.
- Ministries that gather groups or come into contact with other people should either be suspended or strategies devised to limit exposure.

## Regarding worship:

- I will celebrate Holy Eucharist during my upcoming visits, but for the safety of the initiates and their families, **I will not be confirming people for the next few weeks at least.** (I will assess where we are by Easter Day. Later, we may plan for some area confirmations.)  
And because I am traveling around from parish to parish, I will avoid most physical contact for your health and safety.
- When Eucharist is celebrated— Clergy should instruct the people that receiving only the bread is appropriate and is making a full communion. If they wish not drink directly from a common cup they can be instructed to cross their arms over their chest as the cup passes by.
- **Intinction** (dipping the bread into the wine) **must not be offered or allowed in any circumstance.**
- **The Peace should not be physically exchanged** by moving around and making contact with each other. Stay in your seat and love your neighbor by sharing a wave and a smile.
- Spreading out and allowing healthy spacing for seating where at all possible should be practiced.
- Receptions before or after worship should be extremely limited in prepared food and duration or avoided altogether for a season.
- Physically greeting people, as much as you care for them, before and after worship, should be avoided. Again, show and receive the lack of contact as love and concern for your neighbor's well-being.



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Finally, as we consider how to keep our fellow parishioners, our loved ones, and ourselves safe and healthy, let us also be creative in responding to those in need in and beyond our parishes. This crisis will deeply impact those with little to no extra resources. How are we being the Church in this time of pandemic? Some ideas might include— buying cold medicines for those who might not be able to afford them, collecting canned food for food banks, and buying snacks and supplies for kids who will miss school.

I am sure you all will come up with so many ways to serve and care for others in the name of Jesus. Please let us know so that we can all share these new ways of reaching out and expressing God's love.

You will all be in my prayers as we travel through the uncertainty of this health crisis. It will remind us over and over of the many ways that we are all connected as God's human family. We must show others how this connection is a blessing and not a curse. Pray for each other as we continue to be Christ's body to the world around us.

Peace,

The Rt. Rev. Mark A. Bourlakas