



**The Diocese
of Southern Ohio**
Episcopalians in connection

A message from the Bishop (7/5/20)

Dear friends,

This weekend I sent a message to all our clergy and wardens asking them to abide by our governor's decision to restore restrictions on a number of business and social activities in counties in Ohio that have been experiencing sharper increases in COVID-19 cases. I trust that this decision has been conveyed to you by your clergy and lay leadership. And although I continue to call for and respect the judgment of our clergy and lay leaders, my recommendation is to respect our governor's executive orders, not only as they pertain to counties at risk but as they pertain to all of us. It does not matter whether we should or should not be exempt as religious organizations from state directives. Precisely because we are religious organizations, we should support these directives if they fairly and transparently promote the good of all.

I would like to say a few words about why I take Governor DeWine's actions so seriously. The Episcopal Church has always been committed to the just claims of government. Therefore we don't ignore the lawful directives of our elected leaders — even when we are exempted from them as religious institutions.

There is a long history of Christian reflection on church and state, beginning in the New Testament and continuing into our own day. St. Paul calls for respect for government as an imperfect gift to protect the innocent from wrongdoers. Jesus tells the religious leaders of his day to give the government its due. At the same time, the book of Revelation is a diatribe against empire and its dependence on accumulated wealth and slavery. Most of us are aware that for its first three centuries the church constituted a loyal but pacifist opposition to state-condoned violence. After becoming legal, Christianity continued to demand that government demonstrate restraint and humility in the exercise of its pursuit of order.

From then until now, an uneasy peace has marked the church's relation to the state. Some strains of Christianity have rejected the authority of government altogether. But most have taught respect for government as an instrument for good. In modern times, Christians in democratic countries have consistently honored the authority of leaders elected to serve the common good. This has not precluded sharp criticism of the state. But such criticism, across the ecumenical spectrum, has been driven by the conviction

that duly constituted government has a legitimate role to play in the just and fair balancing of public safety and private freedom.

When we are truest to what is best in our tradition, we Episcopalians are about honoring the state, even as we hold it to account. We have the opportunity to demonstrate this by supporting our governor in his efforts to help Ohio get the better of COVID-19. I thank all our congregations for your diligence, discipline and patience as we move through this time.

Blessings,



The Rt. Rev. Thomas E. Breidenthal
Bishop of Southern Ohio



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July 1, 2020

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

It's been hard for us as a worshipping community to forego the celebration of the holy eucharist. As you know, I am not convinced that communion can be administered or received safely under present conditions. A few days ago I set Sunday, October 18, as a tentative date for the resumption of the eucharist, but this will depend on how Ohio is doing in its containment of COVID-19.

In the meanwhile, our fasting from the eucharist provides us with an opportunity to reflect on what the eucharist means. Let me say, first of all, that the eucharist means more than receiving consecrated bread and wine. Certainly, receiving these carries immense weight. We stand in an ancient tradition that claims the real

presence of Jesus in this bread and wine, which we believe to be the body and the blood of Christ.

But we miss the point if we focus the meaning of the eucharist on the act of administering and receiving communion. The shape of the eucharist from beginning to end points to what it means to be the body of Christ, and each moment in the liturgy is a moment of communion — that is, union, with our risen head.

When we gather, however formally or informally, to hear scripture read and preached, then and there we are receiving Jesus, who is God's Word. When we stand for the Gospel, we are acknowledging the real presence of The risen Christ in our midst. Should we proceed no further, our communion with him would be complete.

When we pray for the church and for the world, we claim our relationship with Jesus, our great high priest, as we, the priesthood of all believers, humbly join with him in his constant intercession to the Father on behalf of the entire creation. Should we proceed no further, our communion with Christ would be complete.

When we exchange the Peace, we are living out Jesus' first gift to his frightened community on Easter Day: "Peace be with you; my own peace I leave with you." Peace is love released by the assurance of hope. That peace then becomes our gift to share. Too often we treat the exchange of the peace as a liturgical intermission, but entered into mindfully, it is a powerful reminder of our ministry to friend and stranger in Christ's name. Should we proceed no further, our communion with him would be complete.

When we offer our gifts of bread and wine, of money and food, we are offering ourselves, our souls and bodies, trusting that the Father will accept what we offer, however flawed. We dare to do this because Jesus has accepted us as his family, and kindly incorporates us into his self-offering on the cross. Should we proceed no further, our communion with him would be complete.

When the celebrant lifts up bread and wine as our spiritual sacrifice to the Father through Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, we dare to believe that, however broken and neglectful we as the church have been, we will be given back to ourselves as the body of Christ.

This sacrament of our union with Christ and with one another lies at the center of our public worship. Why? Because it underwrites and affirms the union Christ has

forged with all of us from the beginning of creation. Receiving communion is and should be precious to us.

But it is the outward and visible sign of an uncontainable grace which is ours to receive and share whether or not we partake of consecrated bread and wine. The grace of holy communion with Jesus and one another is present at every moment of the eucharistic liturgy, and therefore is present in every act of Christian worship, and potentially in every moment of our lives.

Just as the eucharist is communion with Christ from beginning to end, so is our walk as disciples of Jesus Christ. We may need to forego sacramental communion in this season, but we need not forego the spiritual nourishment Jesus is providing each of us in this hard time. What is this nourishment? It is Christ's unqualified love for us, and our gratitude that feeds us and impels forward in his name. Holy communion is the outward and visible sign of Christ's presence with us and alongside us every moment of every day. And when we are once again able to receive him in bread and wine, it will be in our thankful acknowledgement that he has been with us all along.

The Rt. Rev. Thomas E. Breidenthal
Bishop of Southern Ohio
