



EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF THE ANNUNCIATION

— our doors are open for everyone —

“Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16)

Pastoral letter in response to latest developments in COVID-19 response

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ! It is clear that many of us are feeling the weight of this unprecedented response to the COVID-19 pandemic. I am writing to inform you of the latest information from the diocese of Atlanta in reference to church activities. At the time of my last letter to the parish, Gov. Kemp had not issued the current shelter in place we have now as well as many counties in response have also issued the same shelter in place order. In light of these orders, the diocese continues to navigate these uncharted waters as best as it can. I continue to consult with the diocese as needed in conjunction with my status as the disaster preparedness coordinator. Many of you have reached out and expressed your anxieties and concerns and I hear them and lift up your prayers daily. Please continue to go to our Facebook public page and participate in our daily worship services being provided.

It is devastatingly clear that we will not be celebrating Palm Sunday and Easter together this year in person due to the current projections put out by public health officials concerning the infection rate and hospitalizations and the bishop of Atlanta’s directive. The peak dates are calculated to be April 22-24 and health officials are hoping that by mid-May we should see positive results. The Shelter in place order is for ALL to stay home and only go out for essential business and items. For this reason, the Bishop has directed all parishes in the diocese of Atlanta to follow these orders. The bishop has agreed to allow church services to be streamed from our places of worship under “essential” business, for now. This may change if churches continue to “stretch” the limits of “non-essential in person” activities on church properties. The temptation has been too great for groups to gather together at churches due to the stress of being isolated. We must not lose our resolve and put ourselves at unnecessary risk of possible infection. At this time, I am following the direction of the bishop and limiting access to the church property to “essential” personnel only at this time to include employees and Vestry members. Unfortunately, there is no exception to this policy and it is deeply painful to have to put these measures in place. I have seen the parking lot services and other variations of worship and this style of worship still creates too many possibilities for unnecessary risk taking. ECA is a sacred property and space we have that is a source of strength in these times, but can also become a source of weakness. We must continue to stay strong in adversity and remain vigilant with safe practices so we can get back together in person as soon as possible. This difficult time will be done sooner rather than later with all our diligence in these times.

What does this mean for us during the most holy of times at Easter? Palm Sunday, Holy Week and Easter Sunday services will still be done online, because Easter will still happen. I am asking everyone to be prepared for when we do get the green light to gather again for worship for **EVERONE** to come out and participate in what will be our true resurrection celebration. We will have a huge festive celebration and will invite everyone to bring their favorite dishes to share and be prepared to celebrate like we never have before. We know that Christians have suffered in a variety of ways over the centuries, this is just another way we can testify to the incredible grace and love of God in Christ in a hurting world. Please continue to pray for all who are affected by COVID-19 and that we will soon be back together fellowshiping and worshipping in glorious ways.

In Christ, Fr. Paul+

“Our Mission is to bear witness to God’s love and invite, encourage, and prepare God’s people to share that grace with others.”