



EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF THE ANNUNCIATION

our doors are open for everyone

*“Do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand. (Isaiah 41:10)*

### **Pastoral letter in response to Bishop of Atlanta directive to clergy and diocese**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ! Lent has taken on a whole new meaning this season in the wake of COVID-19 and has affected how we gather as people of God. To borrow the phrase from show business, “The Worship must go on!”. I am writing this letter to ask that members of The Church of the Annunciation would embrace (once again) the three-legged stool model; with a few word changes, as we approach our Episcopal faith and worship practices during the coming weeks and Sunday mornings: **Caution, Faith, and Reasonableness**. The Bishop of Atlanta sent out a directive to clergy and the diocese yesterday, <https://www.episcopalatlanta.org/news/covid19-update/> and as a priest in this diocese I am required to follow the directive - and we will. Most members know I am one who believes in following the rules. The Bishop has made his decision based on an abundance of caution and I respect his wish to do so.

Having stated the above, I also disagree with the decision that has been made based on history and research and pray that the decision will be made soon to return to our sacred practice of Holy Eucharist and worship in full. In the meantime, I want to assure the members and those who worship with us on Sunday that the Vestry and I take the health and wellbeing of ALL who come to worship very seriously. This is where **Caution** comes in. We cannot disregard the safety precautions being put in place in order to protect the “least of these” and the vulnerable in our midst. While COVID-19 may be minimal for a majority of people, it can have fatal consequences for others. Please do not diminish the safety precautions being put in place and reduce them to some sense of hype or hysteria. For the safety of all involved, safer practices will be used for the time being when it comes to entering and exiting church; when we exchange the peace; and how we clean and prepare our space. We were already doing several of these things without notice. My hope is to create the least amount of anxiety and disruption and yet ensure the greatest possibility of safety while honoring the sacred.

**Faith** is the cornerstone of Hope. I read a reflection recently about the current debate of public worship and the sacrament of grace found in Holy Eucharist, I offer it to you. The Revd. Steve Rice wrote: *The Eucharist was at the center of the pandemic – not as an agent of infection – but as an act of faith. It seems at these times, Holy Eucharist seems to be more on its possibility as an agent of infection more than its promise as the instrument of sacramental grace.* <https://www.sttimothysws.org/news-notices/2020/3/7/covid-19-response> I think his words are a wonderful reflection and perspective in this time of anxiety and fear. Bishop Redall of Arizona wrote: *“The practice of withholding the cup from the laity was a crucial issue in the Reformation, and it is not exaggerating to say that many people died for us to have the privilege of sharing in both Christ’s body and Christ’s blood at the Eucharist.*

[https://www.azdiocese.org/dfc/newsdetail\\_2/3201970](https://www.azdiocese.org/dfc/newsdetail_2/3201970) We are a people of Faith and we are blessed beyond measure as we continue to gather for worship. Receiving of the host (blood) will look different during this temporary modification of our worship practice. Please be patient and we will soon return to what we hold dear to our Faith.

**Reasonableness** is crucial to how we respond as faithful Christians during these anxious times. Last week I put out several guidelines to follow for precautionary measures. I ask that you please follow them to the best of your ability and do what you feel is best for your health. Our website, <https://www.ecamarietta.org> will have more information about COVID-19 and our faithful practices here at ECA. It certainly has given me some time this Lent to reflect on what truly matters. God is in our midst, do not fear.

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.”*

**NOTE:**

I believe accurate information and response is key to planning and responding to the current COVID-19, here are a couple of great resources to answer questions about contamination, incubation and response:

- a. <https://dph.georgia.gov/novelcoronavirus>, at the bottom of the page there are several resources, one is a power point with great information, you can also get the power point here:  
<https://gema.georgia.gov>
- b. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=drMw2evwMFA> this is a great video provided by the CDC
- c. There are several websites to get updated information on how to plan for and respond:
  - I. Georgia Department of health: <https://dph.georgia.gov/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-outbreak>
  - II. Center for disease control: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
  - III. World Health Organization: <https://openwho.org/channels/covid-19>
  - IV. Episcopal Relief and Development: [https://www.episcopalrelief.org/what-we-do/us-disaster-program/faith-based-response-to-epidemics/?utm\\_source=Main+Email+List&utm\\_campaign=d842008ded-For\\_Faith\\_preview\\_0624166\\_23\\_2016\\_COPY\\_01&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_573d393d97-d842008ded-152673265](https://www.episcopalrelief.org/what-we-do/us-disaster-program/faith-based-response-to-epidemics/?utm_source=Main+Email+List&utm_campaign=d842008ded-For_Faith_preview_0624166_23_2016_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_573d393d97-d842008ded-152673265)

ECA has already put in place most if not all of the CDC and health dept. recommendations in place and will continue to strive to instill best practices when it comes to our worship together. If you need to speak more to me about our current practices and worship. Please do not hesitate to call or make an appointment.

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