

## Guest Columns

# Churches can serve the people and observe proper public safety, too

By The Rt. Rev. Michael B. Hunn / Bishop Of The Episcopal Diocese Of The Rio Grande, Albuquerque

Sunday, April 26th, 2020 at 12:02am

One of the very first cases of COVID-19 in New Mexico was a member of our Cathedral community in Albuquerque. From that moment I have been deeply concerned that the church not become a vector for the coronavirus. I have also been adamant that the church never close – even if we must close our buildings, the work of the church continues.

As Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of the Rio Grande, which encompasses all of New Mexico and the far west part of Texas, I need to make a few points about the church and society in the days ahead.

First, the church and every other faith community are essential to our society and need to be treated as such. The practice of faith is essential in helping people manage anxiety and depression, maintain hope and love their neighbor. Our faith communities help people act out of their better selves. Our faith communities help hold the fabric of our society together. For this reason, it is critical that clergy and employees of synagogues, churches and mosques are considered essential services by government agencies and we be given the guidance essential services deserve.

Second, public health guidelines are not an assault on religious freedom. We must not allow this moment to be politicized – as if scientific public health guidelines are pawns in an election year contest. This is a matter of life and death for all of us and we all need to be working together – the last thing people need right now is faith leaders playing politics.

The real question here is how can faith communities, as essential to our society, minister safely in this time? We have encouraged all our parishes to provide worship, Bible study and even coffee hour online. The Mass is still being celebrated, but with no more than five people and observing the best social distancing practices as outlined by our public health officials. Every Mass – no matter how small – is for, and includes, the whole world.

Still, these initial restrictions will need to be updated as it appears this crisis will be long lasting. As universities and school systems consider their options for virtual classes for the rest of the year, faith communities will need to work more closely with the state Health Department and the Governor's Office so we can conduct our essential ministry – including worship – in ways that are safe for the public.

Third, and finally, the faith community and the government must continue to work together, not in opposition to each other. We are partners in saving lives. As we do this, I will be keeping two principles of my faith in mind:

I will have in my heart Jesus' command that we love our neighbors as ourselves – especially the most vulnerable among us. As a follower of Jesus Christ and as a bishop of the church it is clear to me that when I am at my most faithful, when I am closest to God, my attention and energy are focused not on asserting my rights but on serving others.

I will also be mindful of St Paul's teaching as he wrote to a community struggling with their freedom of religion, "But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block for the weak," (1 Cor 8:9). I am concerned lest our churches inadvertently become vectors of the virus by encouraging large gatherings or by not following the best scientific recommendations available. Faith communities, as essential to our society, must be exemplars of the very best and safest practices lest people think their church and their government are at odds.

Because of my faith in God, I will not live in fear of this virus. And because of that faith I am willing to restrict my freedoms while still working tirelessly to love and serve my neighbors.

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### Tensions simmered between Davie, UNM

*Embattled coach sees multiple  
complaints about administrative  
treatment of football program*

*(Graphic by 2020 Albuquerque Journal)*

**BY MIKA BOETEL**  
Albuquerque Journal Staff Writer

Three days before the season opener, former football coach Bob Davie filed a memo to University of New Mexico President Carmen Velez and other university officials detailing complaints about the university's treatment of the football program.

It wasn't just Davie and his coaching staff who were upset. Other coaches and staff who work through the system, Davie's complaints ranged from the university's handling of the "public domain" of football to UNM officials' refusal to meet with Davie's coach Paul West's coaching staff.

Over the end of the season, UNM and Davie's staff agreed to a settlement. A settlement agreement signed by Davie and UNM officials outlined what would happen to the football program. The settlement included a commitment to the football program's future and a commitment to the university's financial health.

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"I was aware of these, and I received a copy of them," Davie's attorney, Emily Hubert, said of the documents. "Everything that was presented by him was reviewed and addressed in a timely manner."

Hubert said in a statement that the documents were sent to the university.

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