

ECCT Clergy and Lay Leaders Communication: COVID-19
Update #18: June 26, 2020

Dear Clergy and Wardens in the Episcopal Church in Connecticut:

Grace to you and peace in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

It is abundantly clear that we are far from finished with the COVID-19 global pandemic. While we thank God that all of the markers in Connecticut continue to trend downwards with the ongoing decline of positive cases, hospitalizations, and deaths from COVID-19, other states such as Florida, Texas and California are sadly trending upwards. And in other nations such as Brazil and Haiti, the pandemic is raging. Appreciating that our state, God willing, is emerging from the worst of a possible first wave of COVID-19, now is not the time for laxity and negligence in practicing safe behaviors. Do not let the summer vacation season and the return to some social and business functions fool you into thinking we need not be vigilant in working to mitigate the spread of the coronavirus. Please be careful, wear your masks, practice physical distancing, and limit your social contact in order to do all in our power to avoid a second spike in COVID-19 in Connecticut.

We are hearing that some parishes in the Episcopal Church in Connecticut are beginning to try on in-person worship again. Most of these parishes are worshipping outside and following the protocols and directions of our "[Living with COVID-19](#)" document. Thank you for the careful and deliberate manner by which you are pursuing in-person worship. We encourage you to continue to go slowly with the return to in-person worship. Please know we also fully support parishes that chose not to return to in-person worship at this time. Please do continue to offer online worship opportunities for those who chose not to, or cannot, participate in the in-person worship opportunities.

We expect that in the first week or so of July Governor Lamont will move to Phase 3 of the reopening of our state. While we will continue to encourage Spiritual Communion, Morning Prayer, and Ante Communion for in-person and online worship during Phase 3, we will soon have protocols and guidelines for the Holy Eucharist. These protocols and guidelines will be for if and when we return to the reception of the sacrament in person. At this point, we are planning for only the reception of bread and not wine once we have returned to in-person Communion services.

Speaking of liturgy, as we continue to live into the vision and direction of "[Transition is the New Normal](#)" for clergy parish leadership prepared by the Rev. Canon Lee Ann Tolzmann our Canon for Mission Leadership, parishes, especially those served by other than full-time clergy, will be increasingly called to have licensed lay Worship Leaders lead Morning Prayer services on Sundays, both in-person and online. To help prepare and license lay Worship Leaders, Bishop Ian will be leading an online "Learning to Lead Morning Prayer" training session on Saturday, July 11 from 9:00-11:00 am. Registration and additional information can be had by being in contact with Amber Page Gehr, Administrator for Transitions and Clergy Support for the Episcopal Church in Connecticut at: apagegehr@episcopalct.org.

Last Friday, in addition to our weekly Update, we also wrote to you concerning the celebration of Juneteenth, the oldest nation-wide holiday celebrating the end of slavery in the United States. In that letter we urged all members of ECCT to participate in an online Juneteenth Evening Prayer

Service hosted by St. Luke's Church, New Haven and Trinity on the Green, New Haven. This "service of light and liberation" was deeply moving and meaningful, and we commend it to you if you have not already seen it. The service can be found on the [St. Luke's Facebook page here](#). We particularly commend the powerful sermon offered by the Rev. Rowena Kemp that invites us, especially those of us who are white, to do our work to overcome the sins of racism, white-supremacy, and anti-Black violence.

In our Juneteenth letter we also called the people of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut to join us in a brief online service of prayer and reflection on the Fourth of July at 9:00 am as we dedicate ourselves to pursuing genuine freedom and independence for all Americans. We will say more about this service in next Friday's Update. We also invited the people of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut to stand up for the dignity and full humanity of Black people in the United States by supporting the "Black Lives Matter" movement. Here a word on how we understand Black Lives Matter might be helpful. For us as white people, our support of Black Lives Matter begins with the recognition that Black people in the United States suffer and die because of the ongoing sins of racism, white-supremacy, and anti-Black bias. These sins fundamentally deny the fullness of the image of God in Black people and result in death-dealing violence as recently witnessed in the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd. Such violence is fundamentally evil and the work of the devil. As followers of Jesus, we are called to stand in the face of evil and do all in our power to bring about God's kingdom of justice and love for all. Our support of Black Lives Matter is because we are followers of Jesus. It is our commitment to a spiritual metanoia, a turning around, that de-centers ourselves as white Americans and turns our focus on recognizing and celebrating Black Americans as created in the image of God and thus deserving of the fullness of life guaranteed by the incarnation of Jesus Christ and promised by our nation. As your bishops, we promise to seek to be about this work of transformation at the personal, interpersonal, institutional, and cultural level. While we encourage you to consider displaying a Black Lives Matter sign in front of your church building as a statement of your commitment to this work, what is more important for us is to understand fully what this movement is truly about, and to grasp the importance of staying away from just performative ally-ship. Our call to action as a predominantly white church that has been closely tied to the history of the United States, and thus complicit with and profiting from white-supremacy, is not just to make verbal commitments. It is to inherently change.

As part of that change, the metanoia we are called to as the Body of Christ, our 2018 ECCT Annual Convention committed the Episcopal Church in Connecticut to a season of "Racial Healing, Justice and Reconciliation." While significant work has been done during this season to confront and overcome the sins of racism, white supremacy, and anti-Black bias, much work remains for us to do. The resolution affirming Racial Healing, Justice, and Reconciliation [can be found here](#). As we noted in our update last week, the 2018 Convention called on all parishes to include a simple report, which will be submitted to the Mission Council, detailing how the parish has engaged in conversation, study, and action regarding racial healing, justice, and reconciliation. To date, we have received 99 parish reports of 155 parishes. [If your parish has not completed the report, please fill it out here](#). **It is vitally important that we have full compliance with this call from our Convention as one way that we can measure and reflect upon our commitment and work as a diocese to racial healing, justice, and reconciliation.**

We give thanks for your faithful leadership of the parishes of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut as together we seek the life-giving ways of Jesus in the midst of the twin pandemics of COVID-19

and racism, white supremacy, and anti-Black violence. We pray that God will continue to use all of us as instruments of God's peace.

A prayer attributed to St. Francis from the Book of Common Prayer, page 833:

Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. Grant that we may not seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved, as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen

Faithfully,

The Rt. Rev. Ian T. Douglas
Bishop Diocesan

The Rt. Rev. Laura J. Ahrens
Bishop Suffragan