

ECCT Clergy and Lay Leaders Communication: COVID-19
Update #19: July 3, 2020

Dear Clergy and Wardens in the Episcopal Church in Connecticut:

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

Today we begin the celebration of the Fourth of July holiday weekend. But this Fourth of July will be much different than what we have been used to in the past. **The twin pandemics of COVID-19 and the ongoing sins of racism, white supremacy, and anti-Black bias have caused us all to reevaluate how, and what, we celebrate on the Fourth of July.** Physical distancing and the need to be safe from the spread of COVID-19 has resulted in the cancellation of parades, fireworks displays, and gatherings with families and friends. And the ongoing struggle for full dignity and equality of all Americans, especially African Americans as manifested in the Black Lives Matter movement, invites us all to take a long, hard look at our country's history as we rededicate ourselves to the truth that none of us are free until all of us are free.

It was anticipated that with the Fourth of July weekend, the State of Connecticut would be on the verge of moving to Phase 3 of the Governor's reopening plan. To that end **we have prepared an updated version of "Living with COVID-19: Protocols and Directions for Clergy and Vestries in the Episcopal Church in Connecticut - Phase 3" which was released last Wednesday and available here.** In "Living with COVID-19: Phase 3" we encouraged parishes to continue with online worship. We also said that if a parish is moving towards in-person worship that such worship be held out of doors, as outside gatherings are significantly more safe than indoor worship. In "Living with COVID-19: Phase 3" we also presented protocols and directions for the planning of in-person Holy Eucharist with the distribution of Communion, urging parishes not to begin the reception of Communion until Phase 4 of the reopening of Connecticut.

Yesterday Governor Lamont, in response to the rapid spike in COVID-19 infections in 40 states across our nation, announced that he is reevaluating his plans to move to Phase 3 reopening in the near future. He stated that all bars, indoor public spaces, and outdoor event venues with more than 250 will remain closed for the indefinite future. We think the Governor's decision to move slowly and carefully in the reopening of the state as a result of the surge in COVID-19 across the United States is a wise move. In a similar vein, **we urge extreme caution with any return to in-person worship you are planning at this time.** If you and your parish are beginning to worship in-person, we strongly advocate for outside worship instead of inside worship as well as the need to follow all of the protocols and directions for safe and sanitary interactions as described in both of our "Living with COVID-19" documents. We also urge you not to begin the distribution of Communion until Phase 4 continuing with services of Morning Prayer, Ante-Communion, and Holy Eucharist with spiritual Communion.

As part of our ongoing posture of caution and safety, we have decided that The Commons will remain closed for the months of July and August. Staff of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut will continue to work from home, with a few staff members going into the Commons briefly from time to time to keep essential service and operations going. We urge you to proceed with the same amount of caution and safety as you consider your parish staff and offices.

We know that moving slowly in the return to in-person worship is difficult for you as leaders given that many of your parishioners are anxious to "get back to church." We also know that many

parishioners are sad about the loss of singing during this time and are pressuring you to begin choral singing. We thank you for your wise and cautious leadership at this time, and we want to do everything we can to provide support for you in these challenging times. In our weekly meeting of bishops in The Episcopal Church with the Presiding Bishop and his staff, coordinated by Episcopal Relief and Development, last Monday we heard from Dr. Joseph Fair, a leading epidemiologist and virologist, and Dr. Marty Wheeler Burnett, Associate Professor of Church Music and Director of Chapel Music at Virginia Theological Seminary. **Both Dr. Fair and Dr. Burnett stressed the danger of spreading COVID-19 through respiratory droplets, especially in in-door gatherings and through singing.** Dr. Burnett also noted that over 100 music organizations, including the Association of Anglican Musicians, have joined together to sponsor research on aerosol transmission of COVID-19 by instrumentalists, singers, and actors. Studies are currently underway at University of Colorado Boulder and University of Maryland. Preliminary results for singers are expected by July 25 with evidence-based guidance available shortly thereafter. These studies should give us even more evidence to help in your discussions with parishioners and church musicians who are anxious to be singing choral music again.

Tomorrow, as part of our observance of the Fourth of July, we will be offering a service of “Independence Day Prayers” online at 9:00 am on our [YouTube](#) and [Facebook](#) pages. As we survey our nation’s history and current circumstances we need to acknowledge that not all people have enjoyed equally the “freedoms” our country has to offer, in the past and today. Let us not forget that at the time of our nation’s independence from England, only white male landowners were enfranchised with the right to vote and our economy depended on the labor of enslaved peoples. Black men were not granted the right to vote until the 15th Amendment was ratified in 1870; and women could not vote until the 19th Amendment became law in 1920. And even with the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965, people of color continue to be discriminated against in our electoral processes today. **Appreciating that many in our country, particularly African Americans, are still not fully empowered to live lives of dignity and freedom because of the sins of racism, white supremacy, and anti-Black violence, our liturgy tomorrow will reaffirm our commitment to racial justice in our nation and lift up the Black Lives Matter movement committed to liberty and justice for all. Please join us in prayer on the Fourth of July.**

We end with a collect for the Fourth of July, adapted from the appointed collect for the Fourth of July by the Honorable Byron Rushing. Byron Rushing is a leading scholar of African American history, a former State Representative in Massachusetts, and the current Vice-president of the House of Deputies of the General Convention of the Episcopal Church.

May your Fourth of July holiday weekend be one of rest, re-creation, and re-dedication. God bless you and God bless our country.

Lord God Almighty, you have made all the peoples of the earth for your glory, to serve you in freedom and in peace: Give to the people of our country a zeal for justice and the strength of forbearance, that we may use our liberty in accordance with your gracious will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Faithfully,

The Rt. Rev. Ian T. Douglas
Bishop Diocesan

The Rt. Rev. Laura J. Ahrens
Bishop Suffragan