

Dear Friends in Christ,

My prayers for all of you continue on a near continuous basis. With change happening so quickly, it is challenging to know whether decisions we make one day will still make sense the next. Together, we are called by God to be the Church in a world that seems to be at war with a largely invisible enemy. Our leadership in these times is not just about caring for our congregations. Rather we are called to work together with local, state, national and international partners in order to halt the progress of a disease that threatens so many, and particularly the most vulnerable in our midst.

It seems that we will be in this battle for the long term. As such, I'd like to share with you some plans that we are implementing for the indefinite future. Each Tuesday morning, I will check in by Zoom with the clergy of our diocese. Yesterday, there were between forty and fifty that came together in this way. Based on the feedback and suggestions we receive from our clergy, we'll reshape the contents of our weekly "News & Notes" publication, which will now be distributed on Wednesdays or Thursdays. With assistance, I will also prepare a reflection or meditation each week, in video form. These will be based on the coming Sunday's gospel reading and will be available to all of our congregations by Friday noon. You'll be welcome to share this short video in whatever way will be most helpful to your people, by email, social media or in conjunction with your own online worship offerings. We'll also share this digitally through Diocesan media after you've had the chance to do so more locally.

Let me now offer responses to some of the questions we're being asked most frequently.

Public Worship - Based on the request of our Governor, made last Thursday afternoon, and with the accompanying recommendations of the Department of Health and Human Services, we made the quick decision to suspend public worship across the Diocese through the end of March. While I'm sorry for the short notice, we worked as quickly as we could, gathering online with some of our clergy and with members of our Executive Council. My public letters to the diocese are available on our "[Coronavirus Updates & Resources](#)" page of our Diocesan website.

Questions:

- 1) Does this suspension apply to all congregations, even our smallest?
Yes, this suspension applies to all congregations, at least through the end of March. We'll continue to pay attention to this question in all pastoral directions to be offered in the future.
- 2) What about other congregational activities, outside of worship?
Decisions about other activities ought to be made locally, with clergy and Vestries working together. All decisions ought to be made within the guidelines/directions of our local, state and federal authorities, and with the goal of keeping safe and healthy all of the members of the wider communities in which we live.
- 3) What about Holy Week and Easter worship?
It would seem that the coronavirus is not going anywhere. If anything, we're being asked to live within even tighter guidelines/directions every day. We will certainly consider our Presiding Bishop's wisdom, published yesterday, in which he writes, "I believe that suspension of in-person public worship is generally the most prudent course of action at this time, even during Holy Week and on Easter Day."

In the next few days, I will consult with leaders across our Diocese, with the goal that early next week we will offer pastoral directions for the Diocese of East Carolina that will be clear and useful.

Resources for Worship and Congregational Ministry - Members of our Diocesan House staff have been working to gather resources that we hope will be helpful to congregational leaders in the challenges we face in “being Church” in a very different world. Please visit our “[Coronavirus Updates & Resources](#)” to see what is available. We have invited clergy and others to share information with us about the online worship options that their congregations will be offering, and a list of these services is available from this resource page. We are also listing, in one place, the status of upcoming Diocesan events. This week, I will not be offering a separate worship option, as I want to encourage you to connect with each other for this purpose.

Diocesan House Staffing - All members of our staff continue to work in support of the Diocese, although with modified schedules. Some are in the office more and others less, based on the needs of our families. Our office doors will be locked, but when we are able to do so we will answer the telephone. When we are not able to answer, please follow the instructions to leave a message and we’ll get back to you as quickly as possible. All of us will be online and able to respond to email messages. While caring for our own health, and for the health of our families and community, we will continue to do our best to be of support to the people of East Carolina and the challenges we are facing together.

Remember, friends, even though public worship has been suspended for now, Church has not been cancelled! We will need to be creative, and to seek the leading of God’s Holy Spirit. The world that we have now entered is different than anything that any of us has previously experienced. Find ways to remain connected, and to care for one another. And please, find ways to live well in relationship with the neighbors who live on every side.

Peace and blessings in this holy season,

Rob