

Thursday, March 26, 2020

Dear Ones,

I write to you today to let you know that our Bishop has issued a further directive that, throughout the Diocese of Atlanta, we will not gather in our buildings for worship, formation, meetings, or fellowship through May 24.

All worship and meetings during this time will be conducted remotely on streaming platforms. This decision has been made in consultation with other bishops, other faith leaders, and with local and state directives regarding public health and the Common Good. I will post the text of Bishop Wright's message below along with a link to a video update he posted on YouTube yesterday.

This, of course, means that any observances of Holy Week and Easter will be affected. More detailed plans will emerge, but my inclination at this point is for us to continue offering (and perhaps expand in number of offerings) our weekly online prayer gatherings as we modeled last Sunday. We will likely have online prayer offerings for those observances of Holy Week and Easter, but we will not attempt to magnify the glory of Easter through the limitations of online offerings. Instead, we will pick a date several weeks after we are released to return to regular worship and then have a magnificent and glorious celebration of the Resurrection (even if this is in mid-summer). Please remember that while Easter is both a Feast Day and a season of the liturgical year, Easter is also a state of being. We are Easter People and we will continue to live and love as such during these trying times – even as the concerns of the world may have us marking time in new and unusual ways.

When I first learned about the duration of this “hiatus from gathering together” I thought “Wow!” and felt a little bereft. But then I realized that understanding the parameters of this hiatus will embolden us to adapt during this time and free us to imagine fully how we will live these days differently – while not retreating from staying connected in new ways. As you process this news, be aware of your feelings. Grief is a very real companion on this journey we are all currently enduring.

The clergy of the Diocese joined Bishop Wright and his staff (136 of us) on a Zoom meeting yesterday morning for about an hour going over all of this. He is encouraging all of us to be responsible and mature in our decision making - stressing that relying merely on precedent alone during these times will likely not serve us (or the Common Good) very well. He stressed that the growth in “Spiritual Maturity” that he has advocated during his entire episcopate for all of the members of the Diocese of Atlanta will be what will sustain us and advance us during these unusual and unprecedented times.

Early indicators are positive as to the parish's willingness to adapt. We had 50 or so folks on our Facebook Morning Prayer and another 35 or so on Compline on Zoom on Sunday evening. I am establishing our own Zoom licenses for use during this time and I am asking groups to identify a Zoom moderator for each group that may wish to use this technology. How could your group gather virtually? Your book group? Your Bible study?

Your prayer group? Your Ministry Team? I am even envisioning a "Virtual Bunco" gathering – perhaps?

Love and kindness will get us through this time my friends. We must remember that. And we must remember that none of this may be our preference, but this new way of working may, indeed, bear fruits going forward for connecting us in new ways - even after we can return to our regular gatherings.

Bishop Wright shared a story yesterday of someone in one of the parishes of the Diocese who had been medically shut-in for three months prior to our current crisis. This person had received cards and visits from a Eucharistic Visitor, but after implementing all of the new ways of connecting (virtually) in the parish, this parishioner said to the priest, "I feel such connection now! I feel like because I cannot go to Church, Church has come to me!" I know that much of this may seem foreign and non-preferred to many of us (including me – they did not teach us any of this in seminary), but we can learn from this time and it will make us stronger. These are the times we have read about in scripture – the desert times, the wilderness days, the exile. These periods, when they present themselves (in our own lives and in our common life together) are challenging, but they also have the ability to strengthen us, connect us more deeply, and help us grow.

Your pastoral staff and Vestry are here through this all for you to help walk with you through any questions or concerns you have in response to this news.

I love you all. Please call three or four other people today and tell them you love them too.

Peace,

Chad+

From Bishop Wright:

[Video message from Bishop Wright can be found here:](#)

March 24, 2020

Beloved, two weeks ago we moved all worship and meetings in the Diocese of Atlanta online until further notice. Regrettably, now given the rapidly increasing amount of cases of Covid-19 in the state of Georgia and given the average age of our membership, it's clear we should continue to worship and meet online until May 24.

This of course includes Holy Week, Clergy Renewal of Vows, and Easter. We establish this timeline with the full support of our Presiding Bishop.

Between now and May 24, we will be monitoring the situation regularly and updating the diocese as necessary relying on the expertise and experience of a diverse council of advice.

To be sure, there are a host of practical considerations and questions that are emerging as we adapt to this challenge. Know that my staff and I are preparing a list of resources, supports and initiatives to be sent out before the end of this week to assist you as you do the work of the church.

Finally, as I have said in other places, I continue to be proud of and inspired by so many of you. This is not the Lent that we wanted, but this is the Lent we have. And though God did not cause this virus, God and God's church can use this virus!

So many are adapting to this extraordinary season of disruption and challenge with collegiality and imagination, with generosity and with grit. And I sincerely thank you! Also, I urge you not to simply endure these present circumstances, but to lean in.

Be on high alert for how this virus can help us more deeply live into being partners with Jesus Christ for the world. Know that I am right beside you in this and the Spirit is beside us all.

Now is a great time to remember that we as the followers of Jesus are "salt and light." So let us season these times with a mature and public faith in God. And let us illuminate God's trustworthiness even as we face a forest of daily question marks.

The church is not closed, she is adapting!

God bless you. Be encouraged.

Blessings,

Rob+