

10 September 2020

Beloved in Christ,

It is September – Can you believe it?

The Sunday after Labor Day is approaching and this is the Sunday we would, by custom, celebrate as “Rally Day” – the day upon which we kick-off the Parish program year. This year, in case you have not noticed, is a bit different (and that’s an understatement). This year as we have learned to stay connected in new ways, we have translated many Parish offerings into online expressions. We have also initiated some new offerings during this time. This is all to say that while some Parish programs “took a break” for the summer this year, many continued on – just to stay connected in these unusual times. So, this year, while we “Rally” for some programs, we also gratefully celebrate those offerings that have continued right through the summer to keep folks engaged and connected!

If you have not joined us online for worship since the Spring, give it another try. We have streamlined and enhanced our Sunday morning worship - adding glorious music, and, WOW, can this bunch of Episcopalians pray extemporaneously!

This Sunday, the voices of our choir return to lead us in our hymn singing during worship. They will also be preparing a few special offerings during the fall as well. I am thankful to all of the members of the choir who are stepping-up their technical as well as their vocal game to make this all possible.

I hope many of you will also join us after worship this Sunday for the first of our new online, intergenerational formation offerings. This is Christian Formation for **ALL** Ages and we want you there! It will start at 11:15 and wrap up around Noon. If you enjoyed our summer VBS offering, this offering will continue some of those elements. Please come – the more folks, the more fun and formation.

There are also opportunities to join up with an ongoing small group online or one of new offerings – such as the monthly Healing Racism book group. There are slots open in the EfM (Education for Ministry) group. The choir would love new members or maybe you make music in other ways and would like to share your gifts. The Community Engagement Team is always welcoming new folks to explore how St. Bede’s can serve the wider community. We’ll be having more Popcorn Theology gatherings later this Fall. A group from St. Bede’s has even formed a virtual/distanced team to walk in the Georgia 2-Day Virtual Breast Cancer Awareness Walk this Fall! And if you have extra time, energy, or interest, feel free to contact a member of the staff to explore starting your own small group for fellowship or formation – we can help provide the technology to make “space” for these groups.

Thank you also for your continued generous financial support of St. Bede's during this time. Even though we are not gathering in the building, much ministry is being done – and we are maintaining the building for when we can return to it as well. If you would like to make a gift to St. Bede's, you may simply mail a gift to the church or drop it off in our secured locking mailbox at the Midvale Road entrance. You can also make a gift electronically (credit/debit card or electronic transfer from your checking account) through Realm – click on the “Give” tab at the top of the website. If you have made a pledge of financial support to St. Bede's for 2020, thank you – and we hope that you can keep current on your pledge even while we are not able to “pass the plate.” All gifts are still offered to the glory of God. We will also be launching our 2021 pledge campaign in October. Our theme for the 2021 campaign is “Grateful Everyday!”

And then there is the question to which I know everyone hopes for an answer – “When will we be able to gather again?” Well, I hope after six months(!) we can claim that we are, indeed, still “gathering” – but just in new ways. I know that sometimes these new ways seem awkward and alienating, but I also hope you have had moments of new or (possibly) even deeper connections during our “online exile.”

When will we all be able to be in the building together again? Well that answer is much more elusive. We need to prepare ourselves for the reality that it will still likely be a good while before we will be able to experience anything akin to what we experienced in worship up until the second Sunday of March this year. With that said, the Vestry has commissioned our “Gathering Going Forward” group to guide us through all of the considerations of the Diocesan guidelines and public health data to help us determine how, when, and by what means we might begin to consider hybrid and in-person gatherings going forward.

I would imagine that for the foreseeable future our Sunday worship will remain online, but this group will explore opportunities for possible special outdoor worship gatherings at other times. The Diocesan guidelines are designed to “flex” with spikes and declines in the virus’ severity in local contexts. Since the guidelines were originally published in June, the maximum number allowed for short outdoor gatherings has fluctuated between 10 and 50. We are currently in a period (from the data prior to Labor Day) allowing for the possibility of considering planning for outdoor gatherings with up to 50 people (still with many restrictions and stipulations – distanced, no singing, no passing of the Peace, no Eucharist, no bathrooms, at least six feet apart, masks, etc.).

This “Gathering Going Forward” group will make recommendations to the Vestry about what any in-person gatherings might look like in our context and the Vestry will certify to the Bishop’s office that these recommendations fit within the diocesan guidelines. Then – and only then – can we consider any in-person opportunities – for the whole Parish or for any small groups within the Parish.

Much of that is likely not the answer that any of us would want to hear, but that is as succinct a summary of a complicated and ever-evolving situation as I can offer at this time – and it is the beginning of a hopeful step forward. Please keep the “Gathering Going Forward” group in your

prayers as they do their work. This group is being co-chaired by Jeff Swoope and Muriel Diguette. Members are: Dixie Snider, Victor Cáceres, John Entrekin, Orisha Parsons, and Judah Sali. Joining them ex-officio are our Wardens, Anita Montelione and Molly Graves; our Treasurer, Will Mizell; our Chancellor, George Shingler; and me, the Rector.

Whew! Have I mentioned lately that you all are loved by God and loved by me? You are! Please keep loving each other during these days – and taking the time to call or Zoom or write one another and share that love. I look forward to seeing you Sunday on Zoom.

With love,
Chad