

10 July 2020

Dear Friends in Christ,

I pray that this message finds you well.

It has been four months since we last gathered for worship on what was a glorious Sunday when the WHOLE parish gathered together for our visitation from Bishop Wright with confirmations and receptions. The spirit of that day keeps my heart warm, but that warmth is also continually fueled by all of the amazing faces that have been beamed into my laptop on my sun porch as I have gathered with so many of you online for worship, formation, and fellowship. None of this is the same, but I also never cease from being delighted during this strange season by the many graces and the beauty of our gatherings in this new way as well.

I am sure many of you may be reading through this message looking for easy answers or clues as to when we might be able to gather together in our building again. I am sorry to disappoint you, but the answer to that question is simply not yet known. I hope you share with me in my grief at the alarmingly increasing diagnosed infections in our state and metro area. Please know that I share with you in our collective grief that this reality prevents us from gathering again in person for the foreseeable future.

In May, Bishop Wright convened a diocesan task force on considerations for beginning to regather in our buildings. Our own Caroline Magee is shepherding this work in conjunction with the Bishop's staff. This group issued their guidelines on "Phase 1" regathering plans in mid-June – just as all of the alarming public health data began to surge. These guidelines offer many well considered recommendations and requirements, but the experience that they imagine as "safe" is very foreign from what any of us has experienced in worship before. Your Vestry reviewed these guidelines in late June and determined that continuing our online expression was the best option for us until we can regather safely in an experience that feels more familiar and conducive to our worship of God.

What do I mean by a "foreign" feeling worship experience? Well, the limitations are lengthy, but to give you an idea, let's start with:

- No Eucharist
- No access to restrooms
- No singing and no choir
- No coffee or fellowship time
- No nursery
- No passing of the peace
- No running of air conditioning or heat

On top of that, everyone would have to wear masks (which you should do whenever you are out in public anyway); you would have to make a reservation to attend; folks would need to enter and exit through different doors; attendance would be limited to somewhere between 20 and 40 people (with only one service allowed per week); and the time inside the building would be limited to no more than 40 minutes.

So, for the foreseeable season ahead, our online gatherings will continue to be our primary means of connection. We will strive to make these experiences (different though they may be) as rich as possible. If you haven't worshiped with us online since the early days (and didn't like what you experienced), give us another try – we've made some considerable improvements.

To that end, I will share with you some interesting news that I shared with the Vestry. Since March 26, we have conducted 98 meetings, worship, or other gatherings on the St. Bede's ZOOM account – everything from Bible Study to worship to Interfaith Women's Book Group (Episcopal and Muslim women meeting on ZOOM together) to VBS to Daughters of the King to Choir to Bunco. And there are already 50 more currently scheduled between now and September 1. This does not include several dozen other ZOOM meetings that have been run through members' personal ZOOM accounts.

We've had people join us for worship online from other countries, from all over the United States, and even while driving in their cars or climbing mountains!

Our YouTube channel launched around April 1. Since then it has gotten 1,689 views so far. It has 60 subscribers. People have watched 212 hours of content (that would be the equivalent of watching St. Bede's YouTube videos 24 hours a day for 9 days straight) – and we only have 31 videos posted there.

In 2019, we had 5 folks giving electronically to St. Bede's through Realm. In the first six months of 2020, we have had 43 folks give electronically to St. Bede's through Realm. [You can make a gift to support the ongoing mission and ministry of St. Bede's by visiting <https://onrealm.org/stbedes/Give> or by mailing a check.]

Please hear me – none of this replaces what we so much miss in terms of our gathering together in person to praise God and grow in community, but it does point to the amazing resiliency and adaptability of the people of St. Bede's.

Your Vestry is also commissioning a "Gathering Going Forward Team" to shepherd us through all of the ways that we may stay connected during this time, but with a particular focus on considerations we will need to make for when we can gather together in person again – whenever that will be. We are still reaching out to the folks whom we are inviting to lead us in this planning and visioning, but we hope to be able to share that group with you in early August.

I know many of you are tired and weary. I am too. While I will not be taking the vacation that I had planned this summer (like many of you), I will begin taking some time off beginning next week and will return to work on August 4. I know that you all love each other and care for each other amazingly well. Please continue to do so.

While I am away, please connect with Muriel Diguette, our Parish Administrator, or Anita Montelione or Molly Graves, our Wardens concerning any church matters. The Rev'ds Lynnsay Buehler, Caroline Magee, and Nora Cruz-Diaz are also here to help support the community pastorally – always, but particularly during my time away.

Be of good spirit, love one another, and I will look forward to picking-up again and rejoining you in a few weeks. I hope that you all are able to get some rest and renewal during the days ahead as well.

Peace,
Chad