

**ECCT Clergy and Lay Leaders Communication: COVID-19  
Update #12: May 15, 2020**

Dear Clergy and Wardens in the Episcopal Church in Connecticut:

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

We are entering a new season of COVID-19, even as we are on the cusp of a new liturgical season with Pentecost right around the corner. If metrics demonstrating the decline of COVID-19 continue to be met, Governor Ned Lamont has called for the first phase of reopening Connecticut to start next week on May 20. Following strict precautions to ensure safety, some offices, restaurants, retail stores, and personal service businesses will be allowed to open. Clearly, as a state we are at a turning point in the coronavirus pandemic.

**To begin with we want to thank all of the incredible front-line workers who have labored mightily during the initial acute stage of COVID-19.** Many of these workers have historically toiled in jobs that are often unrecognized and underpaid. For police and first responders, grocery-store workers and those in the food service industry, warehouse workers and delivery drivers, and all those who continued to provide essential services in scary and dangerous times, we give thanks. We also thank God for the tireless efforts of those who work in hospitals, retirement communities, and nursing homes, for medical professionals, doctors, nurses, lab workers and those who clean the facilities and provide food, we offer thanks and praise. Your selfless service to the sick and dying has shown us the love of God in Jesus. "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." (Matthew 25:40) We invite you, as clergy and lay leaders, to recognize these front-line workers in some manner in your online worship in the coming weeks.

As we enter the first phase of the reopening of Connecticut on May 20, the question will be: is it time to begin in-person worship in our church buildings and reopen our church offices? We do not believe that now is the time to do so and **we ask that churches continue to worship online and keep church offices closed (except for essential services) in this first stage of reopening.** If you have not already seen our communication "[Living with COVID-19: Protocols and Directions for Clergy and Vestries in the Episcopal Church in Connecticut](#)" we urge you to read it and spend time discussing how your parish will move forward in this time of COVID-19.

Those who hoped that come May 20 we would be through with COVID-19 and would be going back to church as we had known it will be disappointed in our protocols and directions for the first stage of reopening our state. We believe that there is no “going back” to life as we had known it. We as a world, a nation, a state, and as a church have been unalterably changed by the realities of the coronavirus pandemic. We do not know what life will look like in the immediate and/or long-term future, but we do know it will be a long road to any kind of new normal. We also know that God has not and will not abandon us. God in Jesus is there to comfort and hold us in our fear, anxiety, loss, and grief. The truth of the resurrection we celebrate this Easter season will sustain us and give us new life now and as we go forward.

Last week Canons Robin Hammeal-Urban and Lee Ann Tolzmann offered a webinar on “Effective Leadership in a Time of Anxiety and Pandemic.” Utilizing resources presented by Episcopal Relief and Development on the [Emotional Life Cycle of a Disaster](#) they helped us to **understand that as we enter this first phase of reopening, feelings of disillusionment and grief are likely. Paying attention to these feelings in ourselves and in our parishes, and seeking appropriate care and support is the work before us.** We invite you to [review the materials presented by Robin and Lee Ann here](#) and take steps necessary to care for yourself and others in your charge. We are here to help you in any way we can. Please do not hesitate to be in contact with us if we can be of assistance.

An important part of taking care of ourselves and others in this time of disillusionment and grief is to maintain regular sabbath time for rest and renewal. Time away from computer screens and other social media devices to recharge is crucial. **Related to regular sabbath is the need to maintain planned vacation time as much as possible as we look to warmer weather and the coming of summer.** While the realities of COVID-19 might mean we will not be traveling for vacation, that does not mean we should not take vacation anyway. We urge you to take vacation time away from the burden of zoom meetings and leading online worship. If you are responsible for producing the online worship in your parish, please assign that responsibility to someone else during your vacation time. If there is not capacity in others in your parish to lead the online worship, it is not appropriate to secure “supply clergy” to take on the responsibilities for online worship when you go on vacation. Instead, encourage parishioners to worship with their companions in Christ across ECCT by referring them to other online services in your Region or work with other parishes to schedule a rotation of online worship services throughout the summer. Please reach out to your Region Missionary to find out what other parishes in your Region might be offering.

In our update last Friday, we encouraged you to celebrate and honor those who are graduating from school this spring and/or who have completed preparation for confirmation, and we suggested resources you might consult. Recently the Faith Formation Department of The Episcopal Church has come out with additional resources to celebrate graduations in this time of COVID-19 and we commend these to you as well. See: <https://lessonplansthatwork.org/celebrating-graduation/>

Last week, we also encouraged you to participate in the webinar organized by Kelli Ray Gibson, our ECCT Racial Justice Resource Coordinator, on the topic of "COVID-19, Health Disparities, and Systemic Racism: A Call to Action." The program and panel is archived on our ECCT YouTube page and we encourage you to [view it here](#). We also encourage you to take a look at the "COVID-19 Reflections" from companions in Christ across the Episcopal Church in Connecticut curated on our [ECCT Stories blog](#). You will find stories of hope, possibility, and good news.

Finally, this past week, there was news that the Federal Government was revisiting guidelines on the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP). Applicants for a loan under PPP must certify that the current economic uncertainty caused by COVID-19 makes the loan request "necessary to support the ongoing operations" of the company. The Small Business Administration (SBA) initially provided little guidance on how to interpret this certification, except that it needed to be made in good faith. **Because uncertainty remained, SBA issued FAQ #46 on May 13, 2020 which provided that any borrower who received PPP loans of less than \$2 million will be deemed to have made the required certification in good faith.** Since we assume that no parishes in ECCT received a PPP loan of \$2 million dollars, this is reassuring information. Further explanation and details on this clarification can be found on the [ECCT COVID-19 Financial and Human Resources webpage here](#). Note in particular question #46 regarding the "good faith" certification on PPP FAQ's.

You continue to be in our prayers as we enter this new season of COVID-19. We pray that you will find the time to rest and be restored as we prepare for this next phase of life together.

*O God of peace, who has taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and in confidence shall be our strength: By the might of your Spirit lift us, we pray you, to your presence, where we may be still and know that you are God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen (Book of Common Prayer, page 832)*

Faithfully,

The Rt. Rev. Ian T. Douglas  
Bishop Diocesan

The Rt. Rev. Laura J. Ahrens  
Bishop Suffragan