



EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN CONNECTICUT

PARTICIPATING IN GOD'S MISSION

A Message from our Bishops: Coronavirus - Update #2: March 13, 2020

Dear Clergy, and Wardens in Parishes without Clergy, in the Episcopal Church in Connecticut:

Grace to you and peace in these challenging times.

Over the last few weeks we have written to you with suggestions about how we can best prepare as faith leaders for the coming circumstances of the coronavirus. We write today as we live into the reality that the COVID-19 pandemic (as the World Health Organization describes it) is now upon us.

You will see attached to this communication, and soon to be posted on all of our ECCT social media, a "Pastoral Letter from the Bishops of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut." As the canons of The Episcopal Church allow us, we ask that you read this Pastoral Letter to your congregations, as well as make it available to all of your parishioners. We know that many of you have cancelled in-person, public worship services for the next few weeks (more on that below) and thus cannot read the letter as a physically gathered body in worship. Still, if you plan to use digital media to make your Sunday worship, we ask that you read the Pastoral Letter in the context of your worship. Please also send the letter to members of your parish, and post it on your parish website so that parishioners checking for updates on services and other events will see it.

We have been in communication with many of you recently regarding the cancellation of in-person, public worship services for the immediate future. We have consulted with our Chancellor, Brad Babbitt, as well as the Standing Committee as our Council of Advice, and all agree that we, as bishops, do not have the canonical power to supersede your authority over the worship and spiritual jurisdiction of your parish. See Canon III.9.6(a)(1). That having been said, as a pastoral direction, we strongly encourage you to consider canceling in-person, public worship for at least the next two weeks or until Palm Sunday at this point.



Even as we strongly encourage you not to have in-person, public worship, we do ask you to try to provide, as possible, some form of video worship on Sunday using digital technology platforms such as Facebook Live and zoom. We ask that those parishes who are offering video worship to communicate what you are doing to your Region Missionary. Parishes that do not have the capacity to offer video worship may then consult with the Region Missionaries in order to join other churches in the Region in video worship. In addition, resources on communications and worship, along with a vast array of information and updates concerning our life as faith communities in the midst of COVID-19, can be found on our ECCT website at: <https://www.episcopalct.org/covid-19-coronavirus-updates/> We commend this webpage to you for advice, counsel and decision-making.

If you do decide on continuing in-person, public worship, we ask that you cease the administration of the common cup. In order to underscore that receiving only the bread is a full and sufficient participation in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, we suggest that when presiding at the altar you forgo partaking of wine in the Eucharist. This is also a good practice for those of you who will not be gathering in-person but will be videoing your Eucharist using digital communications technology.

You will also see in our Pastoral Letter that, in order to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, we ask you to consider cancelling, postponing, or using zoom or some other form of digital communication, with respect to all of your parish meetings and events for a period of time. We will be doing the same with diocesan events and meetings. Please consult the ECCT website for specifics related to diocesan gatherings. As an example of how we might gather and be church in new ways, we, your bishops, will host a zoom on-line conversation on Sunday, March 15th from 1:30-2:30 for any and all Episcopalians in Connecticut who would like to discuss our life in Christ in the midst of COVID-19. We recently used this technology in the House of Bishops coaching session last week and had a very fruitful discussion with close to 60 participants. Details on this upcoming Sunday's zoom call will be available on our ECCT website.

We understand that the realities of the coronavirus present new and unknown circumstances for all of us. We also appreciate that many in our parishes will be consumed with fear, insecurity and anxiety. It is our calling as ordained and lay leaders in the Episcopal Church in Connecticut both to minister to those in our care as well as



encourage the faithful to be about God's mission in the world. We follow a God of hope and resurrection, and it is from this place of transformational hope that God is calling us to lead. Now is the time God is calling us to be non-anxious, clear-thinking, and confident Christian leaders.

As your bishops we are completely committed to helping you be the faithful leaders God wants you and needs you to be. To that end, beginning on Wednesday, March 18th from 8:30-9:30 am, and continuing every Wednesday until further notice, we will be available on a zoom call for clergy and wardens of ECCT parishes to discuss together our leadership needs and resources at this time. Details for this zoom meeting will be on the ECCT website.

In addition, while in-person, public diocesan meetings and events will be cancelled, postponed, or done via zoom, we have asked the staff at the Commons, for the moment, to continue to provide their ministry of service to the diocese taking into consideration all appropriate health care precautions to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. We suggest that you take counsel with your lay leaders as to how your parish staff can both take all necessary health precautions while continuing to support the people of God in service to God's mission. We suggest you also consult with your lay leaders regarding the ministry of your buildings with respect to 12 step meetings, programs that serve the food and housing insecure, and any other ministries you might have, keeping in mind that the mitigation of the spread of the coronavirus is of utmost priority.

We encourage you to explore new ways to ensure that the people God has called us to serve can receive the assistance they need, while providing responsible care to all involved. To that end, it would be good to remind your parishioners that while regular parish life is being altered at this time, active ministry continues. Maintaining one's financial pledge to continue support for your parish's life in God's mission is important. We are available by phone, text and email as needed, and on Wednesdays from 8:30-9:30 am via zoom, to discuss appropriate protocols, procedures, and precautions for parish life.

Finally, we thank God for your collegiality and companionship in Christ as together we serve God's mission and the people of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut living in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated to you; and then use us, we pray, as you will, and always to your glory and the welfare of your people; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. (A Prayer of Self-Dedication, BCP page 832-833.)

Faithfully,

The Rt. Rev. Ian T. Douglas
Bishop Diocesan

The Rt. Rev. Laura J. Ahrens
Bishop Suffragan