



A Pastoral Letter to the People of the Florida Conference

Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Thank you for your patience and faithfulness in this season of COVID-19. This virus is very real. We have lost members to death. We are watching and praying as friends and family members have contracted the virus. We have been unable to gather in our sanctuaries. We carry the stress, anxiety and fear within our bodies. And yet, to quote the words of one of my mentors, Ken Callahan, *"We are the people of the empty tomb, the risen Lord, the new life in Christ. We are the Easter people. We are the people of hope."*

The crucified and risen Lord asked the disciple Peter a question, three times. *"Do you love me?"* When Peter responded, affirmatively, Jesus replied, *"Feed my sheep"* (John 21).

We love our Lord by caring for his people. We love God by loving our neighbor (Matthew 22).

And now we love our neighbors by flattening the curve (the effect and spread of the virus). Many of our neighbors and members are more senior adults, the most vulnerable and among our most dedicated. We love them and honor them by flattening the curve. We save lives by flattening the curve.

Many of our members who live on the margins are among our most dedicated and are most vulnerable. Their illnesses are often unreported.

We are the second oldest state in average age. Illnesses in many elder care facilities and nursing homes in Florida are often unreported.

We do not yet have testing to know if we ourselves might carry the illness to those

we meet and serve.

A pandemic is not about political partisanship. I offered guidance as your bishop twenty-two days prior to that of the state government. This guidance is grounded in the great commandments of Jesus. Right now we love God by loving our neighbors. If you are a clergy in leadership, this is what you were licensed, commissioned and ordained to do—to feed the sheep, to seek their safety, to love God's people.

This is a mindset change for many of us, who have spent out lives assembling congregations in order to offer love for God. When we know it is safe--when there is testing that is widespread and available—we will reassemble. It will be a day of rejoicing.

For now, and through May 15, we will offer worship via technology. Hundreds of our churches, large and small, are faithfully bearing witness in this way. Thank you for the creative and innovative ways you are sharing the gospel.

Be assured of my prayers and gratitude for you. In this time of distancing and at times isolation, we are a connection.

The Peace of the Lord,

+Ken Carter

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