



Thursday, March 12, 2020

Dear Siblings in Christ,

Every morning, I check the websites of the [Centers For Disease Control \(CDC\)](#), [The World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#), [Episcopal Relief and Development \(ERD\)](#), and [Denver Public Schools](#) to glean the latest information on COVID-19 (the Coronavirus).

My care for you and the health of your communities is paramount. And I am mindful of how we, as church, function to meet not only the needs of our members, but also the needs of those in our greater community: through food pantries, feeding ministries, hosting 12-step programs, and sheltering the homeless. The generosity of the Episcopal Church shields many on the margins and I worry what will happen to our communities when that shield is removed.

I also recognize that church is THE social outlet and means of human connection for many of our members. Those who are most vulnerable to the Coronavirus are also the most vulnerable to loneliness and isolation.

With these thoughts in mind, I have been discussing how to respond to this pandemic with my fellow bishops, your diocesan staff, and ERD. I listened as the head epidemiologist at ERD said, "We cannot stop COVID-19; we can only hope to slow it down."

I am therefore, after much prayer, asking all clergy and lay leaders to suspend in-person, public gatherings from March 22 until April 1 (this includes outside and para-church groups). I encourage congregations with particularly vulnerable populations and those in areas where the virus is most prevalent (especially Denver, Pitkin, and Eagle counties), to suspend services as early as this Sunday. Per the CDC's recommendation, I ask everyone over 60 and those with respiratory conditions, heart disease, or diabetes to avoid church gatherings beginning immediately. I will reevaluate our circumstances on March 31 and send another communication at that time.

Please note that I am NOT calling us to cancel church. The Body of Christ is not reduced to where we go and what we do on Sunday; in these days we are called to be church in a new way. We the baptized are called to be church in all circumstances and in the face of this growing health crisis; we are called to even deeper faithfulness. I invite clergy and lay leaders to meet this challenge prayerfully and creatively, attentive to the movement of the Holy Spirit among us.

I ask that you reimagine how you will incarnate the living body of Christ in this time. The Office of the Bishop stands ready to assist you in setting up online meetings, live-streaming worship, and online giving. Please

look for these additional resources tomorrow in your inbox and on the Episcopal Church in Colorado Facebook page.

As we make the most of the technology available to us, bear in mind those members who may not be technically savvy or have the technological resources to participate virtually and find ways to include them. Remember that a simple phone call may be the best way to reach out and share Christ's love.

In terms of worship, Holy Eucharist is a community activity. If two or three are gathered, celebrate. The Eucharist is not, however, a spectator sport and the elements are not consecrated virtually. I encourage clergy and congregations to use Morning and Evening Prayer for virtual worship and to collaborate with one another.

This is not a decision made lightly, and I know that it will be difficult and disappointing for some. It is a loving decision designed to protect the most vulnerable members of our Beloved Community. As you are all aware, this situation is rapidly evolving, and our goal is always doing that which honors and reflects the Gospel that is in us.

Faithfully,  
Bishop Kym Lucas