



Update on Community Considerations

Amidst COVID-19 (Coronavirus)

Feast of St. Cyril-2020

Important

Dear Leadership and other Members of the Diocese,

My life verse of scripture has always been Proverbs 3:5-6:

Trust in *and* rely confidently on the LORD with all your heart

And do not rely on your own insight *or* understanding.

In all your ways know *and* acknowledge *and* recognize Him,

And He will make your paths straight *and* smooth [removing obstacles that block your way].

(AMP)

As I stated last week, *“In times like we are facing now, being the Body of Christ, the Church, and thus His care for the world around us, looks a lot less like isolating ourselves or self-preservation and more like faithfulness in servanthood.”* Needless to say, every day is requiring much wisdom and discernment by all our community and Church leaders. Please pray for us.

As a result of the College of Bishops meeting today with our Archbishop, and with personal consultation with fellow Anglican Bishops, regional faith and governmental leaders, as well as conferring regularly with the leadership of congregations within our Diocese and our Deans:

I am calling and directing all congregations within the Anglican Diocese of the Western Gulf Coast to not gather in person for worship or other activities of more than 10 people until further notice. This is effective today, the Feast of St. Cyril, 2020.

Please let me assure you that in 37 years of ministry, this is one of the hardest decisions I have ever had to make, for it challenges almost every belief and theology I have regarding worship, the Body of Christ, Communion etc. But in order for the Church to share in the leadership of this society and *love our neighbors*, we must take our part in what the health community and our government are calling for over these next few weeks, while serving in other ways as well.

In discussions with the leaders of our parishes, I am calling for the lay and clergy leadership of each congregation to continue to consider creative, safe and disciplined ways of how to ***Be the Church*** now, in this crucial time. To just be at home is not what the Church is called to do. Even if someone is at home, we can still be the Body of Christ in a many other ways. Later in this commu-

nication you will find the beginning of some ideas from around the diocese to possibly communicate to our church members how they can actively be the Body of Christ, even if from our homes and our neighborhoods. Other ideas I hope will be posted on our Diocesan Facebook page linked [here](#). Please join the Facebook page as soon as possible It will be an important communication tool in the weeks ahead.

However, first let me address commitments I am calling us all to regarding how to make sure the message of the Church is not that we are closed. As I have said, the Church can no more “close” than Fire Stations, Police Stations or Hospitals can. So we must commit to ways we can still be “open” for those in spiritual and emotional need, as well as other needs. This will include things like:

- † Posting notices (in large print) on the front doors of our church buildings and on our websites, Facebook pages and other conduits of communication that we “are here to serve with prayer and counsel, as well as to serve needs” and that if we are not on the church campus presently, giving the phone number of someone designated as the Help Line to take such calls, as well as the contact information of at least one clergy person.
- † Some parishes will be able to LiveStream or video some form of a communion service or services of some sort. And our Diocesan Director of Communication, Fr. John Tucker is ready to advise anyone who has not done this before.
- † The Diocese and many parishes are sending devotionals, prayer guides, and links to LiveStream worship which is occurring throughout the Province.
- † If there are going to be designated times of the doors being opened to the church building when individuals and families will be able to come to pray at church and/or receive communion from reserve, then these times need to be posted in the various locations as well. (please note that we cannot permit more than 10 people in any one facility at a time)
- † Parish Leaders are being encouraged to set up Tele-care phone trees and other ways to connect themselves (leadership) with all the members of the parish. Parish lay leaders have been encouraged to take this opportunity to serve alongside their clergy in the pastoral care of the parish, with of course the direction of those clergy. Parish leadership has also been asked to determine specific ministry needs of the elderly, of those with autoimmune disease or disorders, of those with no health care, of those tired and under-resourced healthcare professionals and other first responder workers within, or somehow connected through relationships to the parish.
- † I have asked that all leadership meetings of parishes should be held by conference call or video. Parish Leadership has been offered use of the Diocesan ZOOM to use for video meetings.
- † I have asked that prayer vigils be organized throughout parishes focusing especially on prayers for our Church leaders, public officials, and all first responders. This can easily be done using FaceTime, Google Hangout, or Facebook.
- † I have asked that to the best of their ability, house churches, bible studies and small groups FaceTime or ZOOM their time together as well as serving each other in various ways.

As I mentioned earlier, it is just as important to also actively Be the Church and the Body of Christ to our neighbors as it is to each other. Some of the following are some ideas coming in from our various mission outposts (parishes) from throughout the diocese:

- † Church members being asked to deliver to neighbor’s mailboxes or doors a simple note at least mentioning that they are praying for them, and to please send them an email with specific requests for those prayers, and a comforting verse of scripture. An example of the note Tricia and I delivered to our neighbors and posted on the *NextDoor* community app we belong to is linked [here](#).

- † Offering to serve at local Food Banks or collect food or donate to those banks. (Community leaders tell us this is going to be a very real need in the coming weeks)
- † Delivering canned and frozen food to the door of the elderly and those in quarantine.
- † Providing childcare or pet care or church members for who are healthcare workers or first responders.
- † Tele-care ministries being set up to call regularly the elderly and those staying home
- † Church members offering to relieve parents for an hour or so if they need to go to a health appointment or get groceries etc.
- † And I am asking all church members to prayerfully consider limiting news consumption to breaking alerts. The goal should be to inform our prayers, but not let the repeated nature of especially cable news distract us and therefore limit our time from those prayers or from the service we might be able to do in a handwritten note that could be written or a phone call of encouragement that could be made.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions (bishop@dwgc.org), or any one of the Deans, Dean Stan (sgerber97@AOL.com), Dean Lisa (lisa@hopepointe.org), Dean Tommy (Tommy.Lamb@staples.com), Dean Travis (Travis@hopepointe.org) And as usual, if you have any need from the Diocesan House, contact Sandy (Sandy@dwgc.org) or if leadership has any need of assistance regarding communication during this time, contact our Director of Communications, Fr. John Tucker (communicationdirector@dwgc.org).

To close, in this time of much anxiety and fear around us, let me share something my daughter Nancy Page sent me from a fellow student of hers at Oxford University in England,

The fear of the Lord perfects our natural fears, by reminding us that there is one who may touch what death cannot: our souls. The hope of the Gospel sets us free from the anxious panic to preserve our own lives at any cost. It relativizes any concern for our own security or safety, and even that of the species. It is “part of our spiritual law,” C.S. Lewis writes to followers of Christ, “never to put survival first: not even the survival of our own species.” We may follow the “law of love and temperance even when they seem to be suicidal.”

Do not be anxious, says the Lord, for we put our trust in Him.

In His peace and with much prayer,