



Bishop's Question and Answer Sessions on March 17 and 18, 2020

From March 18th

Liturgical Questions:

How long will we be unable to gather together for corporate worship? There seems to be conflicting information about this.

We are informed by the wisdom of the public health experts, the guidance of our Presiding Bishop, and the rules imposed by secular authorities regarding public gatherings and public health.

As of today, March 18th, this is the most recent communication from the Presiding Bishop's Office regarding church services during the pandemic:

<https://episcopalchurch.org/posts/publicaffairs/presiding-bishop-michael-currys-word-church-holy-week-and-easter-day-2020-online>. As you can see, he speaks ONLY of closures through Easter Sunday, based upon information that he reviewed from the CDC (their March 15th memo). At that time, the CDC talked about "the next 8 weeks." On March 16th, federal officials suggested closure "for the next 15 days." We do not have a suggestion of firm end date from the Presiding Bishop's office since we do not know how this pandemic will play out in the weeks to come.

This is a fast-changing environment, and we will let you know when a firm end date is established, one that reflects our deep concern for the most vulnerable of our community, the already overtaxed health infrastructure, and the laws of the land.

Can we announce this to our parish?

You can and you should. Give them a link to Bishop Susan's statement on the diocesan website. <http://www.thediocese.net/news/bishops-message-about-holy-week-and-easter/>

Can we do online services?

Yes, you can do online services. Facebook Live is a very easy way to do that (check the COVID-19 Resources page on the diocesan website for instructions). You may do this with Daily Office, with AnteCommunion, and with Holy Eucharist. If you haven't seen the



Eucharist done on Sunday by the National Cathedral (<https://cathedral.org/worship/service-archive/>), it is a great example of how it can be done well.

If you are doing the Eucharist, understand that there will be no way for people watching it to receive the elements. Do not give them in advance, do not pre-consecrate, do not tell them to have some bread and wine handy and that the words spoken at the consecration will consecrate what they have in their hands. The National Cathedral handles this nicely, with an explanation and a prayer:

“A spiritual communion is a personal devotional that anyone can pray at any time to express their desire to receive Holy Communion at that moment, but in which circumstances impede them from actually receiving Holy Communion.

The presider invites the following prayer to be said by all:

My Jesus, I believe that you are truly present in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. I love you above all things, and long for you in my soul. Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. As though you have already come, I embrace you and unite myself entirely to you; never permit me to be separated from you. Amen. (St. Alphonsus de Liguori, 1696-1787)”

If when you preside at such a service, there are others present, please commune them with bread only, although you may consecrate a small amount of wine, which will then be returned to the earth.

I would like livestream Morning Prayer this Sunday as we can't do Holy Eucharist even virtually. Is it permissible to substitute the Morning Prayer scripture readings with the Eucharistic scripture readings for the Fourth Sunday of Lent? They just resonate with me so much better given the circumstances we are now working with.

Please note that you CAN do Holy Eucharist virtually, but if you do decide to go with Morning Prayer, you may substitute the Eucharistic Readings.

How do we note the service in our records?

Go ahead and note that you had the service, but note that it was virtual. It's almost impossible to determine how many people attended virtually, so just leave that blank for now.

May we have outdoor services?

No. We will not be doing corporate worship at this time, indoors or out.

Any other guidance, particularly for Holy Week and Easter?

There are liturgical and technological resources on the diocesan website. Click on the COVID-19 box on the main page. Lisa Kimball and Jim Farwell at VTS are leading a two-part webinar on Friday and Monday on leading Triduum liturgies in a time of quarantine. The registration link and more information can be found at

<https://zoom.us/meeting/register/vJYucO6sqDwuGfuAA1LtxYSQPS84NL6qkw?fbclid=IwARoYPv9H-uc3wOsGOJh6unSjxpoFJPM5Zx4kjzqoFxFxJ2UuRiU9td2BlzwE>

Administration Questions

Is there a recommendation or suggestion for how to discuss with parishioners and staff about use of our church buildings? Is it recommended that everyone work from home from now? Many people in our church have access to our building. Would it be recommended that we request parishioners not access the building at all during this time? For example, entering for quiet personal prayer. Or is that a decision each church should make themselves?

At this point, we leave it to our churches' individual discretion, but do note that if you do so, someone should be regularly cleaning any place where hands may touch, like doorknobs, switches, etc.

Updating our list of Wardens and Treasurers so we can have a Zoom Conference with them:

We'd like to directly support the wardens and treasurers by holding online sessions with them, but we don't always have contact information for them. We've created a Google doc for that purpose and we would ask you to add them (with their permission, of course.)

Here's the link to that Google doc:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1ukcOoAeGYoVloiTydHBHQ_amKzqtnEELj2kCTOSJveo/edit#gid=0

Note that the "Position" box is a drop down menu from which you can choose a title.

Financial Matters:

(From Ted Smith, Treasurer) We've had a few questions about money, and we have some of our own. Two that were sent in are (and I paraphrase):

What latitude is the diocese able to give on the monthly contributions from churches to the diocese?

And

Also, how are people suggesting members keep up regular support for the church?

Let me start with the former. Parishes and the diocese have some significant bills that come due each month. I have asked Church Insurance and Church Pension Group whether they will suspend collection of or extend payment time on these bills and have not received an official response. For now, we have been told verbally that CPG is giving a month's grace on all inbound payments for April billings (Health premiums, pension assessments, life, etc.). We're working on learning whether this is going to be an announced policy or is it simply a reality of CPG's ability to process payments with a suddenly distributed workforce, and what the timing of it will be. We're also asking whether this extends to property insurance, which bills quarterly and so may not be as urgent an issue.

We have some latitude built into our system. The health insurance bill is paid directly out of Mayo House and we then bill out to parishes. We collect throughout the month to pay the following month's bill when it arrives (which was today). So, we've paid the March bill and

mailed out the April bills last week. We're current on our payments and have enough reserves to absorb a month of unpaid billing. Further, on the operational expense side we could absorb a two-month delay in pledge income.

So the takeaway here is that we have some time to assess what we need to do. It's not a holiday from CPG as we understand it today, it's a pause, so my team will keep talking to CPG about the way forward and to churches about their individual situations.

On the continuity question. A lot of the guidance out there is to promote online giving, and that's good advice if you can take it. We understand that it's not possible for some people and in some places and uncomfortable for others, so here's a few suggestions I have.

1. Get a PO Box if you don't have one now, and encourage people to send checks there. We don't know whether or to what extent the USPS is going to be affected in this but you can cut out the "last mile" and make sure things come in semi-regularly.
2. Explore ACH transactions. We have some parishes who pay their pledge and insurance bills this way. If you want to explore this let me know and we can help you talk to your bank to get this set up.

Continuity regarding Christian Formation, particularly with young people and children

Please go to <https://www.dovformation.net/> and click on the banner labeled COVID-19. There are all sorts of ideas there, and new ones are being added every day!

Additional Resources:

Webinar re Liturgies for Holy Week: Lisa Kimball and Jim Farwell at VTS are leading a two-part webinar on Friday and Monday on leading Triduum liturgies in a time of quarantine. The registration link and more information can be found

at <https://zoom.us/meeting/register/vJYucO6sqDwuGfuAA1LtxYSQPS84NL6qkw?fbclid=IwARoYPv9H-uc3wOsGOJh6unSjxpoFJPM5Zx4kjqzqoFxFJ2UuRiU9td2BlzwE>

Resources from Episcopal Church Foundation: <https://www.ecfvp.org/blogs/3763/covid-19-resources-2>

From March 17th

Liturgical Questions

When will we get a decision about whether we are cancelling Holy Week services? If we cancel, how should we proceed?

As announced, we will suspend public worship during Holy Week and Easter. We will suspend all services between now and Holy Week as well. How long a fast from public worship might last after Easter Day is yet to be determined, but we anticipate that it will be some weeks beyond Easter Day.

What does the bishop think about virtual consecration of elements in people's homes? If the ban on in-person worship continues, what are some theologically sound options for sacramental ministry?

These questions are much bigger than one diocese, one bishop. They touch not only on rubrics, but on our Church's understanding of sacraments. They are significant theological questions. For now, the theology, wisdom and practice of the Church requires me to answer "no" to requests for permission to use innovative practices for delivery of the sacraments. Bishop Brooke-Davidson and I will be in communication with our Presiding Bishop and with colleagues in the House of Bishops about these larger matters. As we get new thoughts and understandings on these matters, we will communicate them to you.

I am scheduled to officiate a wedding on Sunday, May 3rd. The couple is having the ceremony and formal reception at a wedding venue and are planning a traditional Episcopal service. Do you have guidance on what I should tell the couple about postponing the service to a later date?

This is a significant pastoral matter for the couple and for the clergy person in relationship with the couple. Talk with the couple honestly and openly. By May 3, the venue will have its own practices and restrictions in place. As of right now, a service could happen only if there are 10 people or fewer and if they stand six feet apart. An alternative would be for the couple to be legally married in a very small ceremony now and have the great celebration of their marriage at a later time.

Live streaming worked very well with our folks on Sunday. A small group gathered for the camera and about 1/3 of our households zoomed in! Any further suggestions for zooming?

There is a great wealth of resources on live streaming and electronic meetings on the COVID-19 resource page on the diocesan website.

The Diocese of Washington has announced suspension of worship through May 18. Is it likely that the Diocese of Virginia will follow?

We will make this decision and share information about it within a week.

As of today, how long are we officially stopping in-person worship and gatherings involving more than 10 people? Indefinitely? 8 weeks? Or other?

As of today, at least through Easter Day. It is likely to be longer, but it is too soon to guess.

Outside services are a common tradition during the Easter season. Is there any hope that any such gatherings would be permitted?

Follow the latest on this on our diocesan COVID-19 resource page. As of right now, we are limited to gatherings of no more than 10 people, whether inside or outside.

Update on funeral guidance?

Funerals are another significant time in the life of a family and congregation. They require pastoral sensitivity. Large funerals and celebrations of life must be postponed. A small church or graveside service (10 people or less) could occur, following all sanitation and hygiene protocols. Bishop Barbara Harris died last week. It has been announced that her funeral will be scheduled after this crisis has passed. This might be a good example for all of us to follow, knowing how difficult this is for families. Talk to your local funeral director, who is probably getting her or his own guidance regarding the disposition of the deceased. Most obituaries in the newspapers are now saying that a funeral/memorial service/celebration of life will be announced at a later date, given recent events.

What is your recommendation for baptisms scheduled for Easter?

Since we will not have public worship on Easter, these baptisms cannot take place. They need to be rescheduled.

What are your guidelines for offering the Eucharist for a group less than 10 people and live-streaming it?

Congregations many have a service of Holy Eucharist and live stream it. A good example is the service live-streamed from the National Cathedral last Sunday. Dean Randy Hollerith talked about it as a “spiritual sacrament” for those who participated from home.

How should we be worshipping if we cannot gather in church?

Online worship is one of the strongest tools at this time. This can be done using Facebook Live, Zoom, or YouTube. If you check the Diocese’s website page of resources, you’ll find much to assist you with these tools. If you are not comfortable with the technology, you can refer your people to places like the National Cathedral, which will probably continue to livestream their worship as they did last Sunday. Check within your regions and see if others are doing it. You might also refer your people to other parishes in their area. Deans and Regional Presidents might be particularly helpful in sharing who is doing what. It might also be a wonderful thing to have different parishes in a region each take a turn in hosting a live worship service each Sunday until we are able to return to in-church worship again.

Can we have communion at a Drive-In Cinema?

While it might be possible to create the space for individuals or families in cars to have a service together, the likelihood that those who distribute the bread would put others at risk is still high. It would also be very difficult to create a sense of the sacred in such an environment.

What about funerals?

It’s tricky. To do a small service without Eucharist in the church for immediate family members might be possible, with a celebration of life at a later date, but again, we’d really prefer for there not to be worship services in the church.

Financial Questions

As we look at more than the usually unpredictable rates of contributions, what latitude is the diocese able to give on the monthly contributions from churches to the diocese?

Parishes and the diocese have some significant bills that come due each month. I have asked Church Insurance and Church Pension Group whether they will suspend collection of or extend payment time on these bills and have not received an official response. For now, we have been told verbally that CPG is giving a month's grace on all inbound payments for April billings (Health premiums, pension assessments, life, etc.). We're working on learning whether this is going to be an announced policy or is it simply a reality of CPG's ability to process payments with a suddenly distributed workforce, and what the timing of it will be. We're also asking whether this extends to property insurance, which bills quarterly and so may not be as urgent an issue. We have some latitude built into our system. The health insurance bill is paid directly out of Mayo House and we then bill out to parishes. We collect throughout the month to pay the following month's bill when it arrives (which was today). So, we've paid the March bill and mailed out the April bills last week. We're current on our payments and have enough reserves to absorb a month of unpaid billing. Further, on the operational expense side we could absorb a two-month delay in pledge income. So the takeaway here is that we have some time to assess what we need to do. It's not a holiday from CPG as we understand it today, it's a pause, so my team will keep talking to CPG about the way forward and to churches about their individual situations.

How are people suggesting members keep up regular support for the church? We do not have on-line giving. We are not closed, so they may mail things to us, but in the unlikely event of a closure, how should the money be received and deposited?

A lot of the guidance out there is to promote online giving, and that's good advice if you can take it. We understand that it's not possible for some people and in some places and uncomfortable for others, so here's a few suggestions I have. Get a PO Box if you don't have one now, and encourage people to send checks there. We don't know whether or to what extent the USPS is going to be affected in this but you can cut out the "last mile" and make sure things come in semi-regularly. Explore ACH transactions. We have some parishes who pay their pledge and insurance bills this way. If you want to explore this let me know and we can help you talk to your bank to get this set up.

If the prohibition on group assemblies continues through mid-May, is there any provision for a congregation to have a congregational meeting and vote without meeting in person?

Congregation may postpone and reschedule congregational meetings within the year. They may meet electronically, provided that notice of the electronic meeting is sent in writing ahead of time and clear records are kept. See the notes about electronic meetings on the diocesan COVID-19 resource page.

What wisdom regarding the building being open for small groups of 10-12 would you wish to pass along?

At this point, groups may be no larger than 10. Follow the best cleaning and hygiene practices, including hand washing and wiping down all surfaces that are touched on a regular basis.

We've asked that food items NOT be a part of any small group gathering. Is this advisable?

That is advisable, given that much food that we serve in church gatherings is in open containers and therefore vulnerable to contamination through touching.

Technology Questions

If a staff member tests positive for the virus, but has not had contact with the congregation I assume the parishioners do not have to self-quarantine, though the staff would. Is that correct?

If you have not already done so, be in touch with the local health authorities about this. Follow their advice.

Ministry Partnership Questions

Should we be continuing our Food pantries, community feedings?

Talk with local health authorities about how you can continue to serve the most vulnerable populations, including people who are food-insecure, during this difficult time. Follow the best practices for sanitation and hygiene.

We have two congregations that rent space from our church. They met on this past Sunday since we were not closed. But do we need to tell them that they too cannot gather in groups of more than 10 at any time in our churches?

Yes. The restriction applies to all groups of all kinds. It is time to invite and expect people of other Churches that use space in your church building to join you in this fast from public worship.

Should we continue to allow 12 step programs to meet in our buildings?

Alcoholics Anonymous has posted guidelines for their meetings, including for electronic gatherings. (They are included on our COVID-19 resource page.) Small groups (10 or fewer) could continue to meet in the church as a way of supporting a vulnerable population. Follow the best practices for sanitation and hygiene.

I am also concerned about ensuring that our congregations and those we serve have adequate provisions of supplies and food during this tentative time.

Many congregations and local communities of all kinds are connecting with each other to ensure that neighbors have what they need. Reach out to local neighborhood groups, nearby congregations and other organizations to work together to ensure that no one goes hungry during this time.

We've had a request to prepare a meal for a homeless shelter...can our group of 7-8 people get together in the parish kitchen to prepare and then deliver this meal?

As of right now, yes. Practice good sanitation and hygiene. Be in touch with the shelter and ensure that you understand and follow their guidelines.

Do you have word from related organizations like Shrine Mont as to how they will respond about parish weekends and other events planned for the upcoming weeks?

Shrine Mont and Roslyn are adjusting their schedules in light of this current global health situation. They will communicate their decisions directly to those affected.

Administration Questions

I hope that we can spend time discussing the continued presence of staff in our offices. Should we be encouraging working remotely?

Let me tell you about what we are doing in our diocesan offices. We have given the staff the option of working from home or coming to the office. Our architecture is such that it promotes social distancing; offices are not close together. Many staff with children have chosen to work from home. Unless your building is closed by public health authorities, you may offer these options. Talk with your staff and with your vestry about this and make your best decision.

For our parish records, do you suggest we record virtual liturgy in the Church Register?

Always record every service in your parish register. It may be impossible to get an accurate count of those in attendance. If you have a number, enter it in register. If not, make a guess or leave the attendance number space blank. You need not count those services as you calculate overall Average Sunday Attendance at the end of the year.

How does this impact on the Search/Call process?

At this point, we are moving forward with congregations who are in a search or call process. We are not suggesting that searches be suspended, but they may need to be adjusted on a case by case basis.

Office and administrative issues

Is the Diocese getting a blanket license for Zoom?

No; the cost would be prohibitive. There are several free platforms, like Facebook Live, that are available. Check our website for a variety of resources.

Finances:

Encourage your people to keep giving, using online giving apps if at all possible. This means you can keep paying your staff. We will be reaching out to the Wardens and Treasurers of our churches to give them encouragement and guidance. Please let us know the names and

contact information for those leaders by clicking on:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1ukcOoAeGYoVloiTydHBHQ_amKzqtnEELj2kCTOSJveo/edit#gid=0A

LAST THOUGHT

Be gentle with yourself in this time of great uncertainty. Do what is necessary to attend to your own health and and spiritual and emotional well-being so you can support your people. Know that you are in our prayers. And here's the prayer that one of you requested:

The Prayer from the Service of Holy Eucharist at National Cathedral on Sunday, March 15th:

My Jesus, I believe that you are truly present in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. I love you above all things, and long for you in my soul. Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally, come spiritually into my heart. As though you have already come, I embrace you and unite myself entirely to you; never permit me to be separated from you. Amen. (St. Alphonsus de Liguori, 1696-1787)