



Notes from the Clergy Webinar and Q&A

July 28, 2020

Bishop Goff opened by reading the poem "[i thank You God for this most amazing](#)" by e.e. cummings

She then read the following prayer:

In Time of Great Sickness and Mortality

O MOST MIGHTY AND MERCIFUL GOD, in this time of grievous sickness, we flee unto thee for our succour. Deliver us, we beseech thee, from our peril; give strength and skill to all those who minister to the sick; prosper the means made use of for their cure; and grant that, perceiving how frail and uncertain our life is, we may apply our hearts unto that heavenly wisdom which leadeth to eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. - The Book of Common Prayer 1928

Prior to the centerpiece presentation on outdoor worship, Bishop Goff took questions from clergy regarding re-gathering.

When will the Matrix on local statistics on COVID cases be updated? **It is updated daily when the Virginia Department of Health updates their raw data. If you tried to get on last night (7/26/20), we took it down to modify the macros because VDH changed the format of the raw data. It's back up now.**

Given that the Governor's policy is to permit gatherings of up to 150 people, and given that some of our churches cannot accommodate everyone who wishes to attend an outdoor service at one time due to the 50 person limit, can we raise the limit of participants in outdoor settings to at least 100 persons? **It depends on the size of setting. The space determines things. People need to be six feet apart. They also need to be able to hear. Measure your space. Be aware of how you can appropriately amplify your voice, if necessary. The guiding principle continues to be figuring out how many people can appropriately fit and hear.**

Which public health markers are required to show a decline for us to be able to regather? Deaths or new cases? **Both. We note that the 14 day rolling average for each of these markers is shown on the tracker on our website. Often, increases in deaths trail increases of new cases. Epidemiologists say that it is only when both markers are on a downward trend consistently that we have reduced the risk sufficiently.**

We are aware that the House of Bishops will be discussing the matter of the distribution of the Eucharist. Will they issue a directive after the meeting? **There will not be a directive per se, but a word from the HOB. They are meeting now and we expect it will be a lively conversation. Bishop Taylor is leading a task group on the practical and theological implications and will respond after they have had a**

chance to digest what the word from the HOB contains. Thereafter, your Bishops will give a word as well. It will probably be a few weeks before we send out further guidance.

If the average increases again, do we pull back on indoor services? Perhaps. It is a possibility. We've seen some recent and troubling spikes in new cases around the Commonwealth, and the Governor has let it be known that if we cannot get them under control, he may roll back the phase that we are in. Our pattern has been to never exceed the secular legal limits, but to be prudent within those limits. We have always said that the Bishop reserves the right to roll things back for everyone's safety. That still applies.

How about small group fellowships outside? There are a couple of places that are doing it now; we're using them as testing grounds. It seems to be working. Use discretion about that. Little kids are difficult to keep apart from one another, so Sunday school activities might not work. Consider carefully and prayerfully what kind of group it is, who would be there, keeping distancing, would that work – would everyone be safe? If you can do that safely for everyone who is involved following the appropriate protocols, particularly insofar as masks and distancing are concerned. We would also recommend that you do it slowly. Try one thing and see how it works. We are trusting your understanding of your own congregational context in this matter. Know, too, that if you choose not to do this, we will support you 100%.

When can we return to offices? We would say not yet for everyone, all the time. Our guidance is this: those who have tasks that can only be done in the office should do them there and stay only long enough to do those tasks. Follow all distancing/masking/sanitation and hygiene protocols. Our primary aim is safety.

What guidance do you have regarding parish retreats in Shrine Mont this fall? Shrine Mont has been open for small groups – essentially, family groups, with limited options for dining. Shrine Mont's board will be making decisions about things like parish retreats at their next board meeting in a few weeks.

Any further news or plans on bishops' visitations in the fall? We have heard that in other dioceses, some bishops are doing virtual visitations with parishes. This cannot include confirmation, of course, but it does offer an opportunity for parishes to feel the presence and support of their bishops in a very particular way. We don't know what the fall will bring in terms of in-person visitations – right now the odds do not favor it – but we are also aware that sometimes you have a new vestry member who is not yet confirmed. We have done some small confirmations, in a sense "private confirmations," in the past at Mayo House and elsewhere, to address that need and we may do them at some point in the future, but for the time being, your bishops are saying "don't worry about that for now, we'll get to it in due course."

For the Diocesan-wide Labor Day worship service, is there any thought given to doing a Spanish option for the diocese's Latino Episcopalians? [this is announced toward the bottom of this report] We are still planning the service, and will take this under consideration.

Paris Ball briefly discussed online camp activities such as reunions as well as the “Light in the Valley Live” program next week. MAT camp is just wrapping up its one-week virtual camp, and there was also a successful online St. Elizabeth’s camp week.

Is the Light in the Valley curriculum going to be available to churches? **Yes. We’re working on how we can do that in the very near future.**

Dancing Priest video!

We shared the “Dancing Priest Video” for a bit of laughter and a reminder that we WILL be back together again one of these days. <https://youtu.be/CFduNE4pXAQ>

Experiences of Outdoor Worship

Paul Walker of Christ Church, Charlottesville spoke of their experience, where they had outdoor worship (Morning Prayer) at the farm of their assistant priest, Marilu Thomas. It was hot, with everyone out in the field. The good news was that everybody stayed distant, used the available hand sanitizer, and we had ushers helping with the car park and making sure everyone spread out. It felt a little weird preaching to people with masks. Preachers and lectors unmasked when they were to speak. They continue to offer Adult Ed via Zoom. This Sunday, they will have their second morning prayer service in person. It was a joyful experience for people to see each other and the good news was that people honored the requirements to stay distant and safe.

Lynn Ronaldi is at Pohick in Lorton. She noted that they are a large and historic church and they have been doing a lot of visioning that prepared them for the current circumstance. There has been much lament and grief being away from the church building. One of the themes of the visioning work, though, was an emphasis that Pohick is not just history; it bridges history and the future, by being welcoming and vibrant in the present. When Pohick started the virtual services, they had thousands of views every week because parishioners shared the links. It was great, but it was beginning to wear on everyone not getting back together. It was wonderful to get the nod to get together. They have done four outdoor services thus far. They hold them in the courtyard. They have four tents that are really just canopies for shade. The organist is upstairs in the choir loft and amplifying into the courtyard. It’s loud enough for the attendees in the courtyard, and since they are all linked into the same amplification system, it can be used for the livestream. They started out small, with about twenty and each week it’s grown. They use a Google doc signup to manage the capacity. This last week, they had two services, with a total of more than fifty attending, and they are seeing at least that many on FB live but it’s great to see each other live. They have a check-in tent, and are taking temperatures. They are also careful about keeping names of attendees in case there’s a need for contact tracing. No one has gotten sick yet. They know there are folks singing at home for FB Live. They’ve been exploring the possibility of having ten bell ringers – socially distanced, but have not yet gotten permission for that. They read Morning Prayer for the first three times they had outdoor worship, but switched to Holy Eucharist with spiritual communion this last week. They are looking toward the future and are setting up their fall virtual calendar. They consider themselves “church in two places – acknowledging lament and groaning but patient.”

Ellen White of Cople Parish, a small and historic rural church began doing outdoor worship in their beautiful space at Yeocomico Church, but then she and her lay leaders suspended the practice. She talked about her practice of continuing to track data from a number of sources. The data was disturbing. In their community, new cases had increased by more than 70 percent over a few days. One data source that was particularly helpful was this one from Harvard University: <https://globalepidemics.org/key-metrics-for-covid-suppression/>. “For us,” she said, “the risk was too high. The growth [of new cases] has been frightening. It’s been a struggle. We have resumed online bible study via zoom, but it’s a group of high risk people so the decision to suspend outdoor worship was the only one my vestry and I could make. We’re going right along. People want to get back in but we’re more concerned that people might get sick.”

Matt Rhodes of Christ Church Millwood said he was initially reluctant to consider outdoor worship because 75% of his congregation is high risk. A survey of the parish indicated that many wanted to have something where they could gather together and the lay leadership was supported. They decided to “split the difference” between their two service times and offered it at 9:30 am. They are blessed with a large property with plenty of room. He led the service from the porch of the Parish House. The lawn is well shaded, and there were preprinted bulletins and recycling to dispose of them after the service. There is a restroom that’s open and is thoroughly cleaned. There were no ushers because they all fall into the high risk category. There was an unintended surprising consequence: with the advent of the outdoor service, viewership tanked for the online service. Now they are simulcasting the live service and the viewership is back through the roof. Matt speaking about what made his parishioners so happy in contrast to livestreaming or recording from the sanctuary, said, “I don’t think it’s seeing the church, but seeing and hearing each other. It’s been a blessing.” They have an adult forum online at 11. They recognize it may not last, but for now they’re supportive. There were many tears of joy to see one another and hear the organist other than through a computer screen.

Q&A re Outdoor Worship

Do you have an inclement weather policy for your new outdoor worship? Paul: **If it rains, we don’t have it. We make the decision that morning and put it on the website and voicemail. We’re moving the worship time to 9 am because of heat.** Lynn: **we communicate through the web platforms.** Matt: **we use our OneCall system and put an announcement on FB.** Ellen: **in this area where internet access is spotty and our parishioners are older, we rely on the old fashioned phone tree.**

I am wrestling with including the Peace in our outdoor MP worship. Do you include a safe passing the peace in your outdoor worship? **For Paul, Matt and Ellen, whose worship has been Morning Prayer, the answer was no. For Lynn, they have used it in the Eucharist service it but their parishioners have been coached to wave or bow to one another rather than to touch.**

Is anyone doing any creative things with hymns? **Matt: most of the hymns were pre-recorded. Now we’re doing a name that tune thing – send your favorite hymns to the organist. The organist is inside but can be heard on our lawn.** Lynn said that having a soloist helps. Paul: **for the outdoor service, the opening and closing hymns are played on a guitar but people aren’t singing. For the online service, we’re**

using a prerecorded prelude and postlude, and also using prerecorded anthems that choir recorded over the past several years.

Other Announcements

Join us now for the first-ever **LGBTQ+ Diocesan Retreat** Saturday, August 22, 2020, 9:00am to 12:00pm with virtual lunch following, register at: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/bringing-our-whole-selves-exploring-the-vital-gifts-of-the-queer-community-tickets-114339169534>

I would raise up to us all the three part series **Becoming Beloved Community** NOW this week. Registration is here, and also streaming on Facebook Live (include the session simultaneously happening today): <https://episcopalchurch.org/beloved-community>
<https://www.facebook.com/episcopalian/videos/2597714720482006/>

Comments from Bishop Taylor and Bishop Brooke-Davidson

Bishop Taylor: Rather than dwelling on what we don't have, let's encourage each other to focus on the fact that God loves us and beckons us to be in relationship with God. We feel that great joy in relationship and that helps us live in a space of hope.

Bishop Jennifer: Your Bishops will be offering a diocesan-wide worship service online on the Labor Day weekend – this is a chance for the diocese to connect in a new way. It's also a chance for the parish to give the clergy a day off. The whole service will be available in several different ways. There will be people we can't reach but we want to reach as many as possible. This is a work in progress so we will be giving you more information as it takes shape. We are aware how very, very hard everyone is working and we so appreciate it!

Eucharistic Task Force

If you have thoughts or questions you believe would be helpful for the Eucharist Task Force to consider as they work on what might be ahead for us as a diocese on this important subject, please do send them to Bishop Taylor at ptaylor@thediocese.net.