

Questions from Clergy Webinars 3/24-25/20

Finance and Administration

Is CPG contemplating a scenario where **pension payments** might be indefinitely suspended in light of churches trying to figure out how long they can remain staffed with clergy? **We haven't heard this from CPG, but we expect as the situation evolves, there will be more guidance from them on what can and cannot be done.**

Do you know whether Church Insurance Co has included **business interruption insurance** as part of its standard coverage or whether we all need to check our own church policy? **We have asked but haven't gotten an answer from them yet.**

Could the bishop provide guidance for when the **staff are not all on the same page** about whether or not to be in the church buildings and how clergy leadership might navigate that? **Start with a discussion with the staff. If there is physical distancing and there is work to be done that CANNOT be done remotely, staff can come into the office. Otherwise, if the work can be done remotely, it should be done remotely. Our primary focus, though, is to create safety as much as possible.**

Our parish has our **own preschool** that shares our 501(c)3 number. I know of at least four other congregations that operate their own preschools, not merely allowing another organization to use the church space. Is there a way or plan to bring us together to discuss where folk are going from here now that all schools are closed through the end of the school year. I'm just wondering what others are doing as the Vestry and I try to make decisions about our preschool's future. **We'll work to facilitate such a conversation. Please let Ted Smith know (tsmith@thediocese.net) if you'd like to be a part of such a conversation.**

There are many **gifted tech people** in the Diocese, but not all churches or Rectors have this access – can we figure out how share resources in some way? **Nancy and Erin (nchafin@thediocese.net and ekamran@thediocese.net) are compiling a list of people with gifts to offer. Do note, though, that there are many tech-oriented resources available on the COVID page, so that might be the starting point for the less tech-savvy, and then if we can share who can provide some help, that would be the second step.**

The Coronavirus relief bill in the Senate appears to include loans for disaster relief for nonprofits, including churches, with the potential for loan forgiveness. Are we tracking this and if it happens will the standing committee give accelerated approval for parish's to take a loan. Or, will we apply for something as a diocese? **A deal on the bill was struck this morning (3/25/2020.) We are awaiting further information on what the bill includes and how it might be helpful to us in this difficult time.**

Diocesan Scheduling and Events

Shrine Mont is not opening until after the dates for the **Bishop's Spring Clergy Retreat**. As all of calendars are in flux and events being rescheduled, it would be very helpful to know what the

status of the retreat is and if it is not being canceled this year, when the new target dates are. **Instead of an in-person retreat, we are planning a virtual retreat for Tuesday, May 5th. We'll send further information as the planning for it is firmed up.**

Ted, will refunds be sent to those who have already registered and paid for **clergy conference**? **They will be sent out immediately.**

Is there still a plan for the diocese to host **webinars for Wardens and Treasurers**? **Yes. Since we last talked, we got the contact info for wardens and treasurers from a large number of our churches. We now have critical mass, so to speak, so we will plan to have these webinars soon.**

Are **AA groups** still allowed to meet in the Church? **AA is sending out guidance to all its groups. Some are continuing to meet, as long as the group is under ten people and appropriate physical distancing is done. Some are meeting virtually. This is a discussion you should have with your AA contact. Of course, if the church is closed because a cleric or a staffer has been diagnosed with the virus, it is a moot point. Otherwise, if the other rules are met, and if they wipe down the space as they depart, this can continue.**

Does Church Insurance extension apply to **health insurance payments**? **We have not yet heard from CPG about extensions for health insurance, although the question has been asked of them. Right now, it's the property and casualty insurance only.**

Liturgy/Worship

Would the Bishop provide clarity about or permission for **holding services outdoors**, like in a parking lot, where everyone stays in their cars, parked every other space so 10 ft away. Or should we understand the no-gatherings of 10 or more to truly mean not at all. **No, no gatherings no matter how they are conducted. We know this grieves our hearts, but it is the right thing to do.**

I'd be grateful for some general reflections on how important it is to be leading worship from the **sanctuaries vs our homes**. That seems to me like a tricky balance between a potential pastoral need for the familiar space and a subliminal ecclesiological message we ought to be thoughtful about. **Much depends on the circumstances of your particular parish. A couple of our churches are actually closed because someone in them tested positive. There's great wisdom in the webinars that Lisa Kimball and Jim Farwell from VTS did (<http://www.thediocese.net/news-and-events/covid-19-resources/virtual-worship/>). They talked about creating a sacred space even if you're leading online worship from your home. Do look at that resource and see what you might do.**

The **service register** does not seem to lend itself to entering services we do on Facebook or Zoom. What sort of record should we be keeping of these services? I am simply keeping a log. **See the guidance from The Rev. Canon Michael Barlowe on the diocesan COVID page. http://www.thediocese.net/Customer-Content/www/CMS/files/From_Canon_Michael_Barlowe_COVID-19_Parochial_Report.pdf**

On Monday, at a meeting of the Association of Episcopal Deacons, it was noted that a priest continued with the **consecration** via video, but then did NOT consume the Body or Blood, but instead mentioned that he was having a Fast from the Eucharist, allowing the heart and soul to receive the Eucharist instead. Opinion? This is the reference I was referring to:

Spiritual Communion. Attributed to St Alphonsus de Liguori 1696-1787. 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. Bishop Susan: this aligns with my own thoughts as to how I would do it if I were still in parish ministry. We are in solidarity with our congregations and with those who have even more stringent restrictions right now. Our tradition does allow, however, for the priest and the altar party to receive the consecrated elements, even if the remote congregation cannot. Think through your own understanding of sacramental theology and ecclesiology, along with what you are aiming to say to the congregation, and make your best decision about this.

The State of Virginia has limited gatherings to less than 10. Can 4 or 5 (Rector, Deacon, musician and videographer) be in the church, keeping distance, to provide **video worship**? As mentioned before, the primary need is for safety. If it is a small number and there is safe distance between those participating, that doesn't seem unreasonable.

We will miss our **episcopal visit** on May 3. When do you expect to reschedule? When do you anticipate sending out the revised schedule for clergy visits? Would the bishops please consider a way to do some regional confirmations for youth who are already in preparation. School cancellation has been a big blow. We will be addressing this with the affected congregations on a parish by parish basis. One of the good things is that we will have Bishop Porter Taylor joining us as Assistant Bishop early this summer, and he can start doing some of the visits that will need to be rescheduled. We'll also look at options like regional or ShrineMont-based confirmations.

I have a **wedding** scheduled for May 2 at a winery. I am wondering what message I should give to the couple. Should we be looking at alternatives, postponing, etc? Of course, the winery may be closed so it may make our decision for us. However, if our congregations are still closed at that time, are we allowed to find an alternative way to do a wedding (just ourselves and the couple and a few witnesses) or are we not allowed to officiate any such gathering if public worship is still prohibited? If this would be a very small ceremony (under ten people) and appropriate physical distancing is observed, this can proceed. Some couples are electing to do something like this, with the large celebration at a later point in time.

Saw a **wedding done virtually** on the news. Couple in one place minister in another. Is that a valid marriage? Bishop Susan: I can't speak to the legal validity and I'm not entirely sure I want to opine on this beyond saying "Don't do this!"

I attended yesterday's ZOOM. During your initial remarks, I heard the public worship fast would continue until at least May 8th with no public worship at Easter. We are to not circumvent, but rather to find a way through this time together. I thought we were being encouraged to maintain our longing for Eucharist (in diaspora?) as we lean into/upon the Word. Then during Q&A, there were comments about permitting live streaming from church worship spaces with consecration of elements to offer a spiritual

communion that could be shared among the sparse Altar party gathered provided all health precautions are observed. I'm confused and seek clarity and direction. Are we to **fast from Eucharist**/communion until the whole of Christ's Body can gather together once again publicly for liturgy? Thank you. **Bishop Susan: The guidance I've given says that we are permitted, indeed encouraged, to join together in spiritual communion during this time of pandemic. It is fine to livestream Morning Prayer and other offices. It is also fine to livestream a Eucharistic Service from the sanctuary with a very few persons assisting, with consecration of a very small amount of bread and wine. In that case, the altar party would not consume the consecrated elements, but would dispose of them, returning them to the earth, after the service is completed. The wonderful prayer of St. Alphonse de Liguori cited above is an appropriate way to frame spiritual communion.**

I know that **funerals**, last rites and more will be covered next week but I could really use some more guidance now as I have just had a parishioner pass away. Any and at all guidance would be greatly appreciated. Thanks so much and have a wonderful day!! **DO check with the funeral director as to what is permitted in your county. Health officials on the local level are giving guidance to these funeral directors. This is a tender pastoral time. A very small service, under ten people, perhaps at graveside while observing appropriate precautions, would be acceptable, and you could offer a more fulsome Celebration of Life once the restrictions on gatherings are lifted.**

The President has signaled that he is planning to **lift Federal restrictions by Easter**. Whether we agree with such a move or not (and I do not), is there some advice you can give to us to relay to our anxious and impatient parishioners who will cite the President's initiative as a reason why we should no longer be closed to public worship beyond the lifting of Federal restrictions? We hear the message of fasting for this season of contagion, and of standing in solidarity with others locally and across the globe, and of striving to protect especially the most vulnerable among us, but at least a portion of our congregations hear a different message from the President. **Remember that the President may prefer that restrictions end by Easter to support the economy, but even he is now walking back some of his earlier statements after pushback from leaders of his own party and by the health leaders he is talking to. Remember, too, that when it comes to shutdowns and restrictions, that is a matter that is decided by the governor of each state; we see differences across the country depending upon the intensity of the virus in different states. So we will always err on the side of caution. We are in this together, and we care for each other together.**

Pastoral Matters

Bp. Susan, we have been praying for you since your diagnosis; is your **surgery** still scheduled for this Friday? **Bishop Susan: yes. I had my pre-op work on Tuesday (March 24th) and will have the surgery on Friday at 1:15. I am buoyed by your prayers and am grateful for them.**

The number of cases in the US has doubled from 25K to over 51K in the last four days. I think it's important for us to help prepare our people in terms of **planning for end of life choices**. When health systems become overwhelmed it will be vitally important for providers to know the wishes of their patients. Our congregations will be affected, whether our members or their family in other states. This seems to be something we are not talking about. Do you have a word of how to do this pastorally in this time? **We will address this in greater length on our call next week. We are aware that there are particular challenges and we want to support you in your pastoral work.**

