



EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN CONNECTICUT

PARTICIPATING IN GOD'S MISSION

Following Jesus in the Midst of a Pandemic

A Pastoral Letter from the Bishops of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut

“Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God.” 1 Peter 1:21

The author of the First Letter of Peter is writing to followers of Jesus who are exiles, dispersed in the foreign lands of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. In uncertain and difficult times, the writer calls these early Christians to trust in the truth of the Resurrection, to put their faith and hope in God, and work to restore, support and strengthen those who are suffering. (1 Peter 5:9-10)

We who are living in the midst of the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic (as the World Health Organization now characterizes the coronavirus) are living in uncertain and difficult times, not unlike the experience of the early Christians. We have never been in the situation we now find ourselves. Our world is turned upside down. Fear, insecurity, and anxiety concerning how COVID-19 will affect us, those we love, and our communities -including the church - consume us. Overwhelmed by a plethora of information coming at us on social media, television, radio and newspapers, we seem to be awash, confused, and paralyzed by not knowing what to do.

Yet our faith commends us to do otherwise, to not be consumed by fear, insecurity, and anxiety. As followers of Jesus, we put our trust in God who raised Jesus from the dead and who, in the power of the Holy Spirit, sends us to be about God's mission of restoration, reconciliation and wholeness in the face of brokenness, alienation, and illness. Now is the time for us to be the Church that God wants us and needs us to be.

As your bishops, we have been, and will continue to be, in regular communication with the clergy and lay leaders of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut (ECCT) regarding how best to respond to the realities of COVID-19. Over the last two weeks we have written three letters to the clergy and wardens-in-charge of parishes without clergy with specific advice and counsel in response to COVID-19. These letters, along with other



important information and weblinks related to the coronavirus, can be found on the website of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut at www.episcopalct.org . We commend these resources to you.

One of the most urgent questions before us at the moment is: should the Episcopal Church in Connecticut close our parishes and not hold regular worship services? Our primary advice and counsel are that we should do all in our power to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. As bishops we do not have the individual authority to close the parishes of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut. Our canons (church laws), however, allow us to give pastoral direction related to the worship and spiritual life of parishes. Medical and health professionals, epidemiologists, and government officials all agree that the best way to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 is to reduce human contact and practice “social distancing.” To that end we strongly encourage the clergy and lay leadership of ECCT parishes to decide against holding public worship for at least the next two weeks in order to help mitigate the advance of the coronavirus. While ceasing public worship is prudent at this time, we encourage parishes to use available technology in order to offer some form of worship service, as possible, to the faithful. If you have difficulty making such provisions, we encourage you to connect to, and collaborate with, parishes in your Region, as well as utilize the resources on communications and worship that we are sharing on our COVID-19 update page on our website. In all cases of worship, the use of the common cup in the context of the Eucharist should not be provided.

Consistent with limiting public worship, we encourage clergy and lay leaders in ECCT to consider cancelling, postponing, or holding via video call or other form of digital communication all parish meetings and gatherings in the immediate future in order also to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Once again, limiting exposure and physical interaction is key here. Diocesan events and meetings will similarly be cancelled, postponed or held by zoom. Please consult the ECCT website for details of specific meetings.

As much as we are called to be wise in helping to stem the tide of the coronavirus, we must not use the circumstances of COVID-19 to turn away from our calling to be about God’s mission in the world. Just the opposite! We must stand in the face of the forces of fear, insecurity and anxiety, and witness to the loving, liberating, life-giving reality of



Jesus (as our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry so powerfully reminds us.) We urge the lay and ordained leaders in the parishes of ECCT to take counsel together to determine how best to continue to care for the poor, marginalized, and those who are housing and food insecure, while adhering to the COVID-19 guidelines offered by medical and governmental agencies and your local health officials. Once again, resources to help you with this discernment and participation in God's mission can be found on the ECCT website.

While "social distancing" might be the order of the day to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, spiritual and non-physical closeness in these times of isolation and quarantine is called for more than ever before. Prayer is a potent force in this. In prayer we are profoundly connected to God and one another in deep and meaningful ways that passes all understanding. In prayer we are never alone. In addition to continuing our deep, personal prayer practices, we invite you, with the assistance and direction of your clergy and lay leaders, to develop specific ways to reach out and connect with one another, and neighbors near and far, using available technology. Intercessory prayer lists, telephone chains calling on the sick and shut-in and those in self-isolation because of the coronavirus, texting and emailing one another, are all important ways that we can stay connected to God and our neighbors. These holy spaces are spaces of listening and caring. In prayer, we connect to one another and to God as people of hope in this challenging time. We invite you to be creative and "try on" new ways to be united to God and each other in Christ. This is a time to learn to be Church, the Body of Christ, in new ways.

To that end we, your bishops, will host a zoom on-line conversation on Sunday, March 15th from 1:30-2:30 pm to discuss our life together in Christ and how we are called to be about God's mission in this time of COVID-19. Our diocesan zoom account allows for up to 300 participants, so we invite as many of you as possible to join us in this new way of being together. Specifics on how to log on to the zoom conversation will be on the ECCT website. In addition, we plan to be available weekly to the clergy and wardens of ECCT parishes in a similar zoom call each Wednesday, from 8:30-9:30 am to discuss how God is calling us to be Christian leaders at this time.

Dear companions in Christ, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are reminded to put our faith, hope and trust in God who raised Jesus from the dead and gave him



glory. We are indeed called to be the followers of Jesus sent in God's mission that God wants us and needs us to be at this time.

In the prayer attributed to St. Francis, let us pray:

Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith, where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

Faithfully,

Bishop Diocesan

The Rt. Rev. Ian T. Douglas

Bishop Suffragan

The Rt. Rev. Laura J. Ahrens