

# The Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh



March 18, 2020

Dear friends in Christ,

It is with a heavy heart that I am asking the clergy and congregations of this diocese to suspend public worship through Holy Week and Easter Sunday, as a necessary precaution toward mitigating the effects of the coronavirus in our communities. This is consistent with the prudent advice given by our Presiding Bishop in his March 17 letter, and any extension beyond April 12 will be based on my consultation with other Pennsylvania bishops and the directives of our public health officials.

During this time, I am also asking the clergy to continue, if feasible, the celebration of Sunday Eucharist or Morning Prayer in their parishes, and with *no more than three other selected individuals* in attendance. I hope these can be live-streamed whenever possible. I will preside at the small assembly at Saint Barnabas on March 22 and at Saint Stephen's, Wilksburg, on March 29, joining them in prayer for their congregations and neighborhoods, as well as for all of you.

I know that this past Sunday many congregations maintained effective social distancing and observed other best practices around hygiene. I dearly wish we could continue to gather with little risk in this way. However, as the number of COVID-19 cases increases exponentially — and it will — so will the number of people who are carrying the virus without immediate symptoms. Each contact, before coming to a service, and after going home, poses additional risk. Under these conditions, there is simply no “safe” number for a public gathering.

Already in our diocese, we are seeing innovative ways in which parish leaders, lay and ordained, are continuing and even strengthening our life together when we cannot physically be together. A sampling: we know of live-streaming of Sunday services from our cathedral, by our churches in Brentwood, Canonsburg, East Liberty, Franklin Park, Highland Park, North Hills, Mt. Lebanon, Oakmont, and Peters; others are planning to do so; lay leaders in Mt. Lebanon are being trained in Zoom video conferencing, so that spiritual growth groups and parish gatherings can continue; North Hills is streaming daily Morning Prayer; Homewood's Bible study is now being conducted by conference call; and the list goes on. There is always a danger in mentioning some at the risk of missing others, so please share what you are doing. Let's learn from each other. We are not alone in our desire to show the world Christ's compassionate love in these times.

Please know that the diocesan staff continues to be a resource for you. They may be working remotely, but they are very much at work and still can be reached through their office phone numbers and e-mail addresses. Our website is now providing links for live and recorded worship services and other updated information. All of the above, of course, can be accessed at [www.episcopalpgh.org](http://www.episcopalpgh.org).

Finally, I wish to emphasize this point: our churches are not closing. We are continuing to do what we have always done, *to love, teach and heal in the name and power of Jesus Christ*. We are continuing to offer prayer for the Church and for the world, to support the weak, to comfort the afflicted, to bless the dying, to soothe the suffering. We are simply adapting the means by which we do these things to the needs of the present crisis. And we are trusting that the faithful and loving God who calls us, walks with us on this road. As Christ walked the road to the Cross, and found it led to the Resurrection, so we trust that God will use this present time to multiply mercy and hope among all God's children.

As always, this comes with my grateful prayers for the leadership and service you offer to a world now in a great deal of pain. Please feel free to reach out to me with any questions or concerns. May the Lord always bless you and keep you.

Faithfully, your bishop,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Dorsey", with a small cross symbol to the left of the first letter.

(The Right Reverend) Dorsey W.M. McConnell, D.D.  
VIII Bishop of Pittsburgh