



The Episcopal Diocese of East Carolina

The Right Reverend Robert S. Skirving, Bishop

March 13, 2020

To the People of the Episcopal Diocese of East Carolina

Dear Friends in Christ,

It is with great reluctance that I write today to request that all congregations in the Episcopal Diocese of East Carolina suspend public worship, effective immediately and continuing through the end of March 2020. This direction is made after consultation with many of our clergy and with members of our Executive Council. As I understand them, the Canons of The Episcopal Church give me the authority and responsibility to offer such direction, in my capacity as your Bishop. As it will be helpful, I will be available to speak with any clergy or churchwardens needing assistance.

This decision has not been taken lightly. It has been made in response to the request of the Governor of the State of North Carolina and in line with the recommendations of the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, published yesterday. In keeping with their efforts to mitigate the impact of COVID-19, they have recommended, "that organizers of events that draw more than 100 people should cancel, postpone, modify these events or offer online streaming services. These events include large gatherings where people are in close contact (less than 6 feet), for example concerts, conferences, sporting events, faith-based events and other large gatherings."

The NC DHHS has made these recommendations for the next 30 days, with reassessment to follow. We very much hope that, in fact, we will be free to resume public worship in time for Palm Sunday, Holy Week and Easter, April 5-12.

Suspending public worship will challenge our life as church. As a diocese, we will work to share resources for online worship and for prayer and worship at home. This Sunday, March 15 at 11:00am, I plan to lead a service of Morning Prayer in our chapel at Diocesan House and stream it live through Facebook. All are welcome!

We will also need to develop pastoral strategies for caring for the most vulnerable in our midst, and I hope that our congregations will find ways to serve the needs of community members struggling to provide food for their families or to provide Internet access for children sent home from school. While public worship is suspended, we must give good attention to other dimensions of our life and decide locally when it is appropriate to modify plans and when events must be cancelled or postponed. I look forward to learning of your creativity in meeting these challenges! We will be in regular contact and will share resources through our website, by email, and through Zoom meetings.

We believe that we are called to love God and neighbor, and that our neighbors are all of God's children in the State of North Carolina and beyond. By suspending public worship, we hope to help slow the spread of COVID-19 particularly amongst the most vulnerable in our communities. In time, I would rather learn that such precautions were unnecessary than learn that by ignoring these recommendations we had contributed directly to the suffering of our neighbors.

Yours in Christ,

Robert S. Skirving

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