



Diocese of Utah

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP
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Salt Lake City, UT 84111

October 2, 2020

In my distress I called upon the LORD;
to my God I cried for help.
From his temple he heard my voice,
and my cry to him reached his ears. (Psalm 18:6 NRSV)

Dear People of The Episcopal Diocese of Utah:

After these nearly six months, I had sincerely hoped the Covid-19 pandemic would be at the point we could resume our worship gatherings, congregational events and meetings in the way we did in 2019. Unfortunately, that is not the case. There have been over 208,000 deaths from the virus in the United States. While the virus rates in Arizona are doing better, here in Utah, the number of cases is rising at an alarming rate. Utah has the dubious distinction of being number five on the list of highest risk states for the virus. And, we have seen that some of the largest super spreading instances of the virus have been church services where safety protocols were not in place

I wish the virus was no more dangerous than a cold or not easily spread from one to another. That is not the case. President Trump, who has been tested regularly along with his closest aides, now has it. Please say prayers for him, the First Lady and our nation.

Given all of this, we must continue our efforts to mitigate the spread of the COVID-19. What is scientifically certain is that social distancing, the wearing of masks, and limiting in-person indoor activities in duration are the best ways of keeping the virus from spreading.

Some people have advocated letting the virus spread until we achieve herd immunity. That is allowing enough people to get the virus and hope they develop immunity so that it reduces the spread. We do not know, at this time, whether or not a person is immune to the virus after having it and if they are, how long that immunity might last. More troubling with this approach is that developing herd immunity requires 70 to 90 percent of the people to get the virus. Presently, it is estimated that 7,280,200 people in the U.S.A. have had the virus. The population of the U.S.A. is 331,000,000. Seventy percent of that number is 231,700,000. To reach herd immunity would require an additional 224,419,800 people getting the virus. In the United States, about 2.8% of those who contracted the virus have died from it. If you apply that percentage to the 231,000,000 people needed to get to the minimum for herd immunity, you end with 6,468,000 fatalities. If you take an optimistic figure of one percent of people dying who contract the virus and apply that to 231,000,000, you get 2,310,000 deaths. This is a nightmare scenario.

You, the people of our diocese, are precious to me. I hold as a fundamental responsibility, the care and concern for the safety of our people. Therefore, as the temperature gets colder and outdoor worship becomes untenable for us, I am issuing the following for our corporate life.

- Church offices may open in spaces large enough for physical distancing preferably with separate spaces / offices.
- The decision to hold in-person services is the domain of the Clergy in charge, in consultation with the Vestry / Bishop's Committee. If in-person services will be offered then:
- Scale-able worship size, not to exceed 50 persons, in spaces large enough for physical distancing. Face masks will be worn, households will sit together with physical distancing of six feet from other households or individuals. Disinfecting of hard surfaces shall be done following each meeting or worship service. Common cup shall not be used for Holy Communion.
- No congregational singing. Soloists or a cantor should be 25 feet from the congregation and not directly facing them.
- Services should strive to be no longer than 30 minutes.
- Opening windows and doors during worship to provide as much ventilation as possible for the people present.
- Signs will be prominently displayed that people who are manifesting COVID-19 symptoms should not enter the building. Temperatures will be taken of people who come to the service.
- Virtual Morning Prayer and other offerings shall continue.
- Hand sanitizers shall be readily available.
- No food or beverages will be served before or after the service.
- Restrooms will be opened for individual use - one person at a time.
- A record of the people who attend the service shall be kept for the purpose of contact tracing.
- If a person is diagnosed in the week after the service, then all people who attended the service will be informed of this. The cleric will be tested for the virus and worship services will be put on hold for 14 days until it is certain the cleric is virus free.
- The option to hold Zoom Holy Eucharist Services with people coming to the church following the service to receive the sacrament will be at the discretion of the Clergy in Charge.
- The Clergy in Charge and leadership will determine if outside groups may utilize the building. In all cases, they will be required to follow physical distancing and health and safety protocols and shall be responsible for the cleaning of the space used.

I recognize how difficult this is. Like you, I am fatigued with this different and unwanted "normal". You might ask, "Where is God?" My answer is, God is where God always is. God is in your heart and soul and in Heaven. God continues to hear our prayers. I pray for all the churches in our diocese every morning and evening before going to sleep. In that way, I carry you with me through all the hours of the day and night. You are a constant comfort to me and something that I celebrate, and I need something to celebrate, especially now. Thank you!

As I wrote above, please pray for our President and for our nation. We are deeply divided and need all the good will of each other to make it through this time. I have attached to this letter the sermon from Presiding Bishop Michael Curry that was shown at our Convention. He speaks deeply to our time and what we, The Episcopal Church, should be in this moment.

Faithfully,

