



The Episcopal Diocese of Dallas

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The Right Rev. Dr. George R. Sumner, Bishop

March 13, 2020

Pastoral Directive – Coronavirus
Third Friday in Lent, 2020

I am aware of the recent emergency declarations by Dallas County and the City of Dallas that, amongst other measures, prohibits gatherings of more than 500 people. I am not aware of similar declarations in other counties or cities of our Diocese at this time, but I expect to see many take similar actions. While the declarations by Dallas County and the City of Dallas provide no exception for houses of worship, I am not aware of a single gathering of more than 500 persons in any of our churches, so I am not prohibiting worship.

Consequently, I offer the following pastoral direction in addition to my pastoral directive of March 3rd, which still stands:

- Rectors, Vicars and Priests-in-Charge (hereafter, “Rectors”) must ensure that there is no gathering of more than 500 people. “Gathering” is defined as a single room or space, such as a nave or parish hall. “Gathering” does not preclude simultaneous worship services in separate parts of a church’s campus, although, in such cases, care must be taken to ensure that events such as coffee hour, do not combine, resulting in more than 500 people present.
- Rectors will advise their parishioners that if they feel they are at risk by attending worship, they are not obligated to attend.
- Rectors will counsel those most at risk from serious consequences of the virus (those over 60 years of age, people with heart disease, respiratory ailments, diabetes, cancer etc.) to refrain from attending and make use of remote worship services.
- Rectors will provide for “remote worship” for their parishioners. Such remote worship could include live streaming worship services or providing parishioners via email or otherwise, a “bulletin” for Morning Prayer and a written copy of the day’s sermon to be shared among their family and friends. You should contact Kimberly Durnan at kdurnan@edod.org or 469.247.3645 for information and counsel on how to use technology to facilitate live streaming or sermon recording.

- Rectors should encourage parishioners to let the Rector know if they are choosing to worship remotely, so that they may be included in Sunday's attendance. This is not to elevate attendance; rather, this is to help isolated parishioners experience that they are part of the worshipping community.
- I leave additional precautions such as cancelling mid-week services, cancelling Sunday school or Bible studies, cancelling Lenten studies, or cancelling coffee hour to the discretion of the Rector.
- Clergy are prohibited from shaking hands in receiving lines before or after worship.
- Churches are strongly discouraged from passing a collection plate throughout the pews. Alternately, an offering plate / bag / basket should be made available at some location visible to parishioners. If collection plates are used, the ushers should "wash in" and "wash out" after handling the plates, and the plates should be sanitized.
- Rectors may commission as Lay Eucharistic Visitors family members or known care givers of at-risk parishioners who will worship remotely.
- Clergy who feel at risk for attending worship should contact the Canon to the Ordinary.

Please forgive the business-like wording of this directive, which I dictated very early this morning. I am currently returning from London and will be in Dallas later this afternoon. I will have more to say pastorally once I am on the ground.

You are all in my prayers: for your health, for the safety of all those in your charge, and against disastrous spread of the virus. Please pray for me and for all of the Diocese of Dallas.

Peace,

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The Rt. Rev. Dr. George R. Sumner
Bishop, Diocese of Dallas

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