



The Episcopal Diocese of Newark

The Right Reverend Carlye J. Hughes, Bishop of Newark

31 Mulberry Street, Newark, NJ 07102 • 973-430-9976 • chughes@dioceseofnewark.org

March 13, 2020

Dear Companions on the Journey,

At our Convention just over a month ago, we focused on a word often found in Holy Scripture, **behold**. A simple word that sounds old fashioned today. Behold is used to communicate that something important is about to be said or happen in the Bible. When we read or hear that word in the Bible, we could substitute the words: “now listen, this is very important.”

With that in mind I write: **Behold, God is in this moment**. Now listen. This is very important; God is in this moment. Right this very minute, as people search for the answer to a perilous threat, God is with us, our refuge and strength is a very present help in this time of trouble. While we are full of questions and concerns, God is with us. As our routines are disrupted, God is with us. When we discover how to be church in new and unusual ways, God is with us.

The risk of COVID-19 infection, the need to keep the public safe, and ensuring the safety of our members all require that we take deliberate and unusual steps. **Effective Saturday, March 14 through Sunday, March 29, 2020, all congregations east of Dover (and including Dover) in the Diocese of Newark will refrain or fast from gathering for public worship, large group gatherings, and meetings involving high-risk groups (those over 60 and/or those with underlying medical conditions). Congregations west of Dover will interface with local authorities and the Bishop’s Office to determine operations.** We will reevaluate on March 30 and hope to resume public worship on Palm Sunday, April 5.

During this time, **we will do all that we can to support the spiritual, mental, and emotional needs of our congregations and communities while protecting their physical health. Though we will not offer public worship, we will continue loving God and loving God’s people.** We will offer our prayers, praises, laments, and worship in writing, via phone call, and online. We ask all Episcopalians in our diocese to care for each other and their neighbors in the same way. Though we may not shake hands or give hugs, we can call, write, encourage, and support each other and our neighbors. I ask you to keep a careful eye out for those who struggle during this time of isolation, anxiety, and prolonged worry.

I will continue to send an update to the entire diocesan email list each week. I ask your help with sharing this message to those not on our list. The Diocese of Newark website will continue to update changes and offer resources for congregations and individuals for online and home prayer. Diocesan meetings and larger group events are being evaluated with the same criteria. Some will be cancelled, others will meet via phone or video conference.

We are not the first to experience the wilderness of unknown and unfamiliar territory. Moses, Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, and Jesus all come to mind. God does not abandon people in the wilderness, instead time and again the wilderness is a place where people are drawn more fully into God’s presence. I am trusting the One who created us to order our steps, to give us wisdom, to care for all people, and to watch over our going out and coming in, during this time and forevermore.

Grace and peace,

The Right Rev. Carlye J. Hughes

XI Bishop of Newark