

A Message from Bishop Hughes:

All congregations to refrain from public worship & gatherings for the duration of this health crisis

March 21, 2020

Dear Companions in Faith,

At times the news does not resonate until the moment we become part of the story. In the past few days, multiple members of our diocese have learned of people they know who have been diagnosed with COVID-19. Suddenly this pandemic has become more real as people we know and love struggle with illness. As one diagnosed person said, "I cannot bear to imagine who might be ill because they interacted with me before symptoms began."

This illness has forced us to learn new ways to love each other and our neighbors. We are discovering different pathways to express our faith. We have stepped into virtual meetings, gatherings, prayers and worship. Yes, we may be physically distant, but we are still connected by strong bonds of love and shared faith. As a matter of fact, we love others so much that we sacrifice our pleasure in their company to keep them and ourselves safe. When has distance ever been so full of hopeful and compassionate care?

We hope that all people have a healthy future. It is this hope that motivated us to radically change our experience of church. **As of this week, all churches in the Diocese of Newark are directed to refrain from public worship. Additionally, all churches will fast from meetings and gatherings in the diocese for the duration of this health crisis. While we do not know when this crisis will end, it seems certain that it will not end before Holy Week and Easter.**

This is a terrible disappointment to all of us. Yet, clergy and laity have already begun exploring opportunities for us to offer our faith as a gift to God and God's people through Lent, Easter, and beyond. As long as is necessary, we will do all we can to be loving, faithful, and mindful of the safety of all people.

Behold. Now listen, this is important: God is with us. God remains our refuge, strength, and very present help in this time of trouble. As we gather on the telephone or social media for worship or prayers, God is with us. When we decide to check on the vulnerable, God is with us. While walking and praying for the neighbors and shops we pass, God is with us. When we offer support or encouragement to medical professionals or first responders, God is with us. When we share our disappointment, fear, and hope with others, God is with us.

God remains with us every minute, hour, day, week, and month of this health crisis. It seems certain that God has ministry for us to do in this strange and complicated time. The world cries and clamors for faithful people to reach out with God's love. Last Sunday we began to be the church. I trust God to continue this good work in us until it is complete.

Grace and peace,

The Rt. Rev. Carlye J. Hughes

XI Bishop of Newark