



SECOND EPISCOPAL DISTRICT
James Levert Davis
Servant Bishop

MEMORANDUM

DATE: May 19, 2020
TO: Second Episcopal District Pastor and Congregation
FROM: James Levert Davis, *Servant Bishop*
SUBJECT: **“Reopening Our Churches Safely”**

One of the greatest strengths of the Second Episcopal District is our ability to adapt and reinvent ourselves when needed most. We realize that everyone is anxious to return to their places and edifices of worship. I, too, feel this burning desire. But out of love, respect and appreciation for each of you in the body of Christ, I am appealing to you that you allow us as a body to **COLLABORATE**, explore and suggest regulations that will keep **everyone in the body of Christ safe**.

The coronavirus serves as an inflection point for all of us, raising questions about how we operate, communicate, and socialize. It has truly been an all-around unusual, bizarre, self-enlightening, and reflective time.

From the bottom of my heart, I want to share my appreciation for the amazing work you are doing. The local churches' activities of feeding the hungry and providing funds for the basic needs of people from all walks of life have demonstrated a testimony to the world. Your commitment and calling make me so incredibly proud of you as pastors, congregants, and volunteers providing compassionate outreach to others. It is a privilege to be Servant Bishop to such a caring and resilient group of human beings.

As **48** of **50** States lifted some of their restrictions, and because these are unprecedented times; no one could have predicted, (also true of our Connectional Church), that they would have to deviate so wildly from our original plans, and draw up protocols for the body to follow addressing openings. Therefore, we ask that you engage in the WEBINAR discussion with the AME Church attorney **Douglass P. Selby** at 7:00 pm, Tuesday, May 19, 2020. He will provide a common understanding that can result in our agreeing to protocols that can be implemented and are important to opening our churches safely.

We ask that you prepare now to join us on the WEBINAR. As always, we look forward to your comments, questions, and thoughts so we can be unified on the best way to keep you safe as we navigate these unprecedented challenges to keep everyone safe.

Thus, we ask that you take as much time and opportunities that are available as possible to get wise counsel for decision making through such outlets as:

- **The Webinar Session** (05/19 - Tuesday, 7 pm) Church Attorney on possible church liability.
- **International Health Commission of the AME Church** (publication provided with this email)
- **The Motir Services, Inc.** on project sanitation and cleanup of the facility (**WEBINAR, 05/21 - Thursday, 7 pm**)
- **Local, City, County, State, and National requirements**, including CDC, WHO, Scientific and Health Experts whose professional lives are devoted to research and scientific data analysis and trends in the health and welfare of human beings on a daily basis.

- **Your first priority** before considering going back into churches – Your health, your family, your congregation, your community. Care for those most vulnerable to the coronavirus —the anxiety, the trauma, the suffering, the grief of the moment.

One of the things that I really hope as a people is that we will not allow ourselves to be used again as test tube subjects, guinea pigs, and petri dish specimens. Remember the Tuskegee experiment. Do not allow those who have no regard for human life to push us out first as if our lives do not matter.

Let us be ever mindful that the CDC statistics show that COVID-19 is affecting African Americans at exceptionally high rates, and African Americans are dying in greater proportion to our numbers. We make up 13% of the US population, but account for 30% of the country's COVID-19 patients.

Let us not lose heart. **God is doing a great new thing in the universe.** He is calling pastors to speak the Word in ways that we could not imagine. Pastors are using creative ways through the technology to speak beyond the traditional church building. Utilizing technology has made each of us more visible. The creative ways in which you have been able to enlarge your territories by reaching many more people than you could reach in the traditional assembling, is phenomenal. I have found inspiration from pastors across the Second Episcopal District in my individual telephone conversations with each of you that COVID-19 has made churches large and small function similarly. All of your testimony makes me feel even more confident that “**Greater is Coming**”. Surely, He will allow us to do even more to advance the Kingdom of God right here on earth.

Remember, people depend on our churches to provide guidance and lead the way. Thus, it's vital we keep doing everything in our power to provide for everyone in a safe way during these challenging times. We are in a global pandemic. Sheltering in place, working from home (*where possible*), practicing social distancing, practicing safe hygiene – hand washing, wearing masks and gloves, etc., **please continue.** **LET'S JUST STAY SEATED FOR A WHILE UNTIL HE GIVES THE ORDERS TO MOVE FORWARD SAFELY!** There is a difference between **FAITH AND FOOLISHNESS.** Let us show others through our testimony how **FAITH IN ACTION WORKS.** We just need to hold on a little while longer. Everything is going to be alright.

May the inequities that the coronavirus underscores lead to a greater trend where inequality in health care and other social injustices will be replaced with equality and equity of opportunity for every human being on the face of the earth. May these challenging and uncertain times find us working even more closely together so that our churches, families, communities throughout the world will thrive. This is God's will for the world. May we as a race of people stand together and demonstrate to the world what this looks like. To each of you, I wish the best of health and we are certain that God will make our future brighter and more productive as we put into action authentic love for all humankind.

See you on the Webinar tonight, at 7pm.