



All Saints' Memorial Church

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April 17, 2020

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

In light of all the rising case and death counts announced each day in this pandemic, this message seems almost lost—or for those truly jaded and lost, this message may be met with a ‘So what?’. But it is at the heart of our faith, and for good reason. It means ‘the end’ is not the end; that with God all things are possible, that God is with us and has not and never will abandon us, in life or in death.

That being said (and believed)—it does not mean that we will not suffer, or that we will not know loss or struggle in our human life. We are, whether we like to acknowledge it or not, a creature of this creation; even while we are beloved and cherished, we are mortal, we are not invincible. Jesus lived this during his time on earth—and died a suffering death on the cross. But in and through the resurrection, God declares that we not defined by the worst of our lives—but are seen through the eyes of love and redemption. That God’s love and desire for us to be with God is greater than our sin, greater than any evil. No matter how dark things become, God can bring light, for to God ‘they are both alike’ and God can always find us even if we are lost and in despair.

The same goes for the world, too. Pandemic inducing viruses are scary—there is so much we don’t know, and certainly can’t control. Hence, measures such as distancing, masks, stay at home orders—these things we can control, and we do those things because we want to stay well, and help others stay well. But even in the midst of our societal chaos, God is there; you can see in the love shown, neighbors helping neighbors, businesses creatively seeking to serve needs, the sacrifices being made by so very many from healthcare providers to clerks and truckers and trash haulers and more. (These essential workers have always been essential, even if our society and economic system has, until this time, failed to highlight that. So now, and going forward, is our opportunity to hold that up, and hold them up.) We are being pushed to love in new and challenging ways and stretched to connect and communicate more creatively. As a world, as a church, we will be changed—forever. But transformation and new life is God’s expertise (if you will), and so even if it may not feel like it, we are in good hands.

In the attached Pastoral message from our Bishop, he states that our buildings will be closed through the end of May. We will continue to offer worship online, and hope to expand into other offerings such as our new YouTube channel and even come up with more offerings beyond worship. We are working to improve communications, and ask that you continue to connect with us and one another. It is our hope that we come through this not only changed, but whole in spirit and body.

I thank you for your patience and your support and prayers, and ask for those to continue. Please continue to reach out to one another and hold one another up (if you need a phone number or email, please let me know; we are working on directory options). Help us to continue to be a

presence for others, if you are able, with any donations or gifts you are able to share. And if you need assistance, whether in picking up milk or eggs, or with resource or referrals, please, please let us know by contacting me at mother.debbie@comcast.net or via phone at 732-492-1943. (We also have posted some links on our website).

In and through all this, God is working. Like the outside spring landscape, we are being renewed, unfolding into this new creation. It is hard work, messy work. But it is God's work—and by virtue of our being a member of Christ's scarred and resurrected body, it is ours too. The Lord is risen indeed—and we will too.

Alleluia!

Peace,
Mother Debbie+

Save time (and frustration)....Please use these links!

Website: All Saints' Memorial Church

<https://allsaintsnavesink.org/>

Visit here for updated worship bulletins, worship times, information on online giving, events, calendar, etc. There are also links on our front page to Covid related sites and Legal Aid.

Facebook: All Saints' Memorial Church

<https://www.facebook.com/allsaintschurchnavesink/>

Visit here for Live worship, updates, shared information from the Diocese, and other articles.

YouTube: All Saints Church Navesink

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC0pU9QNLtwkh0Gu70twAshQ>

Visit here for uploads (after the fact) of our worship services. Future offerings via YouTube coming soon.

A Pastoral Statement from the Bishop of New Jersey April 15, 2020

Greetings in the Name of the Risen Christ!

Jesus commanded us to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind,” and to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37). In our response to the COVID19 pandemic, we in the Diocese of New Jersey are prioritizing the love of God and God’s people over all other concerns. From late February when we had to make the first difficult decision to postpone our Diocesan Convention, through the suspension of in-person worship services, every directive I have issued has been toward this end and this end alone.

We are likely now at the apex of Coronavirus infections in the State of New Jersey. During this time, it is projected that our hospitals and health care facilities will be completely overwhelmed. As the infection rate peaks and hospitalizations increase, New Jersey is expected to face a critical shortage of ventilators. Moreover, our health care personnel and first responders do not currently have adequate protective equipment to keep them safe. This means that every unnecessary, avoidable infection places, not only the person infected in extreme jeopardy, it also endangers our first responders and health care providers.

While authorizing travel for “religious purposes,” the spirit and letter of the Governor’s Executive Orders #104 and 107 is clearly to encourage us all to remain at home except as absolutely necessary. He is not alone. Doctors, nurses, first responders and all those who are required to be out and place themselves at risk are begging those of us who do not need to go out to remain at home. Social media is filled with health-care providers’ profile pictures framed with the words, “Protect my life; stay at home!” or “I go to work to keep you safe; please stay at home to keep me safe.” Given the heroic sacrifices that they are all making in the most trying conditions, I believe we have a sacred and moral obligation to do what they are begging us to do.

With this conviction, I directed that small groups should not continue going to our church buildings to live stream or record video worship unless those involved live together. The current directives governing the use of our church buildings will remain in effect at least through the month of May. Many of the members of our congregations are numbered among those considered “vulnerable.” Caring for them demands a conservative and cautious response. As we move through this crisis, I will be following the guidance of The New Jersey Department of Health, the Governor’s Office and consulting people who have expertise, especially as we consider when and how we will exit this current mode of being church.

Some believe that I am allowing the government to repress the free practice of our religion. This is not true. I am allowing myself and the Diocese to be driven by Christ’s commandment to love our neighbors and to do to others as we would have them do to us. While small groups of people may indeed have the Constitutional right to go to our churches and video services, the question we must ask is *ought* they to do this in this current environment? Just because we can do something, should we?

In addition to asking myself these questions, I have received numerous e-mails from people who are worried and concerned that my allowing this sort of on-line worship placed people at risk unnecessarily. I have heard from persons worried about their clergy persons, who have underlying health concerns who, despite my urging to the contrary, felt compelled to go to church and participate in the on-line videoing of the service.

Similarly, Church musicians have contacted me, deeply concerned about their own health and safety. As someone also recently said to me, *“we don’t want people driving unnecessarily either. You don’t want to end up in the hospital from a car accident these days.”* As I have participated in offering on-line, live worship from church sanctuaries and watched others offering it, I have seen slip-ups that, in fact, could be life threatening.

Given the very real threats that we now face and the reality that we have viable options for on-line worship that do not require groups, no matter how small, to go to our churches, thereby risking spreading the contagion, I concluded that I *ought not* to encourage, and should not allow, the practice of “skeleton crews” to continue going to our churches while we are in the height of this crisis.

If, by our abundance of caution, born of God’s commandment that we love one another, we can prevent even one person from becoming infected, if we can keep one physician from having to make the awful decision of which patient they need to provide a ventilator for over another, or prevent one first-responder from having to go to the home of one of our members who got sick because they were infected by another in putting together on-line worship, then our temporary sacrifices will be both right and worth it.

Again, the sole objective of my directive is for us to “love our neighbors as ourselves,” by reducing the risk of spreading COVID-19 to as low a level as humanly possible, while recognizing that we have a responsibility to carry out Christ’s mission. And we are carrying out Christ’s mission, albeit, in ways very different than any of us are used to or could have imagined.

Faith, worship, and fellowship are a lifeline for our people in times such as this. We simply have to do these differently than we do in “normal” times. Moreover, because people are sheltering at home, and because they are anxious and afraid, we need to make more of an effort to reach out to them. This will require a genuine partnership of lay and ordained leaders engaging in so-called phone-trees, “coffee hour” Zoom meetings, and in other creative ways.

While we are offering on-line worship services from the Diocese, it is not my intent to centralize worship at the Diocesan level. As I have said to clergy and lay leaders in my weekly Zoom Town Halls, I encourage clergy and congregations to engage in on-line worship. My staff and I have often expressed in our various Town Hall and Focus Group meetings how inspired and encouraged we are at the number of congregations offering online worship and formation, and the creativity and variety of offerings presented. This was especially true during Holy Week and Easter. I am profoundly grateful to the clergy who worked incredibly hard and showed enormous creativity in offering worship that was rich and meaningful.

For those who need help, we offer assistance and advice on holding on-line worship to congregations that wish it.

I value the community and relationships that individual congregations share with one another and want us to sustain these practices long after we are once again able to gather in person. We are offering worship at the diocesan level for those congregations—of which we have many—that don’t have the resources to do it themselves or who don’t have clergy to do it.

Please do note, I am qualifying my previous directive in one respect: Clergy have my permission to perform grave-side services for those who have died, but only with a limited number of immediate family and in no case more than 10 persons. The use of church buildings for funerals is still prohibited until further notice.

I am aware that some point to retail stores being open, and sloppiness about “social distancing”

being common in the marketplace and ask why we are observing such stringent standards in the face of this. In addition, some are challenged by the idea that businesses like liquor stores and gun shops are considered “essential businesses” and wonder why houses of faith are not viewed to be just as essential.

I believe we are very essential. I also have questions about some of the businesses that have received the “essential designation.” The poor safe-distancing and hygiene practices at many public places concern me deeply. There is little I can do about these things.

In reflecting about all this, I think of my response to my children when they were growing up and would ask to do something that a neighbor’s child or friend of theirs were doing, “well *so and so* is doing it!” My answer was always the same: “We’re not so and so; we’re the Stokes family.” My response in today’s context is: “We’re not so and so; we’re the Church and we are called to love our neighbors as ourselves.” This means doing everything we can to protect others.

Because it is possible to carry the Coronavirus and be asymptomatic, and because we have not achieved the capacity to test everyone, we must all work under the assumption that we are infected and could infect someone else. This is why the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the World Health Organization, the advisors to the President and the advisors to Governor Murphy and local health authorities are all strongly urging us all to stay home except when it is completely unavoidable. We have options for worship, prayer, and study that do not require us to venture forth. We must use these as well as we are able. We must also be sensitive to the reality that others have no choice but to go forth, and that oftentimes those who earn the least in our society are placed the most at risk.

Paul’s Letter to the Philippians articulates one of the great theological underpinnings of the Incarnation and Christ’s passion. Paul writes:

*Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.
Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.*

In this strange, challenging, indeed, life-threatening season, we, as members of the body of Christ, are being asked to “empty ourselves”—to be Christ-like and give up much that is precious and life-giving to us, to do so out of our love for our neighbors. In the name of this same love, I am asking for people to stay at home as much as they are able and to offer worship from their homes, with the exception of worship teams who live together, in which case working together to produce on-line worship in the sanctuary does not add additional risk. I am asking people to stay as safe as they possibly can and to keep others safe.

In a recent post from *Sojourner's Magazine*, the Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church, the Most Rev. Michael Curry, is quoted with words that should speak to all of us this Easter season:

“If the message of Easter is about [new life], then for us to fast from gathering for worship is our following the path of new life, new life for those who we might be hurt by gathering together and new life for us by learning to live—not for self alone, but for others and for God—that's resurrection.”

May God bless you and those you love and keep you safe and healthy.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "W. H. Stokes", with a small cross symbol to the left of the first letter.

The Right Reverend William H. Stokes, D.D.

12th Bishop of New Jersey