



## Diocese of Southeast Florida

### *On Being Faithful*

#### An Addendum

8 September 2020

From its first drafting, *On Being Faithful* was conceived as a reference document, intended to assist the diocese in reflecting on the pandemic, to teach/highlight what scientists knew about COVID-19, and to direct the safe re-entry into our church/school buildings and our ways of ministry. At the time of its writing 4 months ago, little did we know that the pandemic would worsen and remain a challenge to our well-being not to mention a challenge to our gathering as local faith communities and to connecting across our diocese.

Since March, we have continued to use the ever-developing data and scientific knowledge about COVID-19 to guide our decisions around keeping our communities safe. There is no doubt that the length and severity of this pandemic are testing the very bonds of what it means to be community and how to remain community while being physically distant from one another. Another layer of challenge is that a variety of types of organizations and churches of different denominations near us are interpreting safe re-entry differently than the Episcopal Church. These differences test the very essence of what it means to be a Christian community and remain a consistent witness to all people.

There is nothing linear about our re-entry. As we learn more about this virus, the goal posts will be continually shifting. Yet, the data will tell us what is safe, what is possible – where, when and how. Each of us in leadership positions are called upon to respond safely to our changing community conditions. No matter what, our commitment remains in honoring community, and the dignity and sanctity of one another.

The important pieces of the data we need to be watching at this time are:

1. *Positive cases of Covid-19 by Day*. The daily positivity rate average is a 10-day moving average taking the 9 previous days and the 1 current day. ***Please look for a 10-day decreasing average*** before considering in-person gathering.

Regardless of meeting this average, any in-person gathering must follow the guidelines set forth in *On Being Faithful* for social distancing, mask-wearing, sanitation, etc.

2. *Positive Test Rate.* The positivity rate calculation uses the specimen collection date for both the positive cases and tested individuals in order to capture how many tests administered on a given day produced a positive result. Please look for a 7-day positivity rate of 5% or below before considering in-person gathering.
3. The CDC and national scientists are telling us that the taking of temperatures is no longer a useful practice given the asymptomatic nature of the virus in so many people. Therefore, you can relax this practice if it is currently part of your re-entry plan, as it would have been.

As each congregation and school in our diocese begins to test the waters of re-entry based on the CDC guidelines and COVID-19 data for our counties, we will share their experiences with you. Each and every re-entry is an experiment from which we can learn. Our safety and well-being depend on our sharing information with one another. To this end, we want to share with you some of the actions that are taking place now and what you need to know for your own planning around these kinds of ministries and experiments:

### 1. Drive-in or Car Church



An exciting way to re-gather

#### **Drive-In Church**

Only clergy allowed at altar.

Bathroom available for emergencies, cleaned before service and after each individual use.

All people who attend must remain in their cars.

### 2. Thrift Shops

#### **Thrift Shop Reopen**

Masks worn by everyone

Hand sanitizing station

Practice social distancing

## Limited number of customers Fitting Rooms & Restrooms closed

Finally, and perhaps most importantly: While we can easily tend to the mechanics, practices, and protocols of re-entry, we cannot forget the emotional toll of this extended COVID-19 time. Each one of us, clergy and lay alike, have a personal emotional response to COVID. This emotional response not only impacts the individual, but the community. How do we, and how will we, care for one another? We are here for the long haul and it will require a degree of pastoral care of one another in our beloved community that perhaps we have not experienced previously.

The continuous onslaught of worry and insecurity is leading to greater anxiety, not only among congregants, but also among clergy leaders. Insecurity can lead to unrealistic expectations; anxiety can evolve into either demands or to isolation. For clergy, there is everything from the worry of re-entry too early, causing the loss of a beloved church member to COVID, or the daily emails/calls from parishioners threatening to leave a community if it does not open or if it opens too soon. There are the concerns about how to preach in a hyper-partisan environment and in a time of civil unrest. Leading in this kind of disquiet is more than challenging to clergy – this on top of the usual acting out that only ever takes place in church environments. For parishioners, there is every kind and manner of anxiety and worry – health, safety, finances, job security or job loss, loneliness, children going to school or schooled at home, and even domestic violence.

Compound worry creates threat and opportunity. The threat is to the fabric of individual relationships and community. The opportunity is for a renewed commitment to kindness and patience. So how do we do this? This pandemic crisis and what it spawns is so big, it seems the only way to navigate are in spiritual and communal ways. The first two important questions for self-reflection might be:

- A. How am I experiencing God in this?
- B. Can I gather a group of trusted people with whom to share my spiritual experiences?

As we are well aware, in some ways our national situation is impossible. So, when circumstances feel impossible, what do we need to do? And what can inspire us beyond the circumstances? What is your aspirational image of how you want to be in this impossible set of circumstances?

Here are some words and images that can help us move through the disconnects of this moment.

1. Recognize our own emotional process. In other words, feel your feelings. Then name them. Recognize them in others' behaviors. Connect and accept one another that this most basic level. Sit with your uncertainty.
2. Accept our individual and communal fallibility. No one clergy person is perfect. No parishioner is perfect. No congregation is perfect. In the face of anxiety, it becomes easy to sink into comparisons. Envy does not lower anxiety, but raises it. The other clergy on Zoom church, the other church down the street that is open – they are not necessarily any less fallible than we are. Can we come to accept ourselves for who we are right now?
3. Honor one another – anxiety, warts and all. Giving each other some slack goes a long way to preventing needless conflict. Forgiveness is a lot cheaper than therapy.
4. Pray for one another. During this intense, lengthy and severe pandemic time, understanding and patience are gifts we should pray for and embrace.
5. Stay connected – structure time with people. Check in not only at the informational level, but at the feeling level. Check in as frequently as possible (clergy to clergy; clergy to parishioner; parishioner to parishioner). Lean on one another. Practice friendship, kindness, and mutual help.
6. Be committed to and advocate for each other's health, well-being, and success.
7. Clergy – remember the importance of your call and your ministry. Parishioners – remember the importance of your own gifts and skills.
8. Everyone should take regular breaks from the news and social media.
9. Intentional check in with doctors/other caregivers as needed to be reminded of the kinds of coping skills and behaviors that will keep you well.
10. Do less.
11. Navigate this time with faith that is aspirational – concrete images and ways that faith inspires you to deal with this moment. There are no quick solutions – we have more loss in front of us.

*Holy God, who created us for and from love, in this time of social distancing, hold us close in your arms. Comfort those who are afraid, enliven those who are bored, give courage to those who are distressed, and warm those who feel the cold touch of loneliness. Breathe in, with and through us as we walk through uncertainty into a new future knowing that you are with us now and await us there. In the name of Christ, the Beloved we pray. Amen.*

Canon Dr. Ellen Clark-King, Vice Dean and Canon for Social Justice at Grace Cathedral, San Francisco

## A Message from the Bishop's Re-Entry Team

8 September 2020

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Together we continue to endure this season of COVID-19, without any apparent end in sight, at least until there is a vaccine. It has now been a season longer than any of our liturgical seasons with the exception of this present season we call Ordinary Time. But this has been and remains no ordinary time, and all of us are yearning for a time when it may be safe to reenter our buildings and safely regather for in-person worship. In recent weeks, some of you have been imaginative and creative in developing ways of gathering for worship in your parking lot, and reporting a huge psychological boost from the ability of your congregations to at least see one another physically, even if confined to their cars, rather than from within the confines of a box on a Zoom screen or on Facebook or YouTube.

Charting a safe course through this prolonged season has been challenging at so many levels, and many are wondering if we will have the energy to sustain ourselves for much longer. To help us navigate the uncharted waters of this pandemic, we have relied on the guidelines set out in *On Being Faithful*, which in turn relied upon the metrics provided by the CDC and the WHO – namely the 5% positivity rate. For a variety of reasons, sadly even this data is no longer reliable. So, we turned to another source that has offered the most detailed and honest data available. This data, published weekly, adopts a conservative approach, weighted on the side of caution and a desire to keep our people as safe as possible. However, because it draws on multiple sources, we realize that this data does not always correlate with the data produced by local and county government sources with which you may be consulting too. Not surprisingly this has created some confusion about which data sources are the more reliable and which might be best used to base any decisions around re-gathering in our churches.

Any decision to re-gather at this time is inevitably fraught with a number of possible consequences, not least on the lives and wellbeing of our parishioners for whom we have a particular care and a responsibility. We appreciate that it has not been easy to remain closed while watching other institutions around us, including other denominations and our own Episcopal schools, return to some level of re-gathering and what was once revered as 'normality.' We understand the tension. In the face of these pressures, some congregations have been experimenting with various kinds of

re-gathering; some have re-gathered already in a limited way or are contemplating re-gathering during the coming weekends in their churches. The guidelines we provided for you in *On Being Faithful* arose out of an abundance of caution and love, while the information and weekly data are given to help you to make wise decisions about how to move forward safely in this season of continuing uncertainty.

The best we can do is to stand on common ground by putting our faith in the data that we think best provides us with the confidence and integrity to make safe decisions. The lives of many people are dependent on our decision-making, mindful that nearly 190,000 people have died since the outbreak of the pandemic. For the sake of our unity as a diocese, it is important that we are clear and transparent with one another as we seek to move forward. Therefore, whether is it the data you are being provided through our diocese or the data from your county, if you chose to re-gather or already have, we urge you to consider these three fundamental questions:

1. What is the integrity of the data you are using to justify the re-gathering of your congregation?
2. What is the death rate in your county? What are the trends telling you?
3. Should you choose to re-gather, will you be willing to close again if the same data source tells you that it is dangerous to remain open?

Let us be open with one another with no need to hide or disguise what each congregation may be doing. Stake a claim to the data you are using and the decisions you are making, and share with us what you are doing as well as the learning from your decisions. As a significant community of faith and practice, our lives depend on one another and we are called to a common witness – to love God and to love our neighbor.

The Bishop's Re-Entry Team

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