



# The Episcopal Church in Delaware

The Rt. Rev. Kevin S. Brown, Bishop

*all things in love*

*1 Cor. 16:14*

## March 18, 2020 | COVID-19 Response #5 | Focus Items

Hello sisters and brothers in Delaware,

I pray you are all well in this time of such uncertainty and stress. Across the diocese, I've heard every emotion expressed: fear, frustration, anger, confusion, isolatedness, resilience, determination, compassion, mercy, humor, and even joy. Indeed, joy! The selflessness of neighbors has made one lonely and fearful parishioner weep with joy; the calm leadership of a priest is bringing 'hope and a smile' to another. There are countless other stories out there, of emotions of every kind, and I am blessed to hear so many of them. May we continue to pray for and care for one another, and be merciful to ourselves and each other.

I note first that the Episcopal Church in Delaware (ECD) adheres fully with the governor's state of emergency (SOE) declaration and subsequent modifications. While not yet official at the time of my writing, I fully expect the official limit on public gatherings of fifty (50) in Delaware will be reduced to ten (10) per guidance from the federal government, issued after the current version of the SOE.

We also adhere fully to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for public health. (The 10-person gathering limit is recommended by CDC, for example.) I will not reiterate these again as they are widely publicized and widely available – including at our own well-updated COVID response page at [delaware.church](https://www.delaware.church). I will implore us all once again to **follow those public health and personal hygiene guidelines!** Our personal, individual decisions matter! The fundamental, underlying, essential goal is good public health in a time of the dangerous pandemic. This is loving and caring for our neighbors and ourselves in a profound way.

For clarity, I have begun organizing our focus items into three major areas. This is by no means an exhaustive list of action items; rather, these are among the timeliest questions before us now.

### **Area #1: Support and guidance for parishes**

Parishes and clergy are advised the following, in alignment with SOE and CDC. ("Parishes" can be understood to mean any diocesan organization.)

1. I am asking all parishes to divide their parish membership into **'virtual' groups of eight** or so persons, to check in regularly with each other via phone, email, or other means. Assign the groups randomly or alphabetically or by birthday or zodiac sign, it's up to the parish. The point is to help us all get involved. I expect to send out some resources for these groups starting next week.
2. Many have asked for help by sharing ideas and resources for sustaining important feeding and hospitality ministries given the restrictions of the SOE. I've tasked the Canon to the Ordinary to urgently convene this conversation with members of ECD and

with Delawareans already engaged in this work. The information will be shared broadly as ideas, practices, and advice are available.

3. To reduce the risk of transmitting the virus to those already sick, clergy are expected to restrict in-person pastoral visits to only emergency or end-of-life situations, and only then with the prior knowledge of the patient or family.
4. Parishes have asked for help deciding whether or not non-church groups (such as Scouts, AA, or NA) can use parish facilities. While a decision whether or not to meet lies with each group, regardless of location, parishes should not knowingly permit meetings that do not adhere to SOE restrictions and CDC guidelines.
5. Parishes who wish to stream their Sunday worship service (see below) are advised that Facebook Live is the simplest option for getting started easily and already has a large audience in place. The Mission Support Staff is eager to help you with the basics. Parishes may choose whatever technology works best for them. No parish is required to stream worship services at this time.
6. The Mission Support Staff has two zoom accounts available for parishes to share, and parishes are taking full advantage of this resource. Time slots are filling up. Some parishes are opening their own accounts, which I encourage if you are able. Zoom is a fabulous communications resource you'll use well past the current health crisis. If you stay within 40 minutes, Zoom is free.

### **Area #2: Support for clergy and spouses**

The demands upon our priests and deacons at this moment are immense – physically, emotionally, and spiritually. What affects a cleric also impacts our spouses and families. All of our clergy are committed, by vow and by desire, to expressing the love, mercy, and hope of Christ Jesus--*especially* in this time of crisis. Pray for us all as we pray for you!

I have convened three teams to help me expand our existing support for clergy and families. The Canon to the Ordinary, the Rev. Canon Martha Kirkpatrick, will lead the support team for active clergy. My Chaplains to Retired Clergy and Families, led by the Rev. Ed Godden, will spearhead efforts to reach out to retired clerics, and the President of the Standing Committee, the Rev. Sarah Nelson, has eagerly taken the lead with clergy spouses. I have also initiated a weekly call for clergy to help us coordinate the myriad of decisions (and stressors!) of this time.

I ask all laypersons in ECD to take a moment, sometime in the weeks and months to come, to email or call a deacon or priest and say, "Thank you". Please support our clergy in their work as I assure you they are supporting us all.

### **Area #3: Liturgical Items**

1. Beginning this Sunday, I will offer a livestreamed Eucharist from the St. Albans Center at 11:00 a.m. rather than, as originally conceived last week, to visit different ECD parishes. (Such travel is not recommended by CDC.) The time is chosen so that parishes have ample opportunity to offer their own livestream services, and I urge parishioners to follow their own parish offerings where they are available. My service offered simply as one more opportunity for common worship and invitation to folks outside the church.
2. Regarding Holy Week and Easter, all indications are that the current restrictions will not be lifted. We may have stricter mandates in place at that time. **Thus, we should all brace for the deeply sad reality that Holy Week and Easter worship cannot be celebrated in-person.** (I will offer a \$100 prize for the best idea for a virtual Easter egg hunt ... and no, not a video game!) I will meet with clergy in the coming weeks to determine how best to

offer these services. Remember, my friends, that Easter is not only a single day but a whole season, and if we're lucky and steadfast in not helping spread this virus, we might get to celebrate Easter in late May. Who knows? We Christians are a faithful and creative bunch. Soon, we *will* celebrate the resurrection of our Lord together, and when we do, imagine the joy!

Peace and blessings be upon us all. I look forward to updating you next week, and in the meantime, keep calling and emailing us at the [Mission Support Office](#) if we can be of any help. Your questions, worries, jokes, and ideas are essential for me to hear, and I treasure them all. I am eager to hear how your 'groups of eight' take shape, and how they impact your parish, and what creative things we all find to do with them.

With the love, hope, and mercy of Christ Jesus,

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