



# The Episcopal Church in Delaware

The Rt. Rev. Kevin S. Brown, Bishop

*all things in love*

*1 Cor. 16:14*

## April 1, 2020 | COVID-19 Response #7 | Support and Guidance for Parishes

Hello beloved of God in Delaware,

Happy April to you all, my friends in Christ. For years I never thought much about April Fool's Day – a day that some say dates back to 1582. I suppose my interest peaked in third grade when practical jokes or tricking other people seemed like a fun thing to do. But the phase passed, and I soon ignored the day.

I have recently, however, found some meaning in April 1. A preacher helped me see that I am and have long been a fool – a fool for Jesus Christ! As I live and teach and invite people into a breathtaking new way of life in Jesus Christ, as I speak out loud about how this man, called Son of God, has transformed me personally and has, quite measurably, transformed the *world* for the good, I am doing something many see as foolish. Who believes in such things?

St. Paul wrote a letter to a church he helped start in Corinth, only a few years after Jesus died and rose again. To many in Paul's day, as in ours, the whole story of Jesus and any benefit that might come from believing the story, sounded absurd, ridiculous, even stupid. (See 1 Corinthians 1, especially verses 17-31.) In a word, it was and remains *foolish* to many. But that certainly does not hinder its truth!

To be a fool for Christ is not to trick anyone but rather the exact opposite! To be a fool for Christ is to proclaim, with warm invitation and open for all to see, the truth of God's love, mercy, and justice. So *Happy Fools for Christ Day* - which some might say dates back to 4 A.D.! I've come to love it.

As always, I pray you are well and that you are doing everything in your power to stay safe. It is good for you and good for our whole society. Stay strong, my friends. All indications have been, and remain, that it will get worse before it gets better. Stay calm, stay safe, and keep looking out for one another.

Here's a quick update of priorities in the Episcopal Church in Delaware this week.

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

1. **I strongly urge parishes to not make any immediate decisions around payroll, especially layoffs, at this moment.** There is help on the way. The Episcopal Church in Delaware is committed to helping sustain the people doing faithful work for our parishes – the very folks who help keep our parishes strong and active throughout this crisis.
2. To this end, diocesan leaders and I have been working extensively to help parishes navigate the choppy financial waters caused by COVID-19.

- a. First, recognizing that cash flow is becoming a serious immediate concern, Diocesan Council has authorized the **immediate deferral, up to three months, of monthly acceptance payments** until anytime before the end of 2020. No application is required; a parish's rector, warden, or treasurer need only to inform Judith Gregory in the Mission Support Office that the parish wishes to defer payments.
  - b. Second, recognizing that longer-term financial needs and assistance will vary by parish, Diocesan Council also formed a **Joint Team for Parish Financial Support** to construct, as quickly as possible, a 'trusting and graceful' process for how parishes can apply for and receive the long-term help they will need. The goal is to have the process crafted, approved by council and trustees, and made available to parishes the week after Easter – that is, only two weeks from now. Members of this fearless joint team are Arnold Morris, Advance & Development Fund; Roby Roberson, council treasurer; Kathy Van Devender, finance committee; Michael Wood, council member; the Rev. Marianne Ell, council member; Rick Harra, trustee; and Jim Bray, trustee emeritus. The group is led by Judith Gregory, Canon for Finance and Administration.
  - c. Third, the United States Congress passed the massive CARES Act late last week, and on Monday the Mission Support Office provided resources and direction to clergy and treasurers on how parishes can take advantage of this law. The CARES Act includes provisions to help churches and many other businesses and organizations to keep employees on the payroll, including:
    - i. paycheck protection through a government-backed loan you apply for from your (qualifying!) bank
    - ii. payroll tax deferral (for parishes and clergy)
    - iii. expansion of unemployment benefits, even to churches (which normally cannot participate)
  - d. Fourth, the Church Pension Fund has offered relief to parishes in multiple forms, including waivers of clergy pension assessments (with no harm to a cleric's eventual pension) and extensions up to 90 days for benefits and insurance payments.
  - e. These four points are significant, and point to real measures available to parishes to help sustain staff and operations in this pandemic. Again, **I strongly urge parishes to not make any immediate decisions around payroll, especially layoffs, at this moment.**
3. The leadership of Camp Arrowhead and I continue to monitor the summer camp schedule in light of the pandemic. No decision to cancel any portion of the summer program, should such be necessary, is expected until the middle of April.
  4. Starting on Maundy Thursday, April 9, at 12:00 p.m., I will offer a virtual 'Bishop's Forum' open to the diocese and beyond. While I have not settled exactly on the format, I expect it will begin with some remarks from me and conclude with open time for questions. If you have a question you'd like me to consider, email it to [forum@delaware.church](mailto:forum@delaware.church) and I'll do my best to answer it during the forum.
  5. I highlight again the fantastic collection of resources we have compiled at [delaware.church](http://delaware.church). It is well organized, updated regularly, and contains a remarkable range of helpful content. I commend it to you.

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

I convened teams earlier this month to expand our existing support for clergy and families, and their work is progressing well. While there is more that needs to be said here each week, I continue to include this in my updates to (1) emphasize the importance of our clergy and their families, especially at this time, (2) highlight the remarkable work they are doing under extraordinary circumstances, and (2) remind us all to reach out to them and say 'thank you' regularly.

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

1. For Holy Week, I encourage you to worship online with your parish and parishes close to you. These options are already being gathered and posted at [delaware.church](http://delaware.church)'s COVID response page under 'Online Worship Services.'
2. Again this Sunday (Palm Sunday), I will continue to lead worship at 11:00 a.m. from St. Albans Center via Facebook Live.

Flowers are blossoming, the birds are singing, and the days are getting warmer. Even in pandemic, nature's beauty abounds. It too seems to proclaim the goodness of God and our hope in Christ for a new day. Nature, it seems to me, is just as foolish as we are. Amen to that.

Stay foolish in Christ, my friends,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kevin". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

+Kevin