



The Episcopal Church in Delaware

The Rt. Rev. Kevin S. Brown, Bishop

all things in love

1 Cor. 16:14

January 27, 2021 | COVID-19 Response #20 | Our Church Response

Hello, beloved of God in Delaware.

I'd like to talk today about the Coronavirus pandemic, and more specifically about our church's ongoing response in this time of peril and of need in our community and in our nation.

As I am sure you are aware, the pandemic has spiked in the last month. Really since Thanksgiving we have seen a rise in every metric that tracks the spread of the pandemic in our community. We've seen a rise in hospitalizations particularly in the use of our most critical care facilities which are nearing capacity, the rise of tests that are coming back positive, the rise in deaths. There is no doubt that the pandemic now is at levels across our community that are much higher than they were last spring at its peak. New variants are coming along.

The good news is that our medical professionals are doing a fantastic job fighting this disease, that the vaccines have been created and distributed and proven to be effective. The good news is that we know that washing hands and wearing masks are things we can do to help curb the spread. It is great news, indeed, that this pandemic will ultimately be measured in weeks and months, not in years. We're near the end, but we're not there yet. Stay faithful, stay true, my brothers and sisters, and keep taking care of yourselves. We're not out of the woods, but I tell you we're on the right path.

Speaking of paths earlier this month, I wrote a letter to the church called "Choosing a Path of Love" and in it I explained our decision, as the Episcopal Church in Delaware, to intentionally suspend our in-person worship during the spike, during this height of the pandemic. I explained that that is our faithful response, not simply to ourselves, but much more to ourselves and to our wider community at this time. That is what I am convinced that we are called to do as followers of Jesus Christ.

It's not surprising however that some of us will look and see that other faith groups, other denominations are choosing to gather in person during this pandemic. And it makes us wonder, when we see something that we would like to do, because I know I and you would very much like to gather in person, when we see our neighbors and our friends doing something we would like to do, it's natural to say, well, why can't I? A couple of things about that.

First of all, I cannot speak to the priorities and motivations of other faith groups, other churches, and I wouldn't even try, any more than I would want them to try and speak on my behalf or our behalf about what our priorities are and our motivations are. But I do trust, I do trust that other churches, other faith groups are doing their best to faithfully follow what they understand God

to say, just as we are doing our best to faithfully understand what we know to be true through Jesus Christ, through the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth.

Secondly, in life in general, when we see something that a friend or a neighbor is doing, it is tempting to say, why can't I do that? But we know we know that that's not the real first question that we ask. The real question we ask first is when we see something we want to do, we say, should I do that? Is this something I should do? And that is the question for us, my sisters and brothers. What is the most faithful response of a church in a time of severe pandemic?

And I am convinced, as I have said, that our statement that we are making is one that is true to our calling — our calling to love ourselves and to love our neighbors — and that is to give up voluntarily something that we love, something that we cherish. We will sacrifice our time to be together in this moment, together in person, for the greater good of our community.

I think it's important to remember at this point in the pandemic, after we have been dealing with this for close to a year now, that we can forget some things about how novel it is and forget that this virus is not normal.

One thing that is clear is that so many of the people who are bearing the heaviest burdens of this pandemic are people who are generally largely invisible to the public. You know, the people who are really being the most severely impacted, who are bearing the heaviest burdens, are people we often just don't see. They're minorities. They're people without the financial resources to deal with job losses or extended time away from their job for being sick, or who don't have the deeper health care that may get them back on their feet more quickly.

This illness strikes much more deeply at the elderly, folks in assisted care facilities who often are forgotten about, sadly forgotten because they're out of sight and out of mind. If we're not careful we, too, will forget about these people because we don't see them.

I also remind us, that the way this virus spreads has shocked the medical community. The idea that any of us could harbor a virus and never know it, and spread it without the first symptom ever showing up, that is still so strange to us that it's hard for us to wrap our minds around it. And it is tempting to say, well, I would like to be able to go out in public. I'm not worried about myself or I know I'm taking care of myself, and forget that we at any time could be transmitting something we simply don't know that we have, even when we take all the best precautions. Those masks matter, social distancing matters, washing our hands matters, and we'll get to a point where getting back together with those in place makes sense. But when the prevalence is so high in our community, what we can do best is to stay in as often as possible.

The question is not, what can I do? It's what should I do? What is good? What is right? What is as compassionate and as merciful as possible.

Not long ago, someone asked a really good question about our decision as a church not to gather in person. And she pointed out that she was really worried that it was going to cost the church. She was really worried and genuinely concerned that the church would lose pledge income, that there's a financial cost that we may have to bear as people aren't coming to church. Another person told me that he was worried that people might not come, that we might just

lose members. People might just be lost to other churches that are opening and maybe that's true. I think that those concerns are overstated. I believe the potential cost to the church for suspending in-person worship, as painful as it is to do this for a few weeks, even a few months, in the long term it is not going to end up being a cost to the church.

Rather. I think it will be a moment of which we can be deeply proud of ourselves. But even if it's true that there is a cost to us financially or in members, we must remember, my sisters and brothers, that the church is never, can never be more interested in our own wellbeing than in the wellbeing of our society. A church that is more interested in its own safety and security than it is for the good of a larger society is a church in name only. Secondly, when we talk about cost we must also think not about the financial cost or membership costs to the church, we must think about the cost to our community – at what cost to human life and how long can we bear up under difficult situations in order to save as many people as possible.

My sisters and brothers, this is a tough time, and I don't pretend for a second to say that this is easy and that our decision as a church to not gather in person comes without consequences. I know it's hard and I know that at a point when times are really dark like this that the church has always been a beacon of light and of hope, and we can continue to do that online and through our other connections with one another. I know it's not as good as in person. I don't even pretend that it's as good as being in person, but we can persevere. Remember that the vaccines are here. Remember that this is going to be measured in weeks and months, not in years, and that the end is around the corner.

Stay strong, my brothers and sisters. When we look back and we ask, what did the Episcopal Church in Delaware do during the pandemic, especially when things were at their darkest, we chose to love our neighbor, not only in word but in deed, to embody what it means to care for the sick and the friendless and the needy, to remember as Jesus Christ taught us the least of these. When we look back and we say we did that to the best of our ability, I think we can then say well done good and faithful servants.

Stay strong and keep the faith my brothers and sisters. May the peace of Christ be with you always.

Your brother in Christ,

+ Kevin

+Kevin