

# The Episcopal Diocese of Tennessee

## Updated Guidance Regarding the COVID-19 Coronavirus

Many clergy and lay people in the diocese have sought additional guidance or shared thoughts about potential responses to the quickly evolving situation created by the spread of the Coronavirus (COVID-19). The bullet points below are intended to provide some clear starting points for your parish leadership.

In times such as this, communication takes on greater importance. Whether in regard to informing congregations of changes in their normal patterns of worship, ministering to individuals who choose to avoid public worship and other gatherings for health reasons, or offering resources to the entire community should circumstances warrant a suspension of worship or other church activities, imaginative use of technologies old and new are necessary. From phone calls, cards, mailed bulletins, and notes, to emails, texts, and downloadable worship resources or podcasts and live streamed worship, every attempt should be made use of to maintain connection and to uphold one another in prayer.

With that in mind, the following recommendations are offered as an extension of the statement of the Bishops of the Episcopal Church in Tennessee on February 28 (see: <http://edtn.org/a-statement-from-the-bishops-of-the-episcopal-church-in-tennessee-on-the-coronavirus-covid19/> ).

### **Recommendations:**

*A special note for clergy in charge of congregations:*

- Your diocesan staff will provide you with a list of emergency contacts who may lead services should you become ill.
- Each priest is encouraged to train several lay people to lead Morning Prayer in an emergency should the priest be unable to lead worship due to sickness.
- Clergy are encouraged to keep a close watch on their own health even as they minister to others.

- Lay leaders should also be made aware of the provision in the Book of Common Prayer that allows the service/ante-communion to end with the Lord's Prayer in the event that the priest is absent.
- Clergy should take care to provide printed sermons or devotional texts from the Christian tradition to be read by lay leaders in the event of their absence.
- In the event of a suspension of public gatherings, including in-person worship, you are encouraged to make imaginative and pastoral use of technology to offer care to your people.

*In regard to worship:*

- Only metal chalices and fortified wine (e.g. Port) should be used for the administration of communion.
- Those who are not able to gather for worship, whether they live alone or in a nursing facility, should remain connected to their community.
- Those who are unable to attend worship out of health concerns should be offered support by their communities in other ways--through telephone calls and other communications, and through wise pastoral visits.
- During this time make sure to mail or email bulletins to those who cannot attend. Live stream services, create devotions that may be used at home or by families and small groups of people.
- Congregations may wish to suspend visits by lay Eucharistic Visitors, and clergy who make visitations should be certain of their own health, as well as following any guidelines of the facility they may be visiting.
- We don't want to expose the vulnerable to illness, but neither do we want to deprive them of the ministrations of the church, the witness of Christ's love, and the humanizing effect of in person contact.
- Should pastoral concerns within the community dictate wider ranging changes to a community's regular form of worship, Morning Prayer may be an acceptable alternative.

*A note about canceling church events:*

- Canceling church events is a serious, but sometimes necessary step. We encourage clergy and lay leaders in our congregations to look seriously at their schedules of meetings and activities and determine:
  - If meetings might constructively be transitioned to an online forum.
  - If gatherings for Christian formation offerings might be postponed for a few weeks or make creative use of technology and other alternative methods.
- Think of cancelations as moving from the outside-in on a collection of concentric circles. Worship is within the most central circle and should be among the last activities of the church to be canceled or suspended.
- It is suggested that Coffee Hour and communal meals be suspended for the time being.
- Also within this central circle would be ministries of the church that offer immediate care for those in need, such as food pantries or soup kitchens.
  - While food ministries, whether food pantries or soup kitchens should continue to be provided, it should be emphasized that any volunteer who is not well should remain at home.
  - Special attention should be paid to sanitation, using the same methods recommended to prevent the transmission of the flu.
  - Churches and ministries should always follow standard health and safety protocols, including wearing gloves etc.
  - Ministries may wish to transition from self-serve buffet or cafeteria style meals toward pre-prepared and packaged individual meals, e.g. boxed lunches, or use of clam-shell packaging etc.