

Wednesday 18 March 2020

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

“For God alone my soul in silence waits;
from God comes my salvation,

God alone is my rock and my salvation,
my stronghold, so that I shall not be greatly shaken.”

-from Psalm 62

It is an understatement to say that these are uncertain times. The news changes by the day, sometimes by the hour. Our world, our nation, and the city of Nashville all have experienced tremendous suffering these past few weeks. Our congregation has not been immune to these difficulties; many of us and those we love were affected by the recent tornadoes, and now we are faced with having to contend with the threat of pandemic and economic uncertainty.

There are, however, some things you can be certain of: God’s love and care, and the kindness and compassion of people of goodwill everywhere. You can also be assured that the congregation of St. Philip’s Church will do its best to be faithful to the call to, in the words of Jesus, “love one another, even as I have loved you.” (John 15:12)

Governor Lee has asked Tennessee churches to consider alternatives to more traditional gatherings, such as online streaming. Our Bishop has given the faith communities of the diocese a degree of flexibility to determine our own unique needs in this regard; however, he has requested that at this time we suspend all worship for at least the next two Sundays. The mayor of Nashville recently issued an order that many local businesses be closed in response to the Coronavirus threat. Additionally, the U. S. Centers for Disease Control has called for any in-person gatherings of 10 or more persons to be cancelled or postponed.

Yet, it is vitally important, especially at this difficult time, for our church community to stay connected. To that end, going forward, St. Philip’s congregational leaders and myself have agreed on the following: First, we will keep the church office open for regular hours (my office hours will also remain unchanged), with enhanced precautions to cope with the threat of infection. Second, all in-person Christian education and social gatherings (including youth events) will be suspended.

During Lent, we will offer the Wednesday book study series online, which can be accessed at any time each Saturday after 5:00 pm. Sunday’s adult confirmation class will also be offered online, and will be

available each week on Saturday after 5:00 pm. The Second Harvest Food Pantry will continue operating, with some modifications in schedule and procedures.

Finally, per Bishop John's request, traditional Sunday morning worship in the nave is cancelled until at least Palm Sunday, April 5. We will then reevaluate the situation. Periodic all-parish emails and One Call messages will help us stay in touch.

Please know that the staff and I stand ready to assist you in any way we can. This includes bringing communion to your home. If you feel isolated and alone, we will talk and pray with you; if you are homebound, we will shop for you; if you are hungry, we will bring you a meal; if you live alone, we would love to check in with you; please call or email the church office, or call or text Fr. Richard at 615.491.5204 for any of the above.

In the midst of all these challenges I want to share with you this "Prayer for a Pandemic," written by Cameron Bellm, of the Diocese of Olympia, in Seattle, which I came across just today.

"As fear grips our country,
Let us choose love.
During this time when we cannot physically wrap
Our arms around each other,
Let us yet find ways to be the loving embrace of
God to our neighbors."
AMEN.

I also offer to you this petition ("*For Quiet Confidence*") from the Book of Common Prayer, page 832:

O God of peace, who hast taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved,
in quietness and in confidence shall be our strength: By the might of thy Spirit
lift us, we pray thee, to thy presence, where we may be still and know that thou
art God; through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Every Blessing,

Fr. Richard Wineland
St. Philip's Episcopal Church