



# *the* EPISCOPAL DIOCESE *of* UPPER SOUTH CAROLINA

March 19, 2020

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

*"I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers." Ephesians 1:15-16*

In this extraordinary time, I find myself filled with gratitude and love for our common life in Christ. I've begun making calls to each of our congregations—to rectors, vicars or priests-in-charge where one is in place, and to senior wardens where there is no long-term priest serving. It is important that we stay in touch and aware of one another's needs in what increasingly appears to be an extended time of trial. So I pray for each congregation and each clergy person daily.

The challenge of social distancing for safety stands in stark contrast to our most primal Christian intentions: to be in close relationship with God and each other. Reports on this past Sunday's technologically engineered worship services across the Diocese were heartening. This was true both for the numbers of people participating and for our communal relief in feeling connected with each other—even if remotely. Perhaps this will be the time during which the Episcopal Church truly and widely embraces and develops its technology skills and uses! (If you need help, see Canon Alan Bentrup's technological primer on setting up remote meetings at [www.edusc.org/technology](http://www.edusc.org/technology).)

The physical realities of social distancing are challenging but deeply necessary to protect ourselves and to protect others. As the pandemic and estimates of future infection and death levels begin to grow exponentially even *with* social distancing, we must again reassess our gathering practices. ***Effective immediately, I am extending the suspension of public, in-person worship throughout the Diocese of Upper South Carolina at least through April 30<sup>th</sup>.*** I am acutely aware of the multitude of consequences that will occur as a result of this suspension—pastorally, liturgically, financially, and relationally.

To mitigate these consequences, conversations are already taking place among clergy and pastoral care committees of the Diocese about best practices for tending to pastoral needs. Canons Alan Bentrup, d'Rue Hazel and Jimmy Hartley are scheduling regular Zoom conferencing opportunities to facilitate these conversations at Convocational levels. These sessions will allow us to address other areas of concern as well, such as, How do we ensure that congregations have access to Holy Week services regardless of their technological capabilities? Should we focus on Morning Prayer as our primary corporate technological worship? How do we tend to ongoing Christian formation?

For congregations in leadership transitions, we are addressing what adjustments we need to make in search processes to ensure safe, wise, and thorough discernment of God’s call to clergy and the people whom they will serve.

This weekend, the Diocesan Executive Council (DEC) will meet—via Zoom—to consider, among other things, how we can corporately address and strengthen the most vulnerable congregations in our midst? It is clear that *all* congregations, and Diocesan House—and indeed virtually *all* places of employment—will be facing financial challenges. Thus, this is becoming a time during which we discover more deeply both our personal and corporate strengths and to use them to build up our communities and our abilities to respond to individuals.

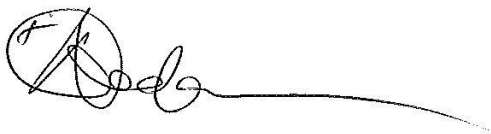
The White House hopes to send support checks to many Americans, checks that will be greatly needed and much-appreciated by many of our congregants. Should this happen, some among us will have the capacity to manage without that extra assistance. If you are in that circumstance and do receive a check, you might consider donating all or part of that assistance to bolster your congregation’s food, clothing, housing or mental illness ministries, which serve some of the most vulnerable of all people. Or, you can offer extra support to your congregation, which is almost certain to experience new financial stresses.

Jesus says, “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens, they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds.” Remembering these words of comfort reminds us also of their challenge, especially in uncertain times, to trust God’s love and care for us, come what may.

The apostle Paul, who built the Christian movement, rooted in love, against enormous odds and continual threats of violence reminds us constantly of our transcendent unity in the One who loves us more than we can ask or imagine, Jesus Christ.

Be safe. Call the lonely. Extend the help you can. Receive the help you need. And rejoice in the love that surrounds you.

Your devoted brother,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Andrew', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

+Andrew, child of God and servant of the Lord Jesus.