

# ST LUKE'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Dear Church,

Since my letter yesterday, things have, once again, changed quite a bit. I returned from tonight's Friday Lenten services at st; Luke's to find a letter from our bishops which states in part:

**"we strongly encourage you to consider canceling in-person, public worship for at least the next two weeks or until Palm Sunday at this point."** The full text of our Bishop's Pastoral Letter on the Coronavirus will be emailed to you shortly.

Neither the rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer nor the Canons of the Episcopal Church address a public health emergency such as the one we are now facing. Church law states: "The Rector or Priest-in-Charge shall have full authority and responsibility for the conduct of the worship and spiritual jurisdiction of the Parish, subject to the Rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer, the Constitution and Canons of this Church, and the pastoral direction of the Bishop." Canon III.9.6(a)(1)

As Presiding Bishop Michael Curry said: "Obedience to the moral primacy of love for the neighbor must direct us. My hope is that this will enable us to do that while maintaining the good order of the Church for the sake of following Jesus in God's mission for God's world." I am working with parish leaders to live up to Bishop Curry's hope.

Accordingly, after consulting with our wardens, I have decided to:

- Cancel in-person, public worship services effective March 15 and continuing until Palm Sunday at the earliest.
- Offer a webcast worship service at 11 a.m. on Sundays. (volunteers willing to help needed).
- Offer a webcast of Stations of the Cross and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament on the Friday nights remaining in Lent, (if volunteers willing to help are available).
- Close the building to all but essential activities (such as feeding people).
- Keep the parish office open for business but not visitation.
- Move all church meetings online.
- Move all Bible Study online (if people participate).
- Unfortunately, our Fish Fry is also canceled for the rest of Lent.
- Suspend regular visits to the homebound. Set up a program for maintaining contact with them through mail and telephone calls (volunteers willing to help are needed).

- Stay in close communication with our members through email letters like this, newsletters, and information posted in our St. Luke's Facebook Group. We're planning a couple of "town hall meetings" online and looking for people to lead Morning or Evening Prayer online as well.

### **Confused?**

I am sorry if you have been confused by all this - we sailing uncharted waters and receiving advice that changes as officials gain a better understanding of what is happening with the COVID-19 virus. Inevitably, this leads at times to planning do one thing at one moment and then finding a something else is needed a few hours later.

### **What about Friends and Family Day?**

I know that postponing or cancelling the Friends and Family Day celebration scheduled for this Sunday is a disappointment to all of us. I love having the St. Luke's Steel Band accompany our Caribbean Mass and was especially looking forward to hearing Dr. Joan Culpepper-Morgan speak. I hope the Network Guild will be able to reschedule both the Steel Band and Dr. Culpepper-Morgan.

### **So how will this work?**

Starting this Sunday, March 15, a small number of us will conduct and webcast a worship service at 11 a.m. During the rest of Lent, an even smaller team of us will conduct and webcast Stations of the Cross and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament on Friday nights. We could use some help setting up and improving the quality of our webcast - please let me know if you are willing to assist.

### **So how can I participate in worship?**

We will post a service bulletin with all of the text and music on our website so you can read and sing along during each service. Please note that you can find these webcasts on our Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/St-Lukes-Episcopal-Church-104540717566337/>

Note this a different internet address (or url) than for our Facebook Group.

### **What about meetings?**

We are also moving all meetings online effective immediately. This meetings of the vestry.

### **What about Bible Study?**

We will move Bible Study online. Please note that we will only continue Bible Study online if people participate. If online Bible Study doesn't work for us at this time, we will suspend scripture study until we can resume face-to-face meetings.

### **I need help to join in anything online!**

We will do our best to advise you how to use your cell phone or computer. It might be easier to ask someone you know for an at-home session.

### **Is our building open?**

Generally, our building is closed. Programs that feed people may continue with some special steps taken.

### **What about the office?**

We plan to keep the office open - but please call before visiting as we need to limit visits to the office.

### **Where will you be?**

I will be spending a lot of time in my home office answering the phone, writing emails, planning services, writing sermons - everything I usually do each week. Our music director and parish administrator will also continue to work.

### **What about my contribution?**

In these trying times it is critically important that each of us to continue contributing to St. Luke's. Please mail in your donation each week or ask your bank to automatically send a monthly check using their "bill pay" feature.

### **So how do I join an online service or meeting or Bible Study?**

All of our worship services will be cast online through the Church's Facebook Page:  
<https://www.facebook.com/St-Lukes-Episcopal-Church-104540717566337/>.

We will share more information on how you can participate in Bible Study and meetings as soon as we figure it out. We are all in a steep learning curve, and it will take some time to get things ironed out. Some of our work cannot move online. If the lunch and breakfast program is able to continue, we will work with those who offer this program to keep their participants healthy.

### **How can I stay in touch?**

These are trying times. There's no guidebook to help us know what to do next. Sometimes it seems things are changing and then changing back and then changing again. I realize this means, for example, that in the past few days members of the St. Luke's Steel Band have been told they were playing Sunday, were not playing Sunday, were playing Sunday, and now are being told they are not playing this Sunday. For the duration, please carefully read our emails and check our Facebook Group at

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/stlukeschurchnewhaven/>

I know it is confusing, but we can only webcast on a Facebook Page and not from a Facebook Group. Luckily we have one of both all set to go.

If you are not sure about what we are doing when, please check with our Senior Warden Valarie Stanley, our Junior Warden Bryant Grimes, myself, or our Parish Administrator Georgia Wilson. If you hear something that is not what you are reading here, please ask the person who is sharing to check with one of us. Please help us keep everyone on the same Chapter and verse. Together we can help each other walk through the coming days in safety and in peace.

Please find below a link to the Bishop's Pastoral letter:

[https://www.episcopalct.org/Customer-Content/www/CMS/files/Following\\_Jesus\\_in\\_the\\_Midst\\_of\\_a\\_Pandemic.pdf](https://www.episcopalct.org/Customer-Content/www/CMS/files/Following_Jesus_in_the_Midst_of_a_Pandemic.pdf)

### **A closing Prayer**

Let us pray:

Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep in this time, and give your angels charge over those who are afraid. Help us to be your people as we walk through the dark valley of this virus. Remind us you are always with us, ready to comfort us, if we ask. Tend the sick, Lord Christ; give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all for your love's sake.

Let the Church say: **Amen.**

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Thomas Jackson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Fr. Thomas Jackson  
Priest in Charge