



St. Mary's Episcopal Church

800 Rountree Street
Kinston, North Carolina 28501-3655

www.stmaryskinston.com

Telephone: (252) 523-6146

Fax: (252) 523-5134

The Fifth Thursday of Easter; May 14, 2020

Dear St. Mary's Parish Family,

I greet you in the name of the risen Lord, Jesus Christ! Clearly, we are not living in “normal” times. The ways which we had grown accustomed to living, interacting, and sharing space with one another are not currently safe for us or for our neighbors. And because the Gospel command to love one another as Jesus loves us requires sacrifice, all of us have been called to make humbling changes for the sake of our communities, nation, and the entire human family.

And yet, the “normal” mission of the church remains unchanged: we must provide avenues for worship, Christian teaching, care, and relationships. Since the suspension of public worship on March 13, St. Mary's has shifted worship, fellowship, and Christian formation to digital resources (i.e., recorded liturgies, Bible studies, book clubs, etc.). Much more pastoral care is done via phone, Zoom, and email. Opportunities for outreach and service continue and are shared in the Bell Ringer and weekly emails. These will continue for the foreseeable future.

I write today because we are also about to take a step towards a return to in-person worship. As North Carolina laws have eased the restrictions on public gatherings, we have been given guidance from the Diocese of East Carolina about how this may be possible for us at St. Mary's. With careful planning, we will begin offering a weekly outdoor public worship service starting this Sunday, May 17, in accordance with the current [State Executive Order](#) and the [diocesan guidelines](#). Although we at St. Mary's have grown accustomed to outdoor worship over the years, this will not be “normal.” **There will be many aspects of these outdoor services that will necessarily be different and it is important that these guidelines be read, understood, and followed carefully if we are to be able to continue to safely offer this form of worship in the future.** Don't hesitate to reach out to me, the Senior Warden (Jo Parrott), Junior Warden (Jimmy Ballard), or any other member of the Vestry with questions for clarification.

The Starting Point Considerations:

St. Mary's promotes and affirms the following general steps for social distancing and reduction of transmission of the COVID-19 coronavirus for all people:

- Maintain at least six feet of physical distancing.
- Wear a cloth face covering indoors, and also outdoors when physical distance of six feet cannot be maintained.
- Carry and regularly use hand sanitizer.
- Frequently wash hands using soap and water.
- Regularly clean all high touch surfaces.
- Stay at home if sick.

If you are someone described as a [“high-risk individual” with respect to COVID-19 impact](#), we encourage you to stay at home rather than risk any chance of infection. Digital resources for worship from home will continue to be offered through our [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#) platforms.

Gatherings that are hosted at St. Mary’s will seek to minimize the amount of surfaces and materials that can be touched (chairs, bulletins, collection plates, bathrooms, etc.).

Practices that necessitate coming within six feet of one another will be minimized (communion, passing the peace, passing a collection plate, confirmation, etc.).

Parameters for Outdoor Worship at St. Mary’s:

- Sunday worship will be outdoors only at 10:30am. In the event of inclement weather, notice of cancellation will be shared via Facebook by Sunday morning at 9:30am.
- Worship will consist of a liturgy of Spiritual Communion, similar to what has been offered online since March. Worshipers can anticipate that the liturgy will last about 45 minutes.
- Worshipers **must bring their own seating** (chairs, blankets, etc.). This will minimize the risk of transmission and not require church property to be cleaned after each use.
- Worshipers of different households **must sit and remain at least 6-ft apart at all times** (Yes, even during the passing of the peace!).
- For worshipers who prefer to remain in their vehicles during the liturgy, an area reserved for cars to be parked on the West Lawn will be specifically designated.
- Bulletins will be available on our website’s front page. Worshipers are encouraged to print bulletins at home or view on their own device. A few bulletins will be provided on a table.
- Hand sanitizer and face coverings will also be provided on the same table. All worshipers are encouraged (and **worship leaders are required**) to [wear face coverings properly](#).
- The church building will be closed during service times. Worshipers are advised to use the restroom before leaving home, though the restrooms in the Bride’s Room will be available for emergencies (access through the door closest to the Chapel).
- There will be one Lector who will be the only person speaking from the Lectern microphone. The Officiant/Preacher will use another microphone from another location.
- Since singing produces an especially widespread aerosol even when face coverings are used, music will be instrumental or offered by a soloist (no congregational singing).
- Until further notice, nursery and coffee hours/receptions will not be made available.

As I wrote in the pastoral letter when we were first experiencing the effects of this pandemic, parts of these temporary adaptations will be challenging to me, as they may be for you. Yet, after nine Sundays of being apart, I am grateful that we now have the opportunity to offer a form of worship in person for those who are able and comfortable to attend.

You may note that May 17 was the scheduled date of Bishop Skirving’s visitation to St. Mary’s. **While there will not be confirmation this Sunday, I am glad that Bishop Skirving will be with us as we take these first steps together.** Opportunities for confirmation will be made available as soon as possible.

Our willingness to humbly adopt practices like these are signs of compassion for others, and in so doing St. Mary’s will continue to offer yet another example that the church is truly a beacon of light and hope to a darkened world. God bless you, friends!

Yours in Christ Jesus,



The Reverend Thomas P. H. Warren
Rector, St. Mary’s Episcopal Church