



The Episcopal Diocese of East Carolina

The Right Reverend Robert S. Skirving, Bishop

October 16, 2020

Dear East Carolina friends,

*“Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me,
and the God of peace will be with you.”*

(Philippians 4:9 NRSV)

Personally, I find great hope in these words from the apostle Paul, words proclaimed with last Sunday’s readings. After encouraging them to “rejoice in the Lord always” Paul called his readers to think about those things that are true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, excellent and worthy of praise. Perhaps another way of saying to them that they ought to “set [their] minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.” (*Colossians 3:2 NRSV*) To accomplish this, they are told to keep on doing the things that they have learned, received, heard and seen in him, trusting that the God of peace would be with them.

We’re living in a time when we cannot help but become focused “on things that are on earth.” With the coronavirus continuing to move freely in our midst, bringing sickness, death, financial disaster and untold layers of stress and anxiety, it is hard to “set our minds on things above.” With the continuous onslaught of campaign messages that are bitter and angry, and with the legitimate fear that such behavior will not end with the election, it is hard to think about those higher things that Paul names. What are we to do? We are to keep doing the things that we have learned, received, heard and seen from those who have come before us as followers of Jesus and citizens of the reign of God, knowing that the God of peace will be with us.

With this letter, you will find a simple document explaining some revisions to our limits on indoor worship, allowing our congregations more freedom to gather in person so long as we continue to work to prevent and/or mitigate the spread of the coronavirus. The clergy and churchwardens of our Diocese continue to have responsibility for establishing and implementing a plan for their own congregation, a plan which must be framed within the limits and guidelines provided in this document.

In the days to come, you will receive more information about a “Journey Across East Carolina” that will be launched on the First Sunday of Advent and continue through to the week of Diocesan Convention. This Journey will call us to grow in our faith as followers of Jesus, strengthen our capacity for ministry in the communities where we live, and prepare us for a process of discerning mission priorities for the Diocese that will be fully launched at Diocesan Convention ...all while we Move, Learn, Pray and Give together. Please watch for the details and plan to participate as individuals, households or congregational teams.

Together, let us be people who “rejoice in the Lord always” and especially in those moments when it is most difficult. And let us keep on doing those things that we have learned as followers of Jesus, disciplines that sustain us and strengthen us for ministry even in these strange times. Know that the peace of God will be with us!

Yours in Christ,

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Revisions to The Next Steps of our Easter Journey

October 16, 2020

With the input of the clergy and churchwardens of the Diocese, and the support of the Executive Council of the Diocese of East Carolina, the following revisions to our May 13th worship guidelines are offered to the congregations of the Diocese, for their consideration and implementation effective immediately and until they are revised again in the future.

As a reference point, here is a link to the May 13th guidelines:

https://s3.amazonaws.com/dfc_attachments/public/documents/3279696/Guidelines_for_Public_Worship.pdf

As an additional reference point, here's a link to a document titled "Interim Guidance for Places of Worship" that was published by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services:

<https://files.nc.gov/covid/documents/guidance/NCDHHS-Interim-Guidance-for-Places-of-Worship.pdf>

This "Interim Guidance" is filled with helpful information about returning to indoor in-person worship, including many links to other valuable resources. Congregational leadership is encouraged to work through this guidance carefully when updating their own congregational plan

Things That Stay The Same

- ❖ As we make decisions about the life, worship and ministry of our congregations, we are to continue to follow our Governor's "Recommendations to Promote Social Distancing and Reduce Transmission." These are detailed on page 2 of the May 13th guidelines. Those who are sick or most vulnerable should be encouraged to stay home. This may include some of our clergy, and congregations may seek assistance from the Office of the Bishop to find supply clergy when necessary.
- ❖ Clergy and Churchwardens must work together to develop and implement a congregational plan regarding public worship and must communicate this plan effectively to all members of the congregation.
- ❖ For the purposes of being safe and of modeling a good example, those leading worship must still keep physical distance from one another, wear face coverings and use hand sanitizer appropriately.
- ❖ Congregational singing is still prohibited. Soloists must keep proper distances and wear a proper face covering. Here are two links to masks that have been specially developed for use by singers:
<https://www.broadwayreliefproject.com/singersmask>
<https://www.mymusicfolders.com/product/resonance-singers-mask-with-disposable-biofilters/>

And here is a link to a webinar titled "Choirs and Singing in the Age of COVID-19" hosted by the Consortium of Endowed Episcopal Parishes that provides some helpful insights:

https://www.ceepnetwork.org/liturgy/?mc_cid=d176f90b5d&mc_eid=344301bf33

- ❖ Celebrations of Holy Eucharist are still to follow the guidelines provided on May 13th and linked above.

Things That Are Changing

- ❖ Congregations are now welcome to worship in the following ways, as laid out in the “Interim Guidance for Places of Worship” linked above. All in-person options should always be planned with the goal of mitigating the risk of viral spread. Congregations may want to offer a combination of options.

-Virtual or online worship.

-Outdoor in-person worship, following worship guidelines and without a limit on numbers.

-Indoor in-person worship, with an occupancy limit of 100 people per room or 30% of stated fire capacity, whichever is less. Physical distancing guidelines, and all other efforts to mitigate the risk of viral spread should be followed very carefully. Congregations without a stated fire capacity should follow the NCDHHS guidelines linked above.

- ❖ When a congregation offers child care or educational programming for children and youth, they are to follow this CDC [guidance](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/index.html) for those settings, linked here:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/index.html>

In Conclusion

With others across this nation and our world, we have been on this journey for a long time and we are tired. Please find ways to encourage members of your congregation to treat one another with love, respect and patience. We are the body of Christ and are called to love one another and all of God’s children in a way which models God’s love for all of us and for all of creation.

Clergy and Churchwardens will continue to have the opportunity to consult with one another and with Canon Mollie Roberts and Bishop Rob Skirving. As we are able to do so safely, we will consider additional modifications to our patterns of worship.

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon;
where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.
Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. *Amen.*

A Prayer attributed to St. Francis