



# The Episcopal Diocese of East Carolina

The Right Reverend Robert S. Skirving, Bishop

Thursday, May 28, 2020

To the People of the Diocese of East Carolina, regarding Public Worship in "Phase Two"

**"Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth."**

Dear Friends in Christ,

As we approach the Day of Pentecost, this Sunday, the chorus of Joe Zsigray's "Lord, Send Out Your Spirit" rings clearly in my memory. I was once a part of a worship band that played each year at a diocesan lay ministry festival. When the weather allowed, we worshiped outdoors. In my memory, at least, we sang this song every year. It is based on Psalm 104, a psalm assigned for use on the Day of Pentecost.

This year, many of us will not worship together in person on the Day of Pentecost and that will be almost as difficult for me as not worshipping together during Holy Week or on Easter morning. Since mid-March, most of our worship has been online. While that would not be the first choice for most of us, let me affirm that I have clearly witnessed God's Holy Spirit at work in our efforts and offerings, and I continue to pray that God's Spirit will renew the face of our earth.

Through Phase One, North Carolinians were limited to mass gatherings of no more than ten people, although larger mass gatherings for the purposes of worship were allowed outdoors. In a document published on May 13<sup>th</sup> as "The Next Steps of our Easter Journey," congregations of the diocese were provided with parameters for making plans to return to public worship, plans that would require a commitment to our Governor's "Recommendations to Promote Social Distancing and Reduce Transmissions" and modifications to our usual patterns of worship.

Entering, Phase Two, congregations are still bound by these parameters and should continue to follow the "Next Steps" which are published on our Diocesan website. Surprising to most, however, is that the Governor's limitations on mass gatherings have changed very little from Phase One. What has changed is that faith communities are no longer bound by these limitations. That said, in East Carolina we will continue to respect our Governor's limitation of no more than ten people for indoor mass gatherings, while continuing to accept our Governor's exemption for limits on outdoor worship. Congregations may choose to worship outdoors without limit on numbers. These directions for congregations will remain in place until the end of the month of June, unless announced otherwise.

God's Holy Spirit continues to move in our midst; equipping us for the life and work that God gives us. May God's Holy Spirit empower us to serve the needs of those in our communities who are sick or who have suffered financial hardship as a result of COVID-19, and to seek justice and peace for all people and especially for those who experience little of either. May God's Holy Spirit renew the face of the earth!

Yours in Christ,

*Rob*

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