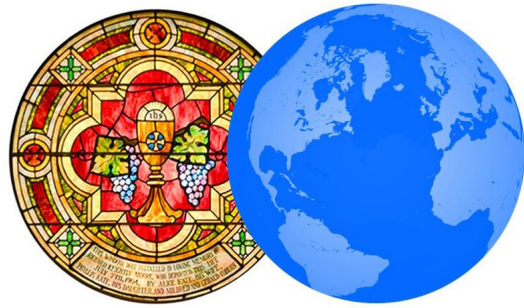


A Message From Fr. Steve



All:

I know some of you were shocked when you heard that Bishop Ed had closed the churches in Oklahoma (<https://tinyurl.com/uuora23>). When Texas A&M University cancelled classes and Thomas was told to stay home an extra week or two, I knew that something different was going on and I needed to pay attention. I do not envy the Bishop's position to have to make such a difficult decision nor do I fault him for changing his mind when he was presented with new information. This is what good leaders do.

I do have some experience with disasters and closing churches and doing things differently. My experiences taught me to take things slowly, to evaluate carefully what makes the most sense for us at this time, and to adapt as things change. The one thing we shouldn't do is allow our anxiety to rule the day. Scripture encourages us to "be not afraid", and, although I have had many moments of high anxiety in the past few days, I've also had moments where I've been reminded that God has been with me through many difficult and challenging times before, and this time will be no different.

This Sunday, I encourage you to join the live streaming service at the National Cathedral in Washington DC. The Presiding Bishop will be preaching and my guess he will offer wonderful words of hope and encouragement. You can catch the live stream of the service here at 10:15 CST <https://cathedral.org/>.

In the next few days, I will be working with the staff and wardens on how to provide worship and care for the congregation moving forward. What I want to make clear to you is we are not attempting to stop the spread of the virus. We are attempting to slow the spread down to a low multiple so our health systems may be at their best and provide rooms and ventilators for those that need it. As far as I know, Washington County doesn't even have any test kits, and our hospital could be easily overwhelmed if the virus spreads too rapidly.

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It is prudent for us to serve as an example as well as to minimize the possibility of spreading the virus to more people. I'm not a mathematician, but if one person came to worship on Sunday, they would spread the virus to 3 other people, who would spread it to 3 more people, and before you know it, a bunch of people would be infected. Our challenge as a community is not to stop the spread but to slow it down. That's why we are being asked not to gather in large groups and why the Bishop has closed the churches.

Early next week I will begin posting information and resources for worshipping at home. Additionally, I will find a means to provide a weekly homily so that we can stay connected. I encourage you to check St. Luke's website at episcopalbartleville.org and follow us on Facebook and Instagram. Also, I am ending my Facebook fast, so you can friend me as well. I usually take a 90 fast from Facebook in the Spring, but the need for connecting with you outweighs the benefit of avoiding social media.

Finally, continue in prayer. Pray for our leaders, for our church, for our community, and for those on the front lines of fighting the spread of the virus and caring for the sick.

O God our heavenly Father, you have blessed us and given us care over your creation: Increase our reverence before the mystery of life; and give us new insight into your purposes for the earth, and new wisdom and determination in making provision for its future in accordance with your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Christ's Peace,
Steve+