



33 Chestnut Street, Post Office Box 631, Camden, ME 04843

March 20, 2020

Dear Parishioners,

First of all — I can't believe how much I miss you all. I had a conversation with other clergy and the Bishop on Tuesday, March 17. The diocese has been in close contact with the Maine CDC. So, let's get right down to the informational part of this missive.

The diocese and state government now believe that this shut down will last at least 7-8 weeks. That means Holy Week in-person services and Easter in-person services are officially cancelled. But I said "in person". We are working on the technology that will allow us to meet at least virtually. Before you ask – even outdoor venues are considered a high risk. Remember: many people are asymptomatic for 3-5 days before they develop any symptoms. They are highly contagious, during this time period, though. The diocese's best guess at this point is that perhaps around May 20 we'll begin to have in-person gatherings again.

The diocese and state are discouraging all face to face meetings with parishioners unless it is an **emergency** – last rites etc.

The diocese would love churches to send photos and stories of what we are doing for *The Dialog* – upbeat stories are especially welcome. They want to showcase innovative ways of doing ministry and give us all positive stories – that sort of thing. I would love it if you would share things that are happening where you are. I would like to share pictures of what people are doing. We'll put them on our website – without names if you request it – for all to enjoy.

The Presiding Bishop's huge rally with the diocese in May has been cancelled by the venue the diocese was renting. As you can see – big venues are fully anticipating that the Coronavirus will not be a quickly passing thing.

Video conferences, such as Zoom meetings, are encouraged. Plans are in the works now to have:

- **Compline** by Zoom or Facebook at 8pm on Wednesdays and Sundays. We'll let you know which.
- EfM is thinking about video conferencing for their classes.
- My class is already meeting via email, and we will also post it on St. Thomas' Facebook and website pages.
- Bible study will start again soon on Wednesdays at 11am via Zoom.
- I am considering a weekly check-in for everyone (even those far way) via Zoom once a week. This will help us stay abreast of needs and concerns and will allow us to see other friendly familiar faces.
- I think I'd like to also have a weekly chat with our kids via Zoom. More on that next week. Let me know if you are interested.

The diocese has asked everyone to work from home. You will probably get very familiar with the interior of my farmhouse as I broadcast on *Facebook Live*, and do Zoom meetings from here.

I know this is a trying time. I am concerned about all of you – and also my parents who are in lock down. I hate not being able to go and see how they're doing, and I'm sure you are feeling cut off from loved ones, too.

Here are some friendly suggestions:

- Don't spend all day watching news programs about what's happening. There's a lot of conjecture out there – which isn't helpful. Give yourself a break from all the anxiety.
- DO take walks. Get out in God's world – just do the social distancing thing – 6' from people. Enjoy nature. Notice the birds, and the tiny changes in God's world around us.
- DO sit in silence for 10 mins at least once a day. Don't feel the need to do anything except sit in the presence of God. God will hold you.
- Those in the same household – DO hold each other. (Obviously unless someone is sick...) Touch is even more important now in a world where distancing is required.
- Join me on Facebook – my personal page is found @ LisaSmithFry. We also have a church page – St. Thomas' Episcopal Church, or @camdenepiscopalians.
- If you don't yet have Zoom on your computer, please add it by going to www.zoom.com. You can wait until we send out notice of a meeting – then just follow the prompts. Let us know if you have problems with it. If you don't have a camera embedded in your computer, you will be able to see all of us – but we won't see you. We'll know you're there, though, because your name will appear. If you don't have a microphone, there is the option of calling in via your telephone. Alternatively, there is a Zoom app for your smartphone or tablet.

- We will do some meetings for the people without internet or computer via conference call. And I encourage you also – check on people by phone who are not online.

Sorry this is so long – there's a lot to communicate.

For the duration, please use my personal email at lisasmithfry@gmail.com. I can pick up my work email – but due to technical things I won't go into – the print is miniscule, and it's hard to read. So, if you would switch to my personal email, that would be great. And I text. Like a fiend. 207.231.2411.

Take care of yourselves. Pray for each other. I love you all. God's blessing.

Lisa+

Prayer for a Pandemic, by Cameron Bellm

May we who are merely inconvenienced

Remember those whose lives are at stake.

May we who have no risk factors

Remember those most vulnerable.

May we who have the luxury of working from home

Remember those who must choose between preserving their health or making their rent.

May we who have the flexibility to care for our children when their schools close

Remember those who have no options.

May we who have to cancel our trips

Remember those that have no safe place to go.

May we who are losing our margin money in the tumult of the economic market

Remember those who have no margin at all.

May we who settle in for a quarantine at home

Remember those who have no home.

As fear grips our country,

let us choose love.

During this time when we cannot physically wrap our arms around each other,

Let us yet find ways to be the loving embrace of God to our neighbors.

Amen.