



July 6, 2020

Greetings friends,

It's been over three months since we've been able to gather together for in-person worship. In that time our world has been transformed by the dual pandemics of COVID-19 and racism. We have been awakened to the realities of our own fragility as we encounter a deadly virus that has taken the lives of over 129,000 people across the United States. Simultaneously, we have been reminded that the insidious evil of racism continues to hold sway in our country, our church, and our lives. It has been a sobering few months, filled with anger, sadness, fear, and grief.

And yet, even in the midst of these dual pandemics, the light of God shines forth. The Episcopal Church across the country, and right here in Connecticut, has explored new ways to "be the church" through the use of technology; inviting those who have never crossed the threshold of a church building into the experience of worship online. We have also heard the voices of millions around the world as they proclaimed "Black Lives Matter;" calling all of us to a new or renewed focus on justice and reconciliation.

At CEC, we too have been invited to explore new ways of being. We have tried on new ways of staying connected via our CEC phone tree. We have wondered together about the holiness of our homes in the "Holiness at Home" video series. And most recently, we have journeyed together through a time of lament in the "Lament" video series. God is still here, and God is still inviting us into deeper relationship with God, with each other, and with our world so that we might show forth the love of God to all we meet.

Which brings us to the question I'm sure is on all of your minds, "when can we gather again for in-person worship?" The Vestry has been discussing this question each month at our regular Vestry meetings, now being held via Zoom, and the question comes up regularly in the weekly clergy and wardens Zoom meetings with our bishops. The answer to it is, like so much in our world today, not an easy one.

Our bishops, Ian and Laura, have been very clear that we must exercise great caution as we consider when to resume in-person worship. In their most recent directions, "Living with COVID-19: Protocols and Directions for Clergy and Vestries in the Episcopal Church in Connecticut" they noted, "A conservative and careful approach that prioritizes the most vulnerable among us is the most compassionate and caring response we can make to COVID-19." The most vulnerable among us has been consistently defined by the bishops, the governor of Connecticut, public health officials, and the CDC as those "age 65 and older or those with underlying health conditions," which means virtually our entire congregation falls within this "most vulnerable" category.

As a result of these realities, a conservative approach is required. We are exploring options for outside in-person worship that could begin once Connecticut enters Phase 3 of re-opening. These

could include something like “drive-in” church, in which everyone remains in their cars or a service wherein everyone brings their own chairs and sits in their own “parking spot” for the worship service. As I said, these are only a few of the ideas being explored and our focus is and will remain protecting the most vulnerable among us.

As we explore these ideas, it is important to note that, even when we do finally gather again for in-person worship, the service will be quite different. We will not be sharing in the Eucharistic meal, nor will we be singing, acapella or otherwise. Masks will be required and we will all be observing physical distancing of at least 6 feet before, during, and after the worship service.

Once our plans to resume in-person worship have taken shape, they will be communicated in the weekly e-News as well as via our CEC phone tree. If you have questions or concerns regarding the process of resuming in-person worship, please feel free to reach out to me.

Yet another challenging reality of this time is the financial struggles so many are experiencing. We continue to lift up those most affected by these financial challenges, particularly those already in precarious financial positions. Sadly, CEC also finds itself in this category as our giving has dropped significantly as a result of our building closure. I would encourage you to take advantage of the various ways to give to CEC, including the new mail slot in the office door, regular mail, or via online giving at [christchurchnorwich.org/give](http://christchurchnorwich.org/give). At the same time, if you will be unable to fulfill your pledge due to the current economic struggles, please let me know. In light of the current economic climate, this is an anticipated reality and carries no shame!

Finally, I would be remiss if I didn't take a moment to remind all of us that, while the building may be close, the church is still open and active in the world. We have been called to share the love of Christ with our world, and to shine forth with the light of God. We have all been invited to explore what it means to live out Christ's love in new ways during these last few months. I invite you to continue in that journey as we explore together the path God has laid before us.

My family's prayers are with you all.

Blessings,

Pastor Stacey

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Stacey". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed name "Pastor Stacey".

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