



EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF NH

NH's Stay at Home Order: A Letter from Bishop Rob

March 27, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ,

We have just heard from Governor Sununu that the State of New Hampshire will be under a Stay at Home order until Monday May 4th. The purpose of this order is to slow progression of the virus that causes COVID-19.

Expected Timeline for Worship

The Governor's Stay at Home Order gives us some guidance about the timeframe of our fast from in-person public worship. It is now clear that we will not be able to gather as usual for our Holy Week and Easter celebrations. The *earliest* we might consider returning to our sanctuaries for worship may be Sunday May 10, which happens to be Good Shepherd Sunday/Mothers' Day. Having said this, I need to assert *there is no guarantee that it may be deemed prudent or safe for us to return to church on that day*, and it may very well be that a call to return may not come to all churches all at once. We will continue to update you as the situation evolves. In the meantime, your local church is providing, either by their own production or by referring to the worship services the diocese is making available, on-line worship services of word, prayer and spiritual communion, even as we experience this time of sacramental exile and fasting.

Essential Services

Clearly, we are all striving to balance the need to provide pastoral and necessary care to households in need of food, clothing, shelter and other needs, while at the same time ensuring that our volunteers and guests are safe. The physical configurations of these ministries vary from setting to setting. Some have found it

impossible to maintain the necessary 6 feet distance between persons. At least one food pantry and a major day care provider have had to close after learning of positive test results for the virus. Others are endeavoring to remain open as long as it is feasible and deemed safe to do so. We know these decisions are extremely difficult yet sometimes necessary to make. Please consult with your local health officer and engage your Bishop's Committees and Vestries. You have my support and prayers as you make these decisions and my office is eager to be informed and consulted.

We can take heart that, though we have had to close almost all of our spaces for 12-Step Recovery Programs, those organizations have displayed tremendous adaptability in moving their meetings to on-line formats. A recent NHPR Exchange discussion revealed that there has actually been a significant expansion in persons being included in meetings. Though the recovery of many will remain vulnerable, our prayers continue for the ways God continues actively to seek the liberation and life of those experiencing addiction.

Since we took the lead from our neighboring states, I am grateful that as a church, we have already taken many precautions in advance of the New Hampshire order to help safeguard the health of our parishes and the communities they serve. We are practicing physical distancing, limiting the numbers of our gatherings to no more than 10 as the Governor's order stipulates. We are getting very adept at offering a range of worship services via our computers and telephones. We are also ramping up our lines of communication and connection to those on our parish lists, especially to those who would be most vulnerable to the virus's effects if they were to venture into public places. It has been enormously heartening to see how our clergy and lay leaders are demonstrating their love for God's people in creative ways they hardly imagined before the present crisis. The signs of the Church's resilience and vitality are beyond measure, and I cannot thank you, or God, enough.

May God continue to show us signs of love and healing grace, protect those who are keeping us supplied with our necessities, and bless and encourage those who are working so hard to bring health to the afflicted.

Faithfully and Gratefully Yours,

Bishop Rob
The Rt. Rev. Robert Hirschfeld