

**ECCT Clergy and Lay Leaders Communication: COVID-19  
Update #11: May 8, 2020**

Dear Clergy and Wardens in the Episcopal Church in Connecticut:

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

We want to begin by, once again, thanking all of you for your faithfulness and leadership during these unprecedented times in the life of the church, our communities and state, our nation, and the world. We have witnessed, over and over again, your profound faith in Jesus Christ, your dedication to God's mission in your neighborhoods and beyond, and your wisdom and love in leading God's people through the tumult and challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. You are inspiring.

We thank God that we are beginning to see a slight downturn in COVID-19 illnesses across our state, even as we acknowledge that communities of color and poorer communities are disproportionately impacted by the pandemic because of the deadly intersection of racism, poverty, and lack of access to health care (as was discussed in [this ECCT panel just this morning.](#)) Thanks to the tireless efforts of health care providers and the good will of the residents of Connecticut pursuing safe practices, we are starting to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. And still there is an extremely long way to go before we are free from the dangers of the coronavirus. Vigilance and dedication to overcoming the pandemic are needed now more than ever, lest we see a return to increasing cases of COVID-19.

As we have noted in previous updates, Governor Ned Lamont identified May 20<sup>th</sup> as the date until which most businesses and organizations in the state were to be closed. <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/Office-of-the-Governor/Executive-Orders/Lamont-Executive-Orders/Executive-Order-No-7X.pdf> In-line with the Governor's Executive Order, we strongly urged all of the parishes and worshipping communities in the Episcopal Church in Connecticut likewise to close our church buildings to in-person worship through May 20. The vast majority of parishes have complied, for which we are extremely grateful. Now the Governor and his Reopen Connecticut team have begun to outline a phased in approach to reopening the state, tentatively planned to start after May 20. While exact details of the Governor's reopening plan are still to be detailed, it is appropriate for us to begin to think about what it would mean for us to begin in-person worship again sometime after May 20<sup>th</sup>. **Within the next week we hope to have a set of protocols or guidelines for the phased in resumption of in-person worship in our church buildings across ECCT. Our guidelines and protocols**

**will put safety first and will continue to be guided by the Governor's Executive Orders. Any resumption in in-person worship will be slow and gradual, making sure that we proceed with extreme caution.** The best pastoral care that we can provide to the faithful in our parishes is to do everything in our combined power to keep all people safe.

In our telephone conversation with the Governor yesterday as part of his Faith Advisory Council, Governor Lamont underscored the importance of faith leaders in helping to keep the people of Connecticut safe. While he described May 20<sup>th</sup> as a "pivot point" in the reopening of Connecticut, he urged us to continue to practice strict social distancing guidelines now and into the immediate future. The Governor also emphasized that, with increasing access to testing, it is important to get tested if one has any symptoms of COVID-19. Such testing will help with his plan to "track and trace" the spread of the disease across our state. We encourage you to share this counsel with your parishioners.

We appreciate that the unknowingness and lack of clarity about what the next steps of our life together might be - including whether, when and how we might begin in-person worship again in our church buildings – can cause anxiety and angst for us as leaders and for our parishioners. God assures us that there is no need for us to be anxious, yet anxiety is a common human experience that we need to attend to when it arises. We are so thankful for the bi-weekly Monday conversations that Dr. Ron Casey is hosting for ECCT clergy through our Clergy Family Assistance Program. If you have not availed yourself of that resource we encourage you to do so. In addition, **next Tuesday Evening, May 12, from 6:30-8:30 pm Canons Robin Hammeal-Urban and Lee Ann Tolzmann will be offering a zoom workshop on "Effective Leadership in Times of Anxiety and Pandemic."** The workshop will provide practical information on how to move forward faithfully in the face of anxiety and will address such topics as: human responses in the cycle of a disaster, how emotions spread from one person to another, emotional hijacking, and how leaders can help to set the emotional tone of a group. **We strongly encourage you to avail yourself of this workshop.** More information on the workshop and how to access Dr. Casey's clergy conversations can be found on the ECCT website here under upcoming ECCT Events: <https://www.episcopalct.org/covid-19-coronavirus-updates/>

With the increasing signs of spring all around us, many of us turn our attention to springtime rites of passage such as school graduations and Region confirmation services. We are very disappointed that because of the coronavirus we have had to cancel the planned Region confirmation services this May and June. We are working on

the possibility of having Region confirmation services in the fall. We know, however, that many of you have confirmation classes that are concluding at this time. **While we are not able to celebrate in-person affirmations of faith with the laying of hands, particularly with young people, across our diocese at this time, we urge you to recognize the completion of confirmation classes somehow in your virtual worship.** Perhaps you might include the Baptismal Covenant and a special recognition of those who have been preparing for confirmation or reception in your online worship services.

Spring is also a time for school graduations and other significant milestones in ones' youth and young adulthood. While Governor Lamont announced on Tuesday that school buildings will remain closed until the end of 2019-2020 academic year and that distance learning will continue, he did note that many school districts are working hard to find creative ways to celebrate the success of those who are graduating or transitioning to another school level. **We recognize the grief and loss experienced because we cannot come together in person to celebrate graduations; and we encourage you to celebrate these important times of transition for the young people in our parishes.** Sharon Pearson, one of the foremost Christian Educators in The Episcopal Church and a parishioner at St Matthew's in Wilton has offered excellent suggestions on how we can mark this holy time with our youth and young adults. We commend her most recent blog to you, particularly noting the virtual service for graduates from Robert Zapulla: <http://rowsofsharon.com/2020/05/05/grief-and-graduation/> .

We also want to celebrate all of the extraordinary efforts of parents, grandparents, and care-givers who are working mightily to continue at home learning during the time of this pandemic. Thank you for all that you are doing to continue the education of the children in your care.

*O Eternal God, bless all schools, colleges, and universities, and especially all home schooling, that they may be lively centers for sound learning, new discovery, and the pursuit of wisdom; and grant that those who teach, and those who learn, especially those who are graduating, may find you to be the source of all truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer p. 824, modified)*

Faithfully,

The Rt. Rev. Ian T. Douglas  
Bishop Diocesan

The Rt. Rev. Laura J. Ahrens  
Bishop Suffragan