

An Update from Bishop Benfield

All Congregations Urged Not to Meet

Each day public health authorities are either mandating or urging additional steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19. In many jurisdictions, large gatherings, including church services, have now been prohibited. So far that sort of prohibition is not the case in Arkansas. It is apparent, though, that people want appropriate actions taken to ensure that as many people as possible remain healthy.

On Thursday I strongly urged Episcopal congregations in central Arkansas to institute virtual worship until March 31 rather than gathering physically in church buildings. After reports from other parts of the state, **I am now strongly encouraging ALL Episcopal congregations in Arkansas to participate in virtual worship until March 31 rather than physically gathering.**

One way to worship is for anyone with internet access to join one of the congregations that offer live streaming. (By the way, St. Andrew's in Marianna has been offering a digitally focused liturgy for years). A list of the congregations that I know of that offer some sort of digital worship is at the end of this message. A second way to worship could be for the clergy or lay leaders to offer prayers (such as Morning Prayer) in church at the regularly scheduled time, while encouraging parishioners to say their prayers in their homes at the same time. Or you may think of another creative response. These are all ways that we can still be a part of supportive Christian communities in this challenging time in which we need one another more than ever, but may not be able to be with one another physically.

As I go about my daily life this week, I see much fear: fear of illness, fear of others, fear that there will not be enough of whatever it is that we think we need. In response, I am reminded of what we read in the first letter of John: "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18). What the

writer is telling us is that where there is fear, we will act lovingly so that fear can be overcome. I encourage you to take loving, thoughtful actions in the coming days and weeks that recognize the needs of others; doing so will help overcome the fear that so many people now have. It is an important way to live out our Christian lives.

Faithfully yours,

Larry Benfield
Bishop of Arkansas

Here are some links to online services and sermons:

- Christ Church in Little Rock plans to stream services via Youtube and Facebook at facebook.com/ChristEpiscopalChurchLR.
- St. Andrew's in Marianna has for several years been having online services, which are open to all at standepiscopal.org (Sundays, 9:45 a.m.).
- St. Bartholomew's in Fort Smith streams its 10:30 a.m. services on its Facebook page: facebook.com/stbartsfortsmith.
- St. Margaret's in Little Rock posts audio of its sermons on its website at stmargaretschurch.org/worship/sermons.html.
- St. Mark's in Little Rock posts its sermons live at facebook.com/stmarkslr.
- St. Paul's in Fayetteville broadcasts its entire services live on Youtube at 8:45 and 11 a.m. at youtube.com/c/stpaulsfay.
- Trinity Cathedral posts the audio of its sermons on its website at trinitylittlerock.org/worship-and-music/sermon-podcasts (also available as a podcast).