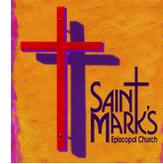


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May 27, 2020



Beloved of God and Community of St. Mark's:

As the season of Pentecost begins, I want to reach out and share some thoughts about our continuing life as the faith community of St. Mark's. I want you to know how deeply I miss seeing you in church on Sunday mornings. I miss singing together as the people of God. I miss catching up with people at coffee hour. And though I never thought I would say this, I miss all the meetings in-person. This health crisis has brought so many changes and it is difficult for all of us to accept and process. Like you, I look forward to the time when in-person church is not only possible but safe again. However, it will be a number of months before we will be able to meet in-person for worship and I wanted to share my thoughts about this and reassure you of my concern for everyone's safety and health along with what I hope is a profound understanding of Church.



I believe that the work of the church is essential. Proclaiming the Good News of God in Christ is essential. The work of caring for those who are lonely, vulnerable, marginalized, fearful, discouraged and oppressed is essential. Striving for justice and peace among all people is essential. Respecting the dignity of every human being is essential. As our own presiding bishop Michael Curry is fond of reminding us: Being a loving, liberating and life-giving presence in the world is essential. The biblically mandated work of welcoming the stranger, the refugee and the undocumented is essential. Being a reconciling and healing presence in this divided and conflicted world is essential.

The Church, the ongoing incarnation of the body of Christ in the world, does not need to be "opened up" as the church has never been "closed." You and I are the living and breathing body of Christ in this world and as long as we, the people of God continue to reach out in love, healing, forgiveness, reconciliation, beauty and joy the church can never be closed. We are the people of God wherever we are, no matter what is happening in the world around us and that cannot be taken away from us.

We are called to love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves. **In the present moment, that means that we will not gather in-person in our church buildings until it is safe and until we have discerned and made wise decisions about how to protect one another, limit the risk of harm to our most vulnerable members and thoughtfully planned our gradual return to in-person worship and gatherings.**



We are the church! You are called to be God's person in the world wherever you are and to serve in the ways that you are able and that are offered and revealed to you by the urging of the Holy Spirit. I know that it is difficult not to be able to gather and that we, as a close-knit community, miss one another and the comfort and encouragement of worshiping together. There will be a time when that is possible again and I look forward to that day very much. But this is a time for wise and careful decision making so that we can keep

each other healthy and safe. In the coming weeks and months the clergy, vestry and staff will be working to develop a measured and well-planned way to slowly return to some in-person aspects of church but we will be doing so in a way that endeavors to do what the love of God demands, that we care for one another in the way that we gather and do all in our power to keep one another safe. We are the Church and we will show that first and foremost in our love and care for one another's well-being.



I want to encourage you to make every effort to connect with the on-line worship, formation and social opportunities that St. Mark's offers each week. If you have not yet been able to join us for worship via Facebook live or on Zoom, I encourage you to do so. If you need technical help and assistance to figure out a way to do this, please call me and let me know (505-331-4638). It is important that we stay connected and

we want to help to make that possible for all of our members. If you have ideas and thoughts about additional ways the community of St. Mark's can stay connected, please share them with us and consider being the leader who helps to make them happen.

St. Mark's is continuing to reach out in loving care to our members and beyond in many ways. Our Congregational Relief Fund is helping to pay bills, rent and bridge the gap for those who have lost employment. We are also sending funds to our diocesan outreach to Diocese of Navajoland in the efforts there to get food and needed medical supplies distributed through the churches. While we have not be able to serve meals in-person at HopeWorks to the homeless, we have continued to provide funds to purchase meals for the ongoing feeding ministry from our St. Martin's/HopeWorks outreach account. Our diocese is also involved in some amazing work at the border especially in Ciudad Juarez with Padre Hector Trejo and the Anglican Diocese of Northern Mexico and we want to support Rio Grande Borderlands ministry (find at more at: <https://riograndeborderland.org/about-us/#relief>).

Finally, I want to thank our whole faith community for your continuing financial support of the life and ministry of St. Mark's. Throughout the first two months of this crisis giving has remained strong as we have been able to meet our financial responsibilities. St. Mark's also was able to secure a PPP loan (Payroll Protection Program) as part of the CARES Act that will help us to meet payroll expenses during the first months of the crisis for both church and school to ensure institutional continuity. I especially want to thank Miranda Eastham (Treasurer), Ken Reese (Assistant Treasurer), Tricia Morton (Assistant Directress, SMMS), and Alan Clawson (Business Manager) who put our PPP application together so efficiently. While this crisis is far from over, I believe that the strength of our St. Mark's community will be able to meet the challenges ahead and to keep St. Mark's viable into the new future that awaits.



St. Mark's is not closed. The Church is not closed. We continue to be the Church in a new way because the time we are in demands it of us and the God we follow and serve sends us out into the world to be the love of God made visible and real here and now. The Church is essential and your loving service as God's person in the world continues to be essential. We are the Church!

In Christ's demanding love,

Fr. Christopher McLaren+
Rector