

March 14, 2020

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

I write to you concerning our life together as a faith community in the midst of the rapidly developing coronavirus (COVID-19) health crisis. In consultation with Bishop Hunn, our clergy staff, and the wardens, I have come to the decision that the most loving and prudent action to help decrease the community spread of this virus is to move away from in-person worship, meetings, groups and other church activities for a time.

St. Mark's will not be holding public worship or in-person meetings for the next two weeks. Instead we will be worshipping and meeting together online. To be clear, we will not gather publicly for Sunday worship on March 15 and 22. There will be no coffee hour, no children and youth classes and no adult formation as well.

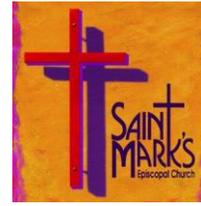
We ask you to join us in prayer and worship from home for the next two weeks, Sunday March 15 and 22 through your electronic devices, such as computers and/or smart phones. Beginning this week, we will be doing our best to use Facebook LIVE to stream and record/post all prayer and worship gatherings at St. Mark's on our [Facebook page](#). We realize that interruption to public worship is surprising and we want to reassure our entire congregation that we will be working to reach out and stay connected in these uncertain times. If you are feeling isolated, if you are in quarantine because of exposure to the virus, if you are ill, or if you need essential supplies or groceries please call St. Mark's Pastoral Emergency Line: 505-800-2422 so we can offer support. You can also call our clergy directly: Fr. Christopher (505) 331 4638, Mother Sylvia (510) 932-1315, Deacon David (505) 231-1354. You can also call the church office (505) 262 2484 or [email the office](#). We are only a phone call (or email) away and we would like to hear from you.

St. Mark's Montessori School has decided to follow APS and will close for the next two weeks leading up to spring break. As of now, SMMS will be closed starting Monday, March 16 and will reopen on Monday, April 6. We will be monitoring the development of the spread of the COVID-19 virus closely and will revise our decision as needed should future developments warrant it. We will be in regular contact with SMMS families as the situation develops and if our decision shifts in any way.

During this wilderness time of Lent, now coupled with the COVID-19 virus, it is important that we work to care for one another, keep each other safe and offer encouragement and spiritual nurture along the way. It is our hope to use this time to strengthen our church community by developing ways of being church that are new and perhaps old at the same time.

We will endeavor to limit meetings at the church to only the essential ones. Meetings that can be conducted via the Internet will be attempted. We plan to be creative in offering worship via the Internet and to conduct classes and experiences in this manner, when possible. We want to stay connected with each other and to offer loving support over the phone and in other ways so that during this time of social distancing and waiting we can remain connected as a community.

There will be many opportunities to serve along the way. Health professionals in our parish have already begun to offer their skills in checking on elderly members. There will be groceries to be purchased and delivered and many other ways that we can help and care for one another.



All of these changes require us to approach worship in new ways and will change some of the dynamics during this time of crisis. These challenging times will make it difficult for us to gather as a whole community but we are still the loving and vital community of St. Mark's. Our changed circumstances will offer us new opportunities and ways to discover what being community really means and to care for one another in the love of Christ.

We will be doing our best to issue updates about our life and ministry at St. Mark's in the coming weeks. We ask that you keep the whole community in your prayers and continue to offer your support both in participation and in giving so that we can maintain our continuity of worship and organizational integrity.

Below are a few websites that you might find helpful during this time of social isolation and suspension of in-person worship and gathering.

The Diocese now has a website dedicated to information for individuals, congregations, and leadership regarding the response to COVID-19. Bishop Michael B. Hunn has a series of video messages that can be found on this site, along with various guidelines and resources: <https://drgresponds.squarespace.com/>.

Links to St. Mark's online classes, worship, and meetings for the next few weeks:

<https://www.mothersylvia.com/stmarksonline.html>

St. Mark's website: <https://www.stmarksabq.org>

Mother Sylvia's website: <https://www.mothersylvia.com>

Forward Day by Day offers online daily prayers and meditations. Go to: <https://prayer.forwardmovement.org/> and look under the "Daily Prayer" and "Forward Day by Day" tabs.

Lent Madness: <https://www.lentmadness.org> As we all seek God's guidance, comfort, and strength during this time, I offer you this beloved prayer:

*"O God of peace, who has taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and in confidence shall be our strength: By the might of your Spirit lift us, we pray, to your presence, where we may be still and know that you are God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."* (Book of Common Prayer, page 832).

With prayers for all those affected by the virus, for our medical professionals who care for them, and for our country and world, let us say together, "Lord, have mercy."

In the love and compassion of Christ,

Fr. Christopher McLaren