

ECCT Clergy and Lay Leaders Communication on the Twin Pandemics Update #24: September 29, 2020

Dear Clergy and Wardens in the Episcopal Church in Connecticut:

Grace to you and peace in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We are writing with our occasional update of matters related to our common life as the Body of Christ here in Connecticut continuing to live with the twin pandemics of COVID-19 and the sins of racism, white supremacy and anti-Black bias that infect our nation. You might recall that when we last wrote on July 31, 2020 we noted that we would cease writing weekly updates and only communicate when there is new and/or urgent information to relay. We believe that time is right to send such an update.

On Thursday, September 24th [Governor Ned Lamont announced details for his plan](#) to move Connecticut to Phase 3 of the State's reopening, beginning on Thursday, October 8, 2020. This move to Phase 3 of the Governor's reopening plan for the State as we continue to live with the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic was anticipated last July. Because the summer months continued to see a rise in the spread of the pandemic around the United States, Governor Lamont took a more cautious approach and delayed Phase 3 reopening during the months of August and September. Still anticipating the move to Stage 3, we issued our "[Living with COVID-19: Protocols and Directions for Clergy and Vestries in the Episcopal Church in Connecticut / Phase 3](#)" last July.

At this time we maintain the protocols and directions offered in "Living with COVID-19 / Phase 3" that we promulgated last July. The only significant change in directions we offer, in keeping with the Governor's changes in sizes of gatherings, is that in Phase 3 limits on indoor worship gatherings move from 25% of building capacity capped at 100 people, to 50% of building capacity capped at 200 people. For outdoor worship, the previous July limit was capped at 150 people. Beginning on October 8, there is no limit on the number of outdoor worshippers as long as 6 foot spacing can be maintained. We anticipate, that given the size of the majority of our congregations and parish buildings here in the Episcopal Church in Connecticut, as well as outdoor worship spaces, this change will not have a dramatic effect on our current worshipping circumstances across ECCT parishes.

Appreciating that fall is upon us and cooler temperatures are coming, **if you are worshipping in-person, we urge you to continue with outside worship instead of inside gatherings.** While there is still some debate as to whether COVID-19 can be spread by both respiratory droplets and by aerosol transmission, it is prudent that when and **if you do return to indoor worship, maintaining good ventilation and air-transfer as much as possible is of paramount importance. We suggest that you consult with Heating/Ventilation/Air Conditioning (HVAC) professionals as to your church's ventilation capacity before returning to indoor worship.** A call to your local Board of Health for recommendations of HVAC professionals in your community is a good place to start. We will also be sharing a list of recommended HVAC firms shared from the State of Connecticut in an upcoming parish administration and finance enews.

In all cases, both for indoor and outdoor worship, it is crucial to underscore the need to continue to pursue all of the now well-established COVID-19 safety protocols including, but not limited to: the constant wearing of masks in public, maintaining safe physical distances, washing of hands, non-exchange of personal effects, sanitizing of surfaces, and remaining at home if you have any COVID-19 symptoms or if you fall into a higher risk group. **The COVID-19 pandemic is far from over and our ongoing vigilance to stay safe and protect the safety and well-being of others is paramount. As followers of Jesus, called to care for the least and the lost as our Lord did, we must always put the pastoral care of the most vulnerable in our midst over our own wishes and desires.** Thank you for being so faithful in your care and concern for the other and those who are most at risk.

You will see in our "Living with COVID-19 / Phase 3" communication that we advocate waiting until Phase 4 before returning to the sharing of communion in-person. Having said that, **we are well aware that many parishes in ECCT are already experimenting with different forms of sharing in-person communion as part**

of the Holy Eucharist. If your parish is one of those we urge you to take seriously the directions for those considering the in-person distribution of communion outlined in our “Living with COVID-19 / Phase 3” document.

We are now in the process of resuming our fall Sunday visitation schedule to parishes. In general for visitations we will consult extensively with the parish clergy and try our best to fit into the established worshipping life of a parish at this stage of COVID-19, whether that be virtual, in-person, or some mix of both. We are open to any and all virtual platforms, both pre-recorded and/or live, to the best of our technological capacity for both worship and for meeting with vestries. We want the visitation to work for you and your parish without adding an additional burden on your planning and liturgical life. The only limitation that we do make is that, at least through the end of October, we will not be participating in any in-person, indoor worship as part of our visitations. We are open to an occasional Sunday morning confirmation during our visitation, if the number of confirmands is small and all COVID-19 precautions are followed. We do not plan on any large Region-wide confirmation services on Feast Days until further notice.

As we continue to point out in our communications and Wednesday zoom meetings with clergy and lay leaders, we are living in the midst of twin pandemics, both COVID-19 and the pandemic of white supremacy resulting in racism and anti-Black violence. **The Theology Committee of the House of Bishops of The Episcopal Church has just released a very significant study on the reality of white supremacy in our nation and in the church. This paper, entitled “White Supremacy, the Beloved Community, and Learning to Listen” is a very important resource for our understanding of where white supremacy has come from and how it continues to infect our lives. It is a must read for all Episcopalians and we commend it to you and your parishes for study, prayer and action. [It can be found here.](#)**

The Theology Committee’s paper offers significant opportunities and resources for further study and action, especially as we own our own histories of complicity in white supremacy in the parishes and institutions of The Episcopal Church. It is much in keeping with, and will be a good resource for, the call for parish and diocesan-wide study into our history of racism proposed in the [Resolution #7 “Acknowledging and Confronting Systemic Racism, White Supremacy and Anti-Black Bias”](#) coming before our Annual Convention on Saturday, October 17th. **All members of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut are encouraged to take part in this year’s Annual Convention’s conversations, legislative session, and worship, even if you are not a voting delegate or clergy person. All sessions will be done virtually and on-line.** Please encourage your parishioners to visit the ECCT Convention webpage and sign up: <https://ecctconvention.org>.

We write knowing that the grand jury in the case investigating the killing of Breonna Taylor has decided not to indict the police officers responsible for her death. This is very disappointing to us, and we know that many will see this decision as a travesty of justice. **The decision by the grand jury will only exacerbate tensions in our nation and possible lead to more violence. The question before us as Christians is what should we do?** Our Presiding Bishop, The Most Reverend Michael Curry, has called for our churches to provide sacred and safe spaces in the midst of such a deeply divided nation and in the wake of the grand jury’s decision. His words are powerful and we quote them here:

“The events in Louisville remind us of the need for safe spaces in times of conflict. Churches, synagogues, and mosques are houses of prayer, worship, and faith. Sacred spaces are safe places where the way of love and nonviolence, the way of peace, the way of justice, and the way of reconciliation can be affirmed and practiced. In deeply conflicted situations, these spaces can play a vital role in preventing escalation into upward spirals of violence. Respecting these spaces as safe places demonstrates a commitment to finding nonviolent solutions. This can help to broker peace and change that can move a community forward, in the direction of genuine justice and eventual reconciliation.

We must ever remember Breonna Taylor, and continue to pray for her family, loved ones, and all the people of the Louisville community. We must likewise pray for America, that our divisions may cease and that we will work together to be a nation where there is liberty and justice for all. Lastly, may we all commit ourselves anew to the living the words of the prophet Micah who said, “what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with your God.” [\(The Most Rev. Michael B. Curry.](#)

One way to help the church be a sacred space of healing and liberation is to participate in liturgical offerings where we confess our complicity in white supremacy and racism and pray for amendment of life. **Tonight, Tuesday, September 29th from 6:30-8:00 pm our ECCT Racial Healing, Justice and Reconciliation Ministry Network will host a Service of Lament and Prayer.** [Details for the service can be found here.](#) We urge you to join with the Racial Healing Justice and Reconciliation Ministry Network and us as we confess our sins, seek absolution of life, and pray for justice for all who suffer at the hands of white supremacy, racism and anti-Black bias, and especially for Breonna Taylor at this time.

Another way for you and your parish to participate in our church's commitment to dismantle white supremacy, racism, and anti-Black bias is to contribute to the *Joining Jesus in a New Missional Age* (JJMA) financial initiative focusing your gift on the *Becoming the Beloved Community* project. The *Becoming the Beloved Community* project is one of five diocesan-wide projects being funded by the *Joining Jesus* initiative, the other four being: an entrepreneurial fund for our Regions, support for new intentional Christian communities, new infrastructure for Camp Washington, and the redevelopment of our Cathedral Space. *Becoming Beloved Community* will provide direct financial resources to assist with our diocesan anti-racism work, and we will give special attention to this fund at our upcoming ECCT Annual Convention. We encourage you and your parish to consider prayerfully supporting of the *Becoming the Beloved Community* project. Specific information on how you can contribute to the *Joining Jesus in a New Missional Age* initiative can be found on our ECCT website: <https://www.episcopalct.org/joining-jesus/>.

Our Presiding Bishop in his September 16 "[Word to the Church: What Did Jesus Do?](#)" calls us to be active agents for God's Kingdom in the political processes of our nation. He underscores the importance of our participating in the upcoming election next month. And while the Presiding Bishop takes great pains to emphasize that the church, and we as leaders in the church, should not advocate any partisan political position, we can and we must act in the political processes of our nation as our conscious call us to. For Bishop Curry preaches: "just as we must respect the right of every citizen to cast his or her own vote according to the dictates of their conscience, so we must do so in the church, the body of Jesus Christ. And that is how it should be. The Bible says we have one Lord, one faith, one baptism, not one political party. But it's important to remember that partisan neutrality does not mean moral neutrality. Partisan neutrality, bidden to us by human civil law does not mean moral neutrality, because we are bidden to obey the royal law of almighty God." **We commend Bishop Curry's sermon to you, as well as the additional election season resources found on the [website of The Episcopal Church](#).** **We also urge you to visit the website of "[Braver Angels](#)" suggested to us in this week's meeting of bishops with the Presiding Bishop and Episcopal Relief and Development officials.** [Braver Angels](#) is an ecumenical and interfaith effort that seeks to bridge the divide between red and blue America for the healing of our nation, both before and after the upcoming election. We must do all in our power to bring our nation together in this time of violence and upheaval. Pray for our country:

Almighty God, who hast given us this good land for our heritage: We humbly beseech thee that we may always prove ourselves a people mindful of thy favor and glad to do thy will. Bless our land with honorable industry, sound learning, and pure manners. Save us from violence, discord, and confusion; from pride and arrogance, and from every evil way. Defend our liberties, and fashion into one united people the multitudes brought hither out of many kindreds and tongues. Endue with the spirit of wisdom those to whom in thy Name we entrust the authority of government, that there may be justice and peace at home, and that, through obedience to thy law, we may show forth thy praise among the nations of the earth. In the time of prosperity, fill our hearts with thankfulness, and in the day of trouble, suffer not our trust in thee to fail; all which we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer, page 820.)

Faithfully,

The Rt. Rev. Ian T. Douglas
Bishop Diocesan

The Rt. Rev. Laura J. Ahrens
Bishop Suffragan