



THE RIGHT REVEREND MARK LATTIME  
BISHOP OF THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF ALASKA  
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Pastoral Letter

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. (1 Peter 1:3)

“In you, Lord, is our hope; and we shall never hope in vain.”

March 30, 2020

To the Beloved of Christ Jesus in the Diocese of Alaska:

I give thanks for the living hope that binds us together in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Despite this period of anxious physical separation from our communities of faith, from our friends and our normal patterns of life, our bounds of love remain strong. In fact, I have witnessed how these bounds have been strengthened.

Giving thanks for the wonderful, creative, and responsible ways the congregations of the Diocese of Alaska have adapted to the guidelines for slowing the transmission of COVID-19, and the extraordinary ministries that continue to serve the needs of our communities, I have even more reason for hope.

Standing with you in this hope, I call on all Episcopalians in the Diocese of Alaska as individuals to strictly adhere to the social isolation restrictions of the Governor's Public Health Mandates, as well as any Orders or Directives given by the civil authority or tribal leadership in your community. In short: stay home; cease gatherings of any kind except with your household; self-isolate if you have symptoms of illness; avoid all unnecessary travel; maintain a six-foot distance from others if you must be out for an essential activity; wash your hands frequently.

Furthermore, until it is stated by the Chief Medical Officer, Public Health professionals, and the Department of Health and Human Services that public gatherings no longer pose a risk to contributing to the COVID-19 pandemic, **and until further notice by Pastoral Letter, I call on all congregations to continue to suspend all public gatherings; and, when possible, to assist any groups or ministries in finding alternatives to public or physical gatherings in church buildings.**

As of the date of this letter, the Public Health Mandates and Executive Orders in effect allow small worship teams (10 or fewer) to provide worship streaming from our parish buildings (including sanctuaries). This is permissible ONLY if a strict adherence to the guidelines for social distancing can be maintained. Social distancing guidelines require a minimum of six feet separation between individuals. This is not a loop hole in the civil order or a special exemption, but is specified to allow low risk non-public minimum basic operations or activities to continue where CDC precautions can be maintained. It applies to both for-profit and non-profit entities. However, I urge any leadership teams that choose to provide worship streaming from their church buildings to limit the number of participants to the barest minimum despite the 10-person limit established by the Mandate. **Under these restrictions, non-public worship from church**

**buildings for streaming online, as well as other minimum basic operations requiring access to church buildings, is permissible. \***

Many options and online platforms are being used to offer worship and pastoral care. Instead of live streaming from the church, several congregations are using teleconferencing platforms for worship, virtual coffee hours, and weekly prayer groups. These teleconferencing platforms have the additional benefit of not requiring worship leaders to leave home or to gather even in the smallest number.

I applaud and commend all of these creative uses of technology to support the spiritual health of our people. I am encouraged to hear the excellent reviews and to read comments from online participants of how important, meaningful, and comforting these “virtual” worship services have been in all their forms. I support and trust our congregations and leaders to use whatever technologies or practices that best suit their needs and resources while honoring our civil responsibility to protect the public health.

With Holy Week and Easter ahead, I have every confidence that our worship and spiritual preparation for the journey with Jesus to the Cross and the grave of Good Friday will awaken our souls to His Passion, and our celebrations of His glorious Resurrection on Easter Day will fill our hearts with the joy of His victory over death and the grave and His gift to us of reconciliation and new life.

In the Hope of Christ Jesus,



\*This provision of the State Mandate also permits going to a church office when necessary to collect mail, pay bills, process payroll, or to conduct any Minimum Basic Operations that cannot be achieved from an off-site location. However, this ONLY applies if social distancing guidelines are strictly enforced.