

# Episcopal Diocese of Southwest Florida

*Tuesday, March 17, 2020*

*This is a letter from the Bishop of the Diocese of Southwest Florida and the President of the Standing Committee. **Please read this letter in its entirety.***

Our Dear Friends,

As you can imagine, in this time of Coronavirus uncertainty there is a growing amount of unsolicited and sometime anxious advice sent to the Office of the Bishop and to the Priests of congregations.

The Constitution of the Episcopal Church states in Article IV, “In every Diocese a Standing Committee shall be elected by the Convention thereof...When there is a Bishop in charge of the Diocese, the Standing Committee shall be the Bishop’s Council of Advice.”

At the Bishop’s request, the Standing Committee met electronically with the Bishop on Tuesday morning March 17, 2020. This is our informational and directive letter to the Diocese of Southwest Florida as of this date.

**A)** As of today, the website of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention directs:

Cancel events for groups of 250 people or more WITH THIS UPDATE: During the next 15 days, all U.S. events of 10+ people should be cancelled or held virtually. Our interpretation is that the word “should” is like the canonical or rubrical word “shall” which means “must.” This includes every congregation in the Diocese of Southwest Florida. Ten chairs tops for any worship, education, pastoral care. Use your parish halls with 10 chairs each placed 6 feet apart.

**B)** The Church is not closed – it is just ministering differently. The need for the Church's presence, pastoral care, and outreach is especially necessary.

**C)** Technology is especially helpful now – and it’s all working! Every congregation should have a membership in Zoom or FreeConferenceCall.com. Zoom is especially helpful with viewing faces and sharing screens and documents. Zoom has a free option with group meeting availability for up to 40 minutes. Pro membership is \$180. Per year. Try it out for free first. It is how the Standing Committee met today. Have the Rector or one of the Wardens sign up as the

host. If any congregation needs financial support to get the helpful technology going, please call the Bishop or the CFO, Canon Anne Vickers.

**D)** Another useful technology is live streaming of worship and other events. It takes only a few steps to get your parish streaming. We advise that you start with a free Facebook Live or YouTube Live account, where you should stream through your church page, not your personal page. With either app available on iPad, iPhone, Android, you can begin streaming. A tripod will be helpful. You will need a newer smartphone and enough Wi-Fi bandwidth and signal. The second option after you have mastered the free account is an account with Boxcast, which has a \$99 a month package. With this your church can stream and archive your video on the server. The Boxcast option, used by a number of congregations in the diocese, again, has a free trial. The diocesan office can offer technological assistance, support, and advice.

**E)** Online giving is another helpful tool. Many congregations use ACS/Realm or other platforms for online giving to support the ongoing ministry of the Church. Pricing varies according to the ACS plan size. Again, call the Diocesan office, in particular Martha Goodwill, or Garland Pollard for addition information and/or assistance.

**F)** Regarding outreach, our congregations provide a great number of forms of assistance. Outreach programs need to plan accordingly during the next 15 days within the 10+ rule. The bishop directs that the rector, priest in charge, or Senior Warden, sign off on any outreach policies, practices, and number of people involved at any one time. This is for your safety and the safety of your clients and guests.

**G)** How to count attendance. During at least the next two weeks, it is difficult to count the number of people streaming, so the Bishop directs, on Sundays when counting streaming, count 1/2 your Average Sunday Attendance and then mark your registers as to why. Simply write Coronavirus.

**H)** If there are any uncertainties regarding funerals, weddings, or other pastoral services, please call the Bishop.

**I)** Start making initial plans for Palm Sunday and Easter. Plan spaced seating arrangements and smaller processions. The same rules apply from last week apply regarding intinction, communion in one kind, or choosing Morning Prayer. Your local contexts will still guide your decision. All of the above is, of course, true as of today! Stay connected to factual information. Pray for each other.

We offer this prayer.

*Almighty God, Giver of Life and Health, Mercy and Resurrection, We pray for all who are frightened, all who are sick, and all who travel and who are stuck away from home. We are grateful for all who are working tirelessly in our grocery stores and especially for all physicians, nurses, medical technicians, and scientists working on medical remedies for the great suffering being endured now. We also pray for all social workers, mental health professionals, and all of our clergy and other spiritual leaders now providing hope and compassion. We pray that you will give all of them strength and wisdom. We pray all of this in the great love of you offered in your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen*

In the Love of Christ,



*The Rt. Rev. Dabney T. Smith  
5<sup>th</sup> Bishop of the Diocese of Southwest Florida*



*The Very Rev. Charles Connelly  
President of the Standing Committee*