



St. John's Episcopal Church
234 French St.
Bangor, ME 04401

March 12, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ,

As we have seen in the news, and almost everywhere we turn, the corona virus continues to spread. It has been determined a pandemic and the first verified case in Maine has been now recorded. We are all being asked to adopt practices and protocols to help slow the spread of the virus. As Christians we seek to live faithfully in a spirit of trust in God's providential care and his victory of life over death given to us Christ Jesus. May we all seek to adopt personal and social practices, not from a spirit of fear or self-preservation, but of sacrifice for our common good and for the care and concern for the most vulnerable in our society. Our Bishop, the Rt. Rev. Thomas Brown, has issued a pastoral directive that we will follow to help conform our common worship to protocols recommended by health officials to cut down risk. We adopted these practices at our Eucharist this Wednesday and will continue, as the Bishop directed until March 29th. As you will see in his letter ([click here](#)) the Eucharist will be a full Eucharist, but we will only consume the bread. Ushers will not pass collection plates. The exchange of the Peace will be with bows and gestures, not with hand shakes or hugs. And we are asked to call and check on those who are absent.

This period before us is also a chance to embrace measures that could enhance our life in the future. We are going to attempt live streaming our services for the next few weeks. Please look to our [facebook page](#) this Sunday ([click here](#)) if you decide to stay home and would like to participate in worship through this technology. Hopefully in the future this will become a means of reaching more people, including homebound and travelers, folks with the flu, family and friends, and inquirers who want to check us out. We are introducing text donations to the church this Sunday. Please look in the announcements, Facebook or TWASJ for instructions on how to donate using text messaging. This will help now to cut down common surfaces like the collection plate. In the future hopefully, it will make it easier for people to donate to the church. We will also be publishing updated directories to be available this Sunday, asking people to make calls each week to parishioners they don't see. In the future this practice, if it is adopted whole-heartedly, could greatly strengthen our congregation and better connect our receiving of the body of Christ in the sacrament to being the body of Christ as a community.

“Make God's Love Known.”

We will also implement some other precautions that will likely only be for a season. Altar guild will use food safety gloves when preparing the bread offering. People may choose to stand for the Eucharistic prayer and to receive communion at the altar, in order to minimize touching surfaces. We will disinfect the altar rail before all services. Hand sanitizer will be available at the crossing, and additional collection plates will be there so that offerings can be made and hands sanitized on the way to communion. Please remember that hand sanitizer is always available at the entrance of the church and please use it these next weeks before coming in to worship. In these next weeks, we are also asked to consider our health, and if we feel vulnerable then to take whatever extra precautions are needed. Similarly, if anyone feels like they might be coming down with something, please stay at home and consider it your sacrifice to God made on behalf of your community.

Some people may wonder whether these measures are too extreme. This week I received an email from the Dean of my seminary, GTS, describing how they were planning some days of working from home as an experiment that they could do precisely because it was early in the spread of the virus. We're very fortunate that the pandemic has not yet spread so widely in Maine and that we have a little time to experiment and try new protocols and practices so that we will be that much better prepared when the virus is more prevalent here. Repeated hand washing and minimizing common surfaces is our best defense, and it will take some getting used to for it to become habit. Please embrace the next few weeks as our best chance to practice protocols and simultaneously slow the spread of the virus. And if at any time protocols feel excessive, silly, or just inconvenient, please remember that we do them for others' sake not just for our own.

Finally, as you pray for St. John's, our larger community, our nation and our world, please also pray specifically for the people of Christ Church, Georgetown. This is the parish where I served for 10 years before coming to Maine. You may have seen in the news that the Rector was the first person in Washington, DC to test positive for the virus, and that they cancelled all services last Sunday. The story was broadcast around the nation, noting that he had given communion to 550 people the Sunday before and had then begun to feel unwell. Everyone who had been to church was asked to self-quarantine. There have been no follow up stories in the news, but I'd like to pass on to you encouraging words from Christ Church: Parishioners have stayed home and have found encouragement and comfort from each other and their faith. They are now also on to day 12 since their exposure, and so far the organist and only one parishioner of the 550 have shown symptoms and tested positive to the virus.

May we also find encouragement and comfort from each other and in our faith. And whether we are together or apart, may we hold each other in our hearts and in our prayers. And together as a community, especially in this climate of fear, may we offer hope and healing to the community around us - *To the Glory of God and For the Common Good.*

Yours in Christ,



The Rev. Marguerite A.H. Steadman
Rector

“Make God’s Love Known.”