May 1, 2020

*“And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not (Galatians 6:9).”*

Dear Friends:

With cautious hope we begin to move closer to our eventual reunion. Drawing from national, state, diocesan, and other guidelines, your Vestry and I are committed to a gradual, phased reopening that is appropriate to St. Peter’s.

You may have already read or heard about some of these phase-based guidelines. All describe a metric that triggers a progression to the next phase: fourteen (14) days of decline or flattening of new confirmed cases. While the different guidelines that are relevant to St. Peter’s differ in later phases, they agree on the first two:

* Phase One
  + All vulnerable persons are to shelter in isolation at home.
  + Gatherings of more than ten (10) people are discouraged.
  + Employers are encouraged to support employee telework.
* Phase Two
  + All vulnerable persons continue to shelter in isolation at home.
  + Gatherings of more than fifty (50) people are discouraged.
  + Employers are encouraged to continue to support employee telework but may allow a limited staff to return.

In each phase, all individuals are encouraged to practice diligent, basic hygiene and to wear masks. All administrators are expected to enforce social distancing and to sanitize and disinfect all common and high traffic areas.

In last Wednesday’s weekly Zoom teleconference, the Bishop and the other clergy in our diocese worked through a variety of questions to help guide our congregations’ planning. While offering some core expectations, the Bishop made it clear that he understands how the differences in our congregations require local adaptation, which I appreciate. Since local, state, and national guidelines are subject to change at almost any moment, and since St. Peter’s activities are complex (in addition to worship, our facilities host many gatherings of different sizes), our challenge is to devise a clear and meaningful policy that fits St. Peter’s:

In Phase One, which started on May 1 in Maury County but in Nashville is extended to May 8:

* Public worship will continue to be suspended. We will continue our livestream and radio broadcasts, we will explore additional media through which people can participate in them, and we will do our best to make them even easier to access. We will also use this time to establish a permanent on-line worship option.[[1]](#footnote-1)
* Our staff will continue to work from home.[[2]](#footnote-2)
* Committees will not meet on our campus.
* We will develop and execute our plan to deepen our mutual connections and pastoral care.

In Phase Two, which might start on May 15 in Maury County and on May 22 in Nashville:

* Even though groups of up to fifty (50) are permissible in very restricted circumstances, St. Peter’s public worship will continue to be suspended; online and radio broadcasts will continue. I have thought and prayed over hosting multiple services of fewer than fifty in the church and the Parish Hall, but neither of these spaces are large enough to make the recommended social distancing possible. Most importantly, I think, is that our gathering *together* as the Body of Christ is as important as our personal reception of the Body of Christ at the Altar.
* We will re-open our office but on an appointment-only basis.
* Vestry meetings and other committee meetings will resume with the expectation of social-distancing protocols.
* Recovery ministries (AA, NA) may not yet resume their meetings on our campus.[[3]](#footnote-3)
* After any room is used, all surfaces must be cleaned and disinfected,

As things stand today, whatever subsequent phases might look like will not take place at least until the end of May. Since too much is subject to change, we do not think it is prudent to commit to any definitive plan beyond those dates at this time. As we advance to those dates and as we have more time to respond to whatever trends we observe, we will share our plans with you. In the meantime, we should not expect to hold public, in-person Sunday worship in May.

Some have wondered about St. Peter’s fiscal health during a time when we cannot “pass the plate.” I can assure you that, as of the end of March, and thanks to the excellent stewardship of our resources by our church leaders over the past ten years and through the sustained generosity of those who have been able to continue to give, our fiscal health is good. We expect to know more about our position in April in a week or so and will let you know when we do. In the meantime, we thank you for your continued support.

With the grace of God, we will persevere in placing our trust in Him and caring for one another. This time of confusion will surrender to His peace, which passes all understanding. Keep praying for one another. Keep calling one another. And keep the faith.

In the love of Christ Jesus,

The Rev. Chris Bowhay

1. While not ordering us to do so, the Bishop encouraged all of us to continue “streaming” online worship out of consideration for our members whose age or health prevent them from attending and for those who may stay home because another family member has been exposed or is infected. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Gary Prewitt, our Parish Administrator, will keep the church office at his home until we know our return will be permanent. It is not desirable to move office computers and equipment repeatedly. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The New Hope room is too small for social distancing, it is impossible to monitor the number of those who attend AA in our youth room, and the necessary deep cleaning after each meeting would be cumbersome. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)