

# To the Diocese of Fond du Lac



My Sisters and Brothers,

Grace and peace to you in our Lord Jesus Christ. With the novel coronavirus (Covid-19), we are facing a serious public health crisis, unprecedented in our lifetime. Earlier reports compared this disease to the seasonal flu, but from China, Italy, Seattle, and other places we now know that this is a very serious, potentially life-threatening pandemic. The situation is changing from day to day, and there will be an impact on our shared life as the church.

I want our congregations to be prudent, but not to panic. Let us remember first of all that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. “

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:37-39)

The essentials of the Christian faith never go away, no matter how challenging the times, give thanks to God in all things, love God, love your neighbors, say your prayers.

## What I am doing

I'm sure you and I are experiencing the same thing: lots of news, lots of advice, and lots of decisions to be made. In order to help me sort through the data and give the best direction, I have convened an ad hoc Covid-19 Task Force. Current members of that task force are:

- The Rev. Chris **Arnold**, Trinity, Oshkosh, Chair
- The Rev. Monica **Burkert-Brist**, vicar, Holy Trinity Church, Waupun; former Assistant Attorney General, Wisconsin Dept of Justice
- Mrs. Nicci **Beeck**, Grace, Sheboygan and, for 18 years, public health educator for the Brown County
- The Rev. Sue **Kruger**, Chaplain and ACPE educator at Ascension Health Care
- Dr. Brad **Lauderdale**, M.D., St. Thomas, Menasha
- The Rev Amanda **Sampey**, St. James, Mosinee and Chaplain at Ascension Hospital, Wausau  
and St. Michael's, Stevens Point
- The Rev. Christopher **Wilkerson**, All Saints, Appleton

That task force is tracking the best recommendations from public health experts and monitoring the response from fellow communities of faith as well as soliciting ideas and expertise from others in our diocese. I am also communicating with the deans and other diocesan leaders, as well as meeting virtually with the Standing Committee and the Executive Council in the coming week .

In addition to this letter to the parishes, I will be issuing more detailed advice to the clergy and wardens of the diocese. We will be working on preparation plans for a number of eventualities.

## **What we will be doing effective Monday, March 16, 2020**

As Christians, and as members of this diocese, we will strive to balance two values:

1. We want to minimize medical risks in our congregations to the best of our ability.
2. We want to continue the life-giving mission of the church to the best of our ability.

This leads to a number of directives that continue or extend those that I issued last week

### **Worship:**

- Sunday worship will continue until further notice.
- Wash your hands with soap and water frequently.
- Stay home if you are in a high-risk groups. High-risk groups include those over 70, or with compromised immune systems, or with chronic lung issues like asthma, COPD, or lung cancer.
- Stay home if you are symptomatic. Symptoms of Covid-19 are most frequently a fever and a cough. But stay home if you have other symptoms!
- Intinction (dipping of the sacred bread either by the communicant or a minister) is prohibited. Receiving the wine may not be advisable for some and as a reminder, Anglican teaching that to receive the sacrament in one kind only (i.e. just the bread) is to receive the sacrament in its entirety.
- I know that the above might instructions might mean effectively cancelling public worship at some of our churches. If that is the case, please call or email my office so we know
- Do not touch at the peace, or when greeting one another before or after worship. Make a bow, wave, or smile instead.
- Spread out at church. This is called “social distancing”. Aim to maintain at least 6’ between you and other people (unless you live with them). Ironically, for a season, loving our neighbor means keeping our distance.
- Until further notice there should be no coffee hour or fellowship time or Sunday School.

### **Worshipping Remotely**

I appreciate that for a time I am requesting that many of our members stay home instead of going to church on Sundays. I want you to be aware that we do have some congregations in the diocese that already live stream their Sunday worship. I encourage you to attend one of them virtually on Sunday mornings until you are able to safely return to your own congregation’s worship. Here are two options:

- Grace, Sheboygan
- [www.gracesheboygan.com/index.php/grace-abounds](http://www.gracesheboygan.com/index.php/grace-abounds)
- St. Thomas, Menasha
- [www.facebook.com/stthomaswi](https://www.facebook.com/stthomaswi)
- Other congregations post sermons that you can read or listen to
- This might be an opportunity to check out what is going on in other congregation in the diocese, if only remotely

### **Diocesan Meetings**

- Beginning Monday, March 16 and until further notice all diocesan meetings than can meet remotely will. Those that cannot meet remotely are cancelled.

- The diocesan office will be restricted to diocesan staff

### **Church Mission other than Worship**

At this point, each congregation is encouraged to plan for ways to minimize gatherings, while still providing pastoral care, sacraments, and service.

- Church meetings, classes, Bible studies, etc. should be canceled or moved to digital meeting systems
- An exception should be made for AA meetings and meetings of that nature

### **Things to Think About**

- How will the parish stay in contact with people who may be quarantined or isolated at home? How can the parish ensure that everyone has food, medicine, contact with other human beings, prayer, the sacraments?
- How will the parish plan to get the word out as the situation changes?
- What plans are in place if the clergy, Vestry, or staff contract an illness?
- How can parishioners who are able to do so get involved in the escalating needs of our communities?
- How can we creatively continue serving the hungry and others in need?

I recognize that the above instructions will create difficulties. But I believe they are the most prudent and faithful options at this moment. This is likely not the last statement on the topic I will need to make. We are entering a time of uncertainty and turmoil. None of us can quite foresee how society will appear next week, let alone a month or a year from now. We will need to extend the greatest of patience to one another as we explore this new landscape together. We will continue to be the church even as some of what that looks like changes. Perhaps this is an opportunity for us to explore more fully what it means to truly be the body of Christ. As Christians we stand on the solid ground that is Jesus Christ. Especially in this season of Lent we remember that he who is God incarnate became human to stand in solidarity with us, shoulder to shoulder with us in temptation, in poverty, in suffering, in anxiety, and even in death, so that he could pave the way for us into everlasting life. Nothing in all creation can separate us from his love, and that includes viruses, economic uncertainty, or the disruption of our church life. We do not know what the future holds. But we know Who holds the future.

Under the Mercy,

The Rt. Rev. Matthew Gunter  
Bishop of Fond du Lac