



The Incorporated Synod of the Diocese of Huron The Anglican Church of Canada

Friday March 13, 2020

To be distributed to all people of the Diocese of Huron.

Dear friends in Christ,

A lot has changed in the two days since I sent a letter to be read to congregations on Sunday (March 15) about our response to COVID-19. This message replaces the directive sent on Wednesday (March 13).

Our central action together, normally, is to gather on Sunday for the worship of God and to perform the liturgy that sends us again into the world in Christ's name. I was hoping that we could do this courageously and as safely as possible until such time that that we were advised or directed by health authorities or the government that it would be necessary to suspend public worship. We have not yet been so directed but a consensus is growing that our civic and moral responsibility is to partner with a growing number of communities who have suspended their gatherings. This consensus has also grown among the other bishops of Anglican dioceses in the ecclesiastical province of Ontario. Please see also the beautiful letter from Archbishop Anne Germond.

Therefore, the Anglican bishops of the province of Ontario have collectively made the decision temporarily suspend public worship services, effective Sunday March 15.

In the Diocese of Huron, all public worship services will be suspended, effective immediately. In Huron, this pause from public worship will continue until Wednesday April 8 when a decision will be made about the possibility of a change.

This measure is in place especially for the protection of those among us who are most at risk and to support a mass movement of care and concern for our health care system and the people who care for us in God's work of healing. This does not mean that the church will stop worshipping or serving in our communities.

In prayer and worship: I will help to provide resources, videos, live-streaming, etc., all of which may also be created locally in ways that help us to worship in small or family groups away from the church building. It is recommended that, if churches want to record or live-stream prayer or music, these "liturgies-for-broadcast" be services of the Word (not Holy Eucharist) with a homily, led by fewer than six people who have scrupulously followed the health protocols for a pandemic.



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In serving: it is essential that, where it is safe and welcome to do so, we reach out and support the individuals who will be most hurt by this crisis. For example, those who are in precarious employment, those who live alone, those who are at risk in any way—these people are in much greater need of the church's ministry over this time. Essential programs which support those who live in poverty, those who are food insecure and/or those precariously housed may continue with procedures that mitigate risk as much as possible.

In addition to this temporary pause in larger, public worship gatherings, all non-essential meetings should be either cancelled or moved to electronic format, and all groups who use our buildings are asked to consider postponing or to assure strict compliance with pandemic protocols.

Because of the short notice for this Sunday March 15, where possible, please have someone at the door of your church building at the time that people would normally gather—in order to inform people of this temporary situation and to make sure that people are cared for. If it is appropriate, brief prayers may be offered at the entrance to the church with individuals before they leave. As before, please follow safety, health, and “no-touch” protocols to avoid transmission of viruses.

Our churches are normally open as places of refuge and prayer at times of crisis and we want to return to that mission as soon as possible. I pray that, over the next three weeks, we will learn that we can safely resume smaller gatherings for public worship.

A more detailed and comprehensive letter will follow in the days to come with support material and new guidelines.

I want to express appreciation and concern for the clergy and lay leaders of our Diocese. Ministry is front-line work, and risk is always part of that. I urge you to monitor your own health and err on the side of caution. Call on your colleagues and other capable lay leaders to cover for you, as best as they are able, and please keep your Archdeacon and Bishop informed as to your own well-being and the state of your parish.

With prayers for peace and healing,

+ *Todd Townshend*

The Right Reverend Todd Townshend
Bishop of Huron