

Message to the [Mid-Atlantic Episcopal District](#) from Bishop [W. Darin Moore](#) concerning the Coronavirus

March 9, 2020

*"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."
(Philippians 4:6-7 NKJ)*

As the nation is facing increased numbers of persons impacted by the coronavirus and the news today that a Washington, DC Episcopal priest contracted the virus resulting in that Georgetown congregation being advised to self-quarantine, I felt it incumbent upon me as your Presiding Bishop to share some observations for our pastors and church members.

Physical contact and social connection are core value of Christian community. We are a people who embrace one another, laugh, cry, and hold hands during our worship. It is notable that in Romans 16, Paul even encouraged believers to greet one another with a holy kiss. I sincerely pray that these Christian practices will never be lost in our churches. Social isolation is antithetical to our Christian unity and witness. However, in light of the current pandemic and the uncertainty surrounding the coronavirus, I urge our leaders and members to act with heightened caution.

We are persons of faith and should never act in the spirit of fear or panic, but we must be guided by scientific facts and prudent medical practices. These are not contradictory truths. Rather than overreact I propose that we wisely react. Use this international crisis as an opportunity to strengthen our most essential Christian practices of love, mercy, justice, and community. The church must be focused our healing and helping not only our members, but our communities, and our neighbors. We must heighten our advocacy for affordable, accessible healthcare for all. Let us refuse to use xenophobic, anti-immigrant rhetoric. In other words, in crisis let us BE the CHURCH!

There is currently no need to adopt a widespread cancelation of weekly church services and other gatherings. Individuals who are healthy and have no flu-like symptoms are at very low risk by attending such events. However, our elderly members and anyone who has a fragile health condition should consult their doctor for guidance on attending public events. Any person experiencing flu-like symptoms, fever, coughing, running nose, etc. should not be in public spaces and should consult a medical professional.

Pastors and Class Leaders must make it a priority to be in touch with our sick, shut-in, and elderly members. Let's ensure they have adequate medical supplies, water, and food. We can also use phone conferencing to keep them included in Bible Studies, Prayer Meetings, and other church events.

Many of our churches have online worship services that are an important option for those of all ages who may choose to temporarily avoid public gatherings. If your church doesn't offer an online option, there are many of our AME Zion Churches that do. Please don't neglect your corporate worship experience, even if it may have to be a digital experience. You can even continue to support your church financially by giving your tithes and offerings online or standard mail.

My concern for our members is also extended to our pastors and ministers. Until more is understood about the transmission and cure of this virus, I advise our clergy to limit handshaking and hugging. Let's remain radically hospitable and welcoming yet do so with wisdom and creativity. Holy fist bumps, enthusiastic greeting of one another, and a loving wave can express our beloved community without putting each other at greater risk. Hand sanitizers (containing alcohol) should be readily available around our churches.

When celebrating Holy Communion, it is important that in addition to our traditional practice of washing our hands prior to handling the elements, that alcohol-based hand sanitizer be used as well. Only ordained ministers, after completely sanitizing their hands, should place the wafers into the hands of the congregants. Members should not reach into the bread containers to take the wafers themselves.

Some basic, common sense guidelines that we should observe at all times:

- If you're feeling ill do not attend public gatherings, go to work or school.
- Cough or sneeze into your elbow.
- **WASH YOUR HANDS FREQUENTLY AND CORRECTLY!**

Among the CDC's recommendations for older adults:

- Avoid unnecessary travel, including long plane trips and cruises.
- Avoid crowds and stay home as much as possible.
- Keep extra supplies of medicines handy.

- Call your doctor if you develop fever, cough or shortness of breath, and get immediate medical help for severe symptoms including difficulty breathing, persistent chest pain or confusion.

Here is the link to the CDC website for more detailed information: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus

Please join me in praying for everyone impacted by this health crisis. We pray for our elderly and those with compromised immune systems. We pray for our children and other vulnerable populations. We pray for healthcare providers, caretakers, and others who are on the frontline in confronting this pandemic while comforting others. We pray for our pastors and ministers who often risk their own wellbeing to be with and serve others. We pray for our congregational life together that we will not become weary or apathetic but that we grow deeper, stronger, more united and renewed in our commitment to Christian love and community.

I offer the words of the Apostle Paul for you, my beloved sisters and brothers:

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to test and prove what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (Philippians 1:9-11)

Yours with the Joy of Jesus,
Bishop W. Darin Moore, Your Episcopal Servant