



May 13, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ,

Last Friday, Governor Northam issued Executive Order #61 which outlines "phase 1 easing of temporary restrictions due to the novel coronavirus." It goes into effect on Friday, May 15 for much of Virginia and on May 29 for the northern counties, cities and towns of Virginia. While this order allows individuals to attend religious services, we in the Diocese of Virginia will not begin our phased regathering in church buildings this month. Like dioceses across The Episcopal Church, as well as many denominations and faith traditions across the country, we will continue the fast from in-person worship that we began in March for a time longer.

This continued fast from in-person worship is rooted in scripture.

In 1 Corinthians 10:23-24, we read, "All things are lawful, but not all things are beneficial. All things are lawful, but not all things build up. Do not seek your own advantage, but that of the other." Regathering under very specific guidelines is now lawful, but it is not beneficial for our whole population when nearly 2,000 people died of COVID-19 in the United States just yesterday. We are bound by Jesus' law to love our neighbors as ourselves. We sacrifice worship in our church buildings for the sake of people we love in our congregations and for the sake of people in our communities whom we will never meet.

Experience shows in this time of pandemic that worship is a "superspreader" of the virus. When we go to the grocery store or to a restaurant pick-up window, we accept the inherent risk. When we gather for worship at church, however, we produce the risk. As people morally bound to live the way of love, we choose not to produce such risk. Instead, we choose to protect others and ourselves until the time when we can worship together safely.

As we continue our fast from in-person worship, we ease one restriction that has been in place in this diocese since April 19. Beginning on May 22,

congregations may live-stream or record worship from inside their worship spaces, following specific guidelines that are outlined in [Attachment 1](#) of this letter. We ask congregations desiring to exercise this option to write a letter to me outlining their plan for the reasons included in the attachment.

We continue to work in the Diocese of Virginia to develop strategies, guidelines, checklists, support and review processes for phased regathering for worship in our church buildings, as promised in [our letter of May 4](#). The [second attachment](#) to this letter describes the process.

Worship in this Diocese over the past month has been marked by tremendous creativity and energy. Many congregations have learned new technologies and skills that have enhanced worship. Many of you have moved outside of your church walls to engage with people who never come to church. We have worshipped with a good number of congregations over the past weeks. The most vibrant worship we experienced was not filmed in a nearly empty church, but in homes and backyards, neighborhoods and pastures. We hope congregations will continue the new best practices you have learned, even if you do record or livestream from the church building, so that worship may continue to reach far beyond our walls with the saving, healing, loving grace of Christ Jesus. Let's not be in a hurry to "go back," but filled with urgency to keep going forward into the future, into all that God is revealing to us.

God bless you with hope and grace as these days of fasting from in-person worship continue.

Faithfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Susan E. Goff". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross symbol at the beginning.

The Rt. Rev. Susan E. Goff  
Bishop Suffragan and  
Ecclesiastical Authority

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Jennifer Brooke-Davidson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross symbol at the beginning.

The Rt. Rev. Jennifer Brooke-Davidson  
Assistant Bishop