

St. James' E-pistle: **SPECIAL EDITION**

A Letter from the Rector March 13, 2020 AM

Dear People of St. James' Church,

In the midst of our rapidly changing circumstances, I wanted to reach out to you all with an update about where things stand for our faith community in the next few days. Please note that as new information and guidance is received, these plans may change. Updates will be communicated through our digital resources, though persons without access to such communications will be welcome to contact the parish office with any questions.

This Sunday, we will hold our Eucharist services at 8am and 10am, similar to last week. Our bishops have not sent out any updates or revisions to their directions of March 6th, though the website of The Episcopal Church in Connecticut now has a designated page ([here](#)) just for coronavirus guidance and resources for our church communities.

First and foremost, anyone who is ill or concerned about becoming ill by coming to St. James' is encouraged to stay home. That guidance applies not only to worship, but to any and all church activities. The health and well-being of all our members is absolutely paramount.

As before, this Sunday we will receive only the consecrated hosts at communion, with a chalice station available near the font for those who wish to drink the consecrated wine. Intinction (dipping) the wafer in the wine is no longer permitted, as we are trying to eliminate both direct and indirect contact between hands and faces.

We will continue to refrain from touching one another during the Passing of the Peace and at other times of the morning. Because "social distancing" helps prevent transmission of diseases spread

through coughing and sneezing, worshippers are encouraged to take advantage of St. James' large nave and *spread out*.

At the 10am worship, we will still offer special Prayers for Healing after the Prayers of the People. However, anointing with oil will not be offered. Again, this is because we are trying to eliminate all hand-to-face contact.

This Sunday, we will still have Coffee Hour following services, though we will want to avoid serving any refreshments that require handling shared utensils.

The Red Door concert Sunday afternoon has not been cancelled.

Our vestry meeting scheduled for Tuesday will go forward as planned. This will be an opportunity for your parish leaders to share with one another input in planning for the coming weeks. Please keep your vestry members in your prayers Tuesday evening, as they discern the next steps in our Lenten way forward together as a community.

Please note that, at this time, we have a simple funeral service scheduled for Michelle Brown, mother of Tiwana Council. This Burial Office will be held at 10am on Tuesday in the church, and church members are invited to join Michelle's family for this service of prayer and remembrance.

Lastly, I want to offer a word of hope for encouragement and calm through days ahead. We do not know what the future holds, and we see that our present reality is changing by the hour. What we do know is that distance and isolation may be one of the most effective ways to maintain our health, and the health of those we love. Of course, such distancing runs directly counter to much that we treasure about our Christian faith. We look to Jesus in the Gospels, and we see him breaking down barriers and reaching out to the ill and the outcast over and over again. But if we look to our Scriptures a little deeper, we also see there that Jesus seemed to know when it was time for him to go away, oftentimes to a lonely place in the desert. Such are the days that we seem to be facing. In the trying times ahead,

when we feel torn by our hunger and longing for fellowship with one another, let us bear in mind that image of Jesus taking care of himself by stepping away from the crowds for a time. May whatever isolation we each encounter in coming days and weeks be so hallowed as the time that Jesus spent away.

And if we should find ourselves longing for the joyful unity with God and one another we experience in the Holy Eucharist, I offer up for us a prayer of St. Thomas Aquinas, when he faced similar challenges:

Lord Jesus, I believe that you are present in the Blessed Sacrament. I love you above all things, and I desire to receive you into my soul. Since I cannot at this moment receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace you as if you were already there and unite myself wholly to you. Never permit me to be separated from you. Amen.

May the same be true of our union with one another, dear friends.

Yours in Christ,

Fr. Dustin+