

Good morning dear friends in Christ.

I pray you are all well and staying safe. I miss being together face to face and sharing in the fellowship and ministry that is such a visible expression of our faith. I am grateful for the live streaming worship we are currently offering to help us stay connected. These online services will continue in some fashion even after we restart public worship. Thank you all for your participation, your comments, and your encouragement as we navigate these uncharted waters.

I know you are hearing about some other local congregations restarting public worship and are wondering when St. Peter's will be in a position to do the same. Just last evening, our office received the latest update from the bishop's office regarding the phased, gradual restarting of public worship in the Diocese of West Texas. This most recent communique from the diocese is attached.

I want you to know that our parish office has begun ordering the necessary sanitation and safety supplies for us to be in compliance with CDC and diocesan guidelines in preparation for that day. In addition, St. Peter's Vestry and our office staff have begun planning for the implementation of the diocesan guidelines as we discern the timing of our parish restart of public worship. Our intention is to be thoughtful and caring as we sort out the best practices for keeping our congregation safe. We will all have a part in this. As you will note in the guidelines, the emphasis on the importance of self-distancing, hand washing, self-monitoring of our own potential symptoms, and wearing masks is essential.

We must all keep in mind that increased rates of community spread may require churches to delay reopening further or to close again in the future. It is incumbent on the parish leaders to monitor state and county virus statistics as we consider what is best for their congregation. We are mindful that some 90% of our congregation is in the at-risk group and vulnerable to the COVID-19 virus. So, I am especially guarded about our restart since our area statistics are so sketchy and testing is so limited. Many health professionals point to a consistent 14-day decline in confirmed cases as an important indicator to begin the reopening process. Our ability to detect any upward or downward trends in positive cases in our area is only as accurate as the data that we receive from week to week. Even when, St. Peter's feels we are in a position to begin public worship again, we fully understand that there will be many who will still be uncomfortable in attending these larger gatherings for worship. Based on the continued uncertainty, this is a perfectly logical response. Our live streaming offering of worship will continue as well as other online opportunities that will help us stay connected. It is good for us to remember that the only recourse we have had to date to help flatten the infection curve has been the social distancing and shelter in place policies.

Please read through the attached update from Bishop Reed and continue to stay safe and well. We will keep you updated as we make this journey together. I'll close with some comments from a recent message from Bishop Reed.

"I fully understand the ongoing frustration and weariness you feel. I know that pushing back the start of the phased reopening once more will disappoint some, even as it will be a great relief to others. Please trust that we are all trying to work together so that when we come joyfully to the other side of this, we will see that we have arrived together - one in Christ. I am blessed to have so many people working and praying with me toward that goal. And they are doing that for all of us. I ask that you continue to practice patience and loving-kindness with one another as your church's leaders work hard to develop plans that will allow you to gather together again, in person, in your church.

Keep in mind that it is still Easter. Christ is risen, and the challenges of this present time will not outlast the power of his love."

God bless us all.

Faithfully,

~ Fr. Jim Friedel