

Q: Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?

A: I will, with God's help.

Q: Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

A: I will, with God's help.

Friends,

This morning the parish leaders of the congregations within the Diocese of Kansas met with Bishop Cathleen to discuss our responses, plans and other items surrounding the issues of the Covid-19 pandemic. We had a prayerful and good meeting with creative ways for all of us to move forward in the coming weeks of uncertainty.

First off, as of today there are only a handful of confirmed cases in the area around Kansas City. While testing has been limited, a larger outbreak or cluster like in other parts of the country is not being reported here. I am not aware of any members at St. Thomas that are showing symptoms or have tested positive. This is good news and we are ALL being asked to do our part in keeping it that way.

At the core of our Anglican (Episcopal) theology is the idea of gathering in fellowship, sharing in communion and praying together. In fact is part of our Baptismal Covenant. Times like these push our understanding and there are several ways to respond. One is to be stubborn and continue as usual, and I think under the circumstance this is foolish. The other is to be creative and look at the tools we have to utilize in this day and age and do our best to continue to gather our community in a myriad of ways.

We will continue to have our regular worship times on the weekends. Here are some adjustments that will be made starting this weekend.

- A) Communion will be served only in one kind, bread.
- B) We will move to a central collection plate (no passing of the plates).
- C) All services will be broadcast online on Facebook and Youtube.
- D) Greeters and Ushers will be asked to help wipe down surfaces with disinfectant wipes after and between services.
- E) Only coffee and water and other drinks will be served at coffee hour.
- F) Hand shaking/ Hugs at sharing of the peace will be discouraged instead bows, fist or elbow bumps, etc. are encouraged.
- G) Clergy will not be shaking hands after the services in a greeting line. Please understand that we interact with hundreds of people each week- so it is best we stay

as healthy as possible and also not risk spreading this to others unintentionally. We can still chat and talk after the service, just please no touching for now.

Our weekly bible studies, small groups, choir, youth group, etc, since they are smaller in groupings, will continue to meet for now. We plan to continue our weekly Lenten lunches and speaker series (broadcasted online).

The CDC is recommending that we practice “Social Distancing” to help keep the virus from spreading. That can mean avoiding large gatherings (like the NCAA tournament) and things like keeping at least a yard (meter) between you and other people, etc. Also we are being asked to “up” our hand washing practices with soap for 30 seconds multiple times a day. (I’m sure all of you washed your hands before, RIGHT!?!)

Here are some ways you can help our faith community of St. Thomas.

- If you have decided to not personally attend worship at this time, please respond to this e-mail gdemo@stthomasop.org. I’d like to make sure we can stay connected in other ways and the clergy and others will reach out to you regularly.
- If you would like to be part of the “Connecting” team to call folks and check on folks by email, etc. please let me know at this email as well. This is way for all of us to stay in fellowship with each other.
- I’m looking for a few people to offer compline on facebook and youtube daily for this difficult time. If you are interested send me an email at gdemo@stthomasop.org.

There will undoubtedly be further updates and we may need to make more adjustments. Please know that we are all taking this very seriously and doing our best. I ask that you keep all our health care workers, government officials, school leaders and those making decisions in your prayer.

Let me know if you have questions-

Fr. Gar Demo
Rector- St. Thomas