

**The Anglican Province of Christ the King**  
**St. George's Anglican Pro-Cathedral**  
**1210 Dixie Trail**  
**Raleigh, NC 27614**  
(919) 786-0640

**Archiepiscopal Residence:**  
10317 Crisp Drive  
Raleigh, NC 27614  
[APCKArchbishopJEU@hotmail.com](mailto:APCKArchbishopJEU@hotmail.com)



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The Feast of St. Joseph, Spouse of the BVM

TO: All the Clergy and Laity of the Anglican Province of Christ the King

FROM: The Council of Bishops

RE: COVID-19 and Next Steps

I am writing to you today out of the abundance of Love that Our Saviour, Jesus Christ, has for you all and as if I were able to be in each of your churches and homes during this turbulent time to speak to you in person. Covid-19 (Coronavirus) has caused all of us to begin adjusting to a new “normal” in both our professional and personal lives. Many school systems have closed, restaurants and other dining establishments have suspended eat-in options and now are offering only curbside take out. Many businesses have had to furlough their employees. We are now to practice “social distancing” and our border with Canada has closed to all but essential traffic. All of which in an attempt to slow the progression of the virus.

The personal and economic disruption of Covid-19 is something which many of us have never experienced during our lifetime. These times, for us, are unprecedented. The developments associated with this pandemic are extremely fluid and are changing rapidly. We, too, need to remain adaptable as we strive to adjust to its challenges. All of us need to be vigilant, not fearful; prepared, not anxious; aware, but not desperate; generous, not hoarding; calm, not panicking; and use common sense as we acclimate to this new norm. St. Paul reminds us in his second Epistle to St. Timothy, “For God hath not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and a sound mind.”

In recent weeks we have experienced an increase in the number of Coronavirus cases and the number is climbing every day. We have not reached the



peak of the outbreak. Different areas of our country are under different mandates as local health officials try to stem the number of people infected ~ all the way from limiting sizes of groups, practicing “social distancing”, to legal “shelter in place” orders from civil authorities. Many of our Parishes, depending upon the severity of the outbreak in different areas of the country, have already curtailed social gatherings, limited the number of their services, chosen to close altogether, or are under mandates from the civil authorities to close. Although some may question the legalities of such “orders”, it is important for us, now, to obey them. As long as they do not conflict with God’s laws, as St. Paul reminds us, we are to obey the civil magistrates.

The Council’s concern is not that Covid-19 will be transferred by receiving the Chalice at the Holy Communion (if that were the case, we would be getting sick every time a virus went through the community), but it is a matter of those who appear to have lesser symptoms (younger people) being in close proximity with those of our older or health-compromised Church populations who seem to have more severe, even life-threatening, complications from this virus. This exposure between people is what must be limited for now.

Given these and other important considerations, I called a meeting of the Council of Bishops on Wednesday (yesterday) to discuss these matters and to map a way forward in these uncharted and treacherous waters. The Council agreed, unanimously, that foremost, we must protect the faithful from being exposed to the virus. Therefore, out of an abundance of caution and by God’s Grace, I am urging the clergy of the APCK to close the doors of our Parishes (and Missions) and to suspend all *public* services, Sundays and weekdays, for the next two weeks, March 22<sup>nd</sup> (Lent IV) and March 29<sup>th</sup> (Lent V), inclusive, in an effort to keep our people safe; as of the date of this letter. I am asking the Bishops to send this Pastoral Letter out to their Parishes and am also asking the Clergy to send the same out to their membership via the email lists for their parishes and contact by telephone those who may not have or use email. The Bishops will re-evaluate this situation the week of March 29<sup>th</sup> and every two weeks thereafter until this situation is passed. All of you will be kept informed by your Bishops.

Moving forward, and I want to be clear on this, we are neither running nor hiding from this virus! The Church is not afraid and she withdraws from nothing! I am charging the Clergy of the Province to explore new ways of ministering to their parishes; holding services via ZOOM or Skype, You Tube or Facebook ~ any way we can remain in ministry and in touch with one another. I have heard some

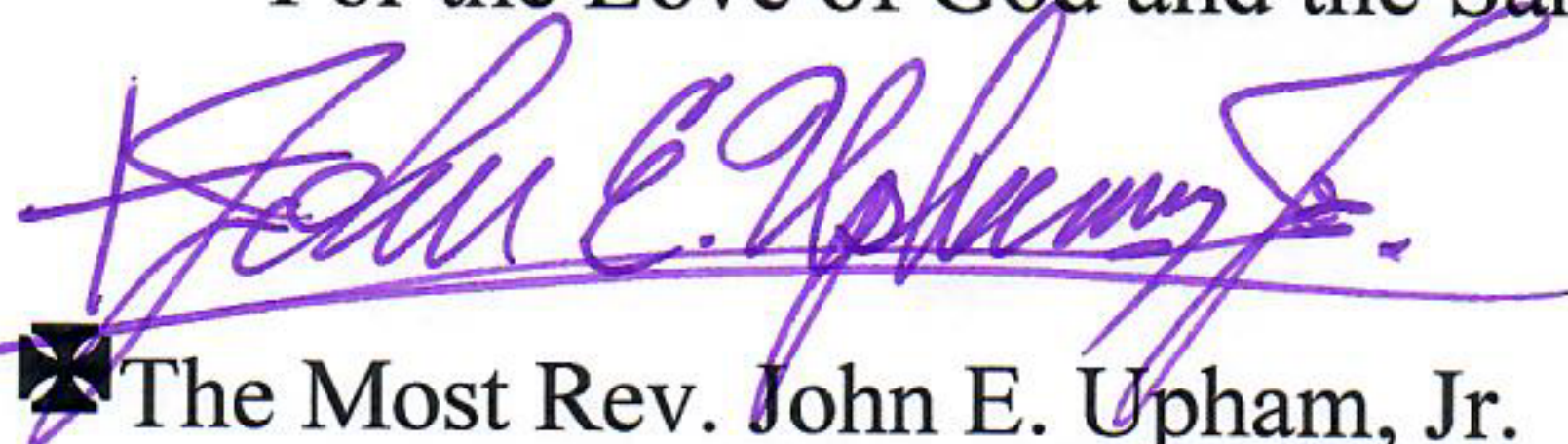


Parishes are already exploring these options and I encourage all of us to do the same. At the very least, via these and other platforms, you and your parish could say Morning Prayer with the Litany including sermons, as well.

Finally, I have a few words for our Priests, Deacons, and the Laity. Priests – Stay at your posts as the spiritual head of your Parish. You are not hirelings, you are shepherds. You may not be able to be physically present at the Church, in the neighborhood, or visit parishioner’s homes but be present to your people as much as ye are able ~ by telephone, computer, or whatever means you have at your disposal. If there is serious illness, you need to administer Last Rites, or there is some other pastoral emergency, – GO! But do not put yourselves in harm’s way. Use common sense. Take the necessary precautions. You are of no use to anyone if you get sick . . . or worse. Deacons – Assist your brother Priests as faithful servants in the charism of your Order; seeing to the needs of the sick, the infirm, the elderly; doing whatever you can by helping deliver groceries, medications, or helping with other needs your people may have. But, again, use precautions when you go to minister among the people. Laity – Now, more than ever, strive to remain faithful to Jesus Christ and to His Church with your prayers and your commitments to your local Parish. Read your Daily Offices, earnestly. Pray for your Bishops, your Clergymen, your Parish, Diocese, and Province. Pray that this scourge will pass. Prayer is the greatest and most efficacious gift we possess because it comes directly from God. Above all, please stay safe! To all of you, as the early Church did, stay in touch with each other, always, but especially now and let your clergymen know of any illnesses or other pastoral situations of which they need to be aware.

As we do these things, the Church will remain visible; both to her faithful people and to the world, even in the midst of this pandemic. We will not disappear into hiding but will change our visibility and adopt the attitude and characteristics of the early Church under persecution. When this pandemic is over and we emerge, we will be stronger and greater than before as we continue the work of God and His Church!

For the Love of God and the Sake of the Gospel,



✠ The Most Rev. John E. Upham, Jr.  
Archbishop  
(For the Council of Bishops)