

13 March 2020 – 2 pm

Dear Ones,

Greetings again in the name of the one true and living God – Perfect Unity and Glorious Trinity.

Concerning our global, national, and local public health crisis, a great deal has changed in the past 24 hours.

I write to you today to inform you that we as a body, WILL NOT BE GATHERING for worship, formation, or fellowship for at least the next two weeks.

To restate that as clearly as possible – all worship, meetings, and activities that are normally held in the building where St. Bede’s Episcopal Church meets are cancelled for at least the next two weeks.

What does this mean?

This means that there will be no regularly scheduled liturgies, classes, meetings, or social gatherings until further notice. Right now we are imagining that we will observe a two-week “pause” on all activities to allow for “social distancing”.

Why are we doing this?

Public health authorities are instructing us all that “social distancing” or “being apart from large gatherings” is the only way to effectively reduce the spread of the COVID19 virus. This is an action that is being taken by so many communities, activities, organizations, schools, and public events for the sake of the Common Good. This step is especially appropriate in communities with significant populations who are 60 years old and older (as defined by the CDC) and where there are significant populations with compromised immune systems.

Are other faith communities doing this?

Yes. As of Noon today, there are numerous dioceses of the Episcopal Church whose bishops have inhibited public gatherings for the foreseeable future. The latest that I saw this morning was Bishop Michael Hunn of the Diocese of Rio Grande (and son of Bruce and Joyce Hunn, former St. Bede's parishioners). Many of these dioceses that have already cancelled public gatherings are in places that have fewer diagnosed cases of COVID19 than we do in metro Atlanta. Locally, I am aware that Embury Hills United Methodist, Briarlake Baptist, Dharma Jewel Monastery, Shallowford Presbyterian, Christ Church (Norcross), St. Luke's, All Saints', and the Cathedral have all cancelled public worship and activities for at least the next two weeks. Bishop Wright fully supports the decisions of local faith communities to implement these protocols in their local contexts.

How can we stay connected and “in communion” in the meantime?

Love one another. Call each other. Write to each other. If you are bold and adventurous - consider exploring new ways of connecting electronically. In the days ahead, we will post on the St. Bede’s Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/StBedesAtlanta/>) resources to connect for the lectionary readings, prayer, sermons, and other information. You do not have to be “On Facebook” to access the St. Bede’s Facebook page. Anything posted there should be accessible to anyone who has access to the internet.

I am aware that not participating in worship is very disheartening. Communion is something that we share and express through bread and wine, but it is also the state of grace in which we live with each other. Please reach out to one another even more deeply during this time to share that deeper sense of “communion” with one another.

I appreciate the Vestry’s affirmation of this decision. It is difficult and a decision that I wish we did not have to make. Please be assured that we are in the “deep middle” of adopting this protocol – many faith communities have already landed here and more have made that decision since I have begun writing this letter.

Although I have spent most of the last 36 hours connecting with folks about the implications of the first worship protocol changes that I wrote to you about yesterday and additional time trying to discern in advance the implications of this new protocol, I am sure that there are some factors that we have not considered. Please let us get through this weekend and we will figure out more of the “if this, then…” or “what about…” early next week.

Please note earlier in this letter I said, **“all worship, meetings, and activities that are normally held in the building where St. Bede’s Episcopal Church meets are cancelled for at least the next two weeks.”** Why did I say this that way? Because **YOU** are St. Bede’s Episcopal Church – gathered or scattered. St. Bede’s is not merely a building, nor is it merely a liturgy. As the Bishop said last week, “Worship is your spiritual fueling station to go and live Love in the world.” Consider your tanks topped-off to head out on this journey of the next two weeks!

As I said yesterday, I love you all and I trust that the good folks of St. Bede’s can rise to the occasion no matter how adverse the circumstances. Please be kind and loving to each other and to all of your neighbors. This time will pass quickly and we will embrace “normal” again with the full hope of the Resurrection. Your clergy and other ministers are here for you in the days ahead. Please reach out to us as you need us (we will be working and checking email and voicemail).

I’m looking forward to connecting with you all in new ways in the days ahead.

Peace,
Chad+