



Dear Friends in Christ,

As people of faith, we follow the commandment Jesus gave us - to “love our neighbors as ourselves.” Loving our neighbors these days in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, means setting limits. This is how we love our neighbors - by working to slow the spread of this extremely contagious, life-threatening virus. We know that coming together, even for the best of reasons, can spread this disease.

On March 17th, we issued a pastoral directive that put all of our 203 congregations on hiatus from in-person gathering until May 10th. Today, we extend that directive and offer a plan for how we might engage re-entry when it is advisable to do so. We know that if we resume gatherings prematurely, we will force our most vulnerable members to make the choice between keeping themselves safe and participating in congregational life.

The linked “*Plan for Re-Entry for Great Lakes Episcopalians*” articulates three phases for re-entry into our new normal. Currently, we are in Phase I and will remain in Phase I until further notice, pending further recommendations from public health experts and the State. When we are able to progress into Phase II, we will communicate the return date at least ten days ahead of the change.

Furthermore, as we continue to respond to this pandemic in the way we gather for worship, formation, and fellowship, we must consider how to respond more fully to the injustices being revealed by this pandemic - food insecurity, racial bias, access to healthcare, a living wage, housing, and education. As a people of faith who believe in the power of resurrection and new life, we are committed to naming and addressing these injustices so that the kingdom of God may come nearer. We must be asking - how might our faith communities use this crisis as a catalyst for re-imagining our ministries and priorities to come alongside a world in grief? What tangible steps will we take to address these issues?

And, as we continue to follow recommended guidelines for safety, please remember to embody hope as we pray. Pray for the ill and recovering, for the grieving, and for the lonely. Pray for researchers, medical professionals, health policy experts, front line workers, and for those who clean and stock and ship. Pray for our clergy and our staffs. And pray for each other - that we may be filled with God’s courage and compassion in the midst of fear and unknown.

Peace be with you,

The Rt. Rev. Wayne M. Houglund, Jr. - Bishop, *Episcopal Dioceses of Eastern & Western Michigan*

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Bonnie Perry - Bishop, *Episcopal Diocese of Michigan*

The Rt. Rev. Rayford Ray - Bishop, *Episcopal Diocese of Northern Michigan*