



This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.

PSALM 118:24

31 May 2020

The Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

TO Congregation members and other friends of Church of the Holy Comforter, Drexel Hill
FR Thomas Eoyang
RE Re-entry for in-person worship in the church

Dear Siblings in Christ:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Some people have pointed out that “social distancing” is an unfortunate term for what we’ve been asked to do to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus. Some say—and I agree—that we are more accurately being asked to distance ourselves from each other *physically*, but that we should therefore be even more intentional in seeking *social connection*. My last letter and the phone campaign by members of the Vestry were intended to encourage all of us into new ways of connecting and relating when it is too risky for us to be physically near one another.

Now we are considering what it will take—once the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania declares that Delaware County to be in “yellow” phase—to allow us to gather for worship in person in the church. To this end I have called together a Safe Worship Task Force whose members, working with me, and to whom I am deeply grateful, are the following:

Mike Christopher
Jim Gardner
Sue Gelsomini
Barbara Irving
Dan Knowles
Gail Morgan
Steve Perrone

The work product of this task force will be a document that applies, as faithfully as possible, the guidelines that the Bishop of Pennsylvania has issued describing in great detail what must be done for a congregation to commence in-person worship services in its church building. “The Plan for Return: Living with COVID-19, May 2020” is a 27-page document that every member of the Holy Comforter Task Force and the Vestry has read and thought about. Here are some of the key points that will make our common worship look very different from what it has been:

- Attendance for an in-person worship service will be limited to a total 25 people (including clergy and worship ministers).
- Everyone will be masked.

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- Safe distancing of six feet between individuals will be observed at all times (family units who live together would be allowed to sit close together).
- There will be no choral or congregational singing; hymn books and prayer books have been removed from all the pews.
- If the service is Holy Communion (a decision that has not yet been made), the sacrament will be received in one kind only—the bread. Safe distancing will be strictly observed during the administration of communion as well as during other parts of the service.
- Everyone is asked to monitor their own health closely and, if a person exhibits any symptoms of illness, that person is asked to refrain from attending worship in church.
- Identification of exactly who attends a service will be made and recorded, with contact information, to allow for contact tracing later should a transmission event occur in church.

These are just a few of the guidelines that the diocesan document stipulates. The Safe Worship Task Force will be looking closely at each detail to figure out how best to implement the guidelines so that worship at Holy Comforter during this intermediate phase can be as close to safe as possible. Given the nature of this virus, however, absolute safety is probably beyond reach, even if all the guidelines are scrupulously followed.

Meanwhile, while we live in this in-between time (which might go on for quite a while) we must persist in deepening our relationship with God and with one another. We are being called to support each other in what seems like a time of stasis and boredom. With over 100,000 deaths in the USA, and over 360,000 deaths worldwide, and a world economy virtually frozen, we are even more importantly living through a time of trauma and grief. Much more is at stake with our physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being than deciding when and how we conduct worship in church once again. Not only do we need to call on the Christian virtue of patience, but even more we need vigilance and persistence in seeking out the facts and the truth of our reality if we are to meet the challenges that lie before us.

In summary, it will be a slow and deliberate process to specify how and when we re-enter the church premises for common worship. That re-entry will definitely not be within the next few weeks. The Safe Worship Task Force and ultimately the Vestry are working toward putting the necessary rules and resources in place with safety as the top priority.

In all this, we remain confident in the embrace of God's love, and thankful for God's grace.

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12).

Yours in Christ,



(The Rev. Dr.) Thomas Eoyang, Jr.
Rector, Church of the Holy Comforter

P.S. As always, if you need to reach me for pastoral care, please contact me at my church e-mail: rector.holycomforterdrexelhill@gmail.com. Or you can call or text me on my mobile phone: 215.870.0078.