



The Episcopal
Diocese of San Joaquin
The Central Third of California

May 21, 2020

Sisters and Brothers of EDSJ

I hope my words find you safe and well. As I have communicated in my previous pastoral letters during these pandemic times of COVID-19, we have seen illnesses and deaths in an unprecedented manner. At the time of writing this correspondence, close to 5 million cases worldwide have been reported and over 1.5 million cases in the US. And we are approaching 325,000 deaths globally and shy of 92,000 deaths in our country. I realize we see the very same statistical information each day through our various news streams. My concern is that we may not pause enough during this informational storm and truly consider those who suffer from a debilitating and life threatening virus. Equally, I'm afraid we may not reflect enough upon the people who are no longer with us and those who grieve them. Please Church, do not get lost in the continuous numerical totals or the constant partisan politicizing or the ceaseless self-serving positioning. This is a time, as it is in all times, when and where we remember who we are and to Whom we belong. This is a time, as it is in all times, for us to be the Church.

In my last issued pastoral letter, I identified that we would continue to suspend public worship and public gatherings through May 24. Again, after considerable thought and prayer and consulting with diocesan leadership, I am extending that date until such time when we can confidently resume our gatherings in a safe and healthy manner. I realize in my two previous pastoral letters, I provided forecasted dates for potential reopening. In this instance, I am electing to refrain from predicting a prospective date as I do not want to raise expectations unnecessarily regarding a resumption of public worship and gatherings. I will say, we continue to rely upon science and the health-related data provided. Moreover, we continue to rely upon our belief that we are guided by our commitment to public health and our faith-informed responsibility for one another.

As a diocese, we will continue to follow the lead of the state of California with regards to measurements, requirements, protocols and when reopening may occur. And when and where those measurements, requirements and protocols may differ from the position of local counties,

we encourage the safest and most cautious option for adherence. I write those words because at the time of crafting this correspondence the rates of cases increase in the counties of Fresno and Tulare. Last weekend during our Deanery Meetings via ZOOM, I was asked if reopening would take place at different times for different Faith Communities given our varied circumstances, contexts and conditions. My response at the time was my deep hope that EDSJ make covenant in an act of solidarity to reopening simultaneously. Sisters and Brothers, I do hope we will follow that *very good way*.

Last week, I assembled a small diocesan working group with the task of providing information throughout EDSJ pertaining to “moving towards reopening.” It is my intention to have this information available to everyone in the next two weeks.

Most importantly EDSJ, sheltering-in-place, wearing masks and gloves, namely, ensuring that we are exercising our responsibility for others by taking care of ourselves, remains the very best thing we can do.

I pray for the safety and wellness of us all. And I pray that we may continue to exercise patience and kindness and generosity and care.

Please, if you have questions or wish to make comment, do not hesitate to contact me.

Blessings

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a plus sign followed by a stylized 'D' and a flourish.

+David