

March 13, 2020

From the Rector of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Beaumont, Texas:



Good day and God bless you all,

I trust you all have been keeping one another in prayer just as I have. Last week I promised that I would keep you informed as we learned new information about Coronavirus Disease 2019 (or COVID-19). This week I am providing some important updates as they affect St. Stephen's.

Recent advice from health professionals has made it clear that--even if everyone in our community feels healthy right now--it is possible simply by us gathering in groups to spread this virus quickly. It is possible to be contagious with COVID-19 and cause harm to those among us who are the most vulnerable and at highest risk without knowing it. I know how deeply we love each other and that none of us would want to be responsible for the illness or even death of one of our family or friends. It is, therefore, after great prayer and deliberation that I am today temporarily suspending all events and gatherings of public worship at St. Stephen's until advised it is safe to resume.

St. Stephen's has been preparing for such a possibility, so beginning this Sunday, March 15, we will have live worship services streaming online via our Website, ststephensbmt.org. We will hold worship services Sundays at 8:00am and 10:00am, Wednesdays at 5:30pm, just St. Stephen's always does. I ask you to join us and be a part of the ongoing acts of praise and study and prayer of the Body of Christ from the comfort of your home. If you do not have a Book of Common Prayer at home, Peggy worked hard this week to quickly prepare a condensed version of the BCP you can use to follow along with our live online worship. Copies are available to pick up in a basket in the church office alcove. We hope this helps!

Please know that even though we cannot be together in body we will all be together in spirit. I will remain available for prayer, consultation, and questions by telephone (409-892-4227), text, (313-405-3995), or email (sbalke@ststephensbmt.org)



Finally, a dear friend and colleague of mine drew my attention to the Collect of the Day for Eighth Sunday after the Epiphany, reminding me in the midst of uncertain times of God's unfailing presence and guidance:

Most loving Father, whose will it is for us to give thanks for all things, to fear nothing but the loss of you, and to cast all our care on you who care for us: Preserve us from faithless fears and worldly anxieties, that no clouds of this mortal life may hide from us the light of that love which is immortal, and which you have manifested to us in your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

And, as The Most Rev. Michael Curry, reminds us, Jesus came to show us "how to live not simply as collections of self-interested individuals, but how to live as the human family of God....Look out for your neighbors. Look out for each other. Look out for yourselves. Listen to those who have knowledge that can help to guide us medically and help to guide us socially. Do everything that we can to do this together; to respond to each other's needs and to respond to our own needs."

God has given us a great gift in one another, letting us be the Body of Christ right now and in the age to come. As we gather online this Sunday to worship from a distance, I look forward to sharing the Peace of Christ, celebrating the Word of God, and proclaiming the Resurrection with you all, my friends.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steven". The letters are cursive and fluid, with a large initial 'S'.

The Rev. Steven M. Balke, Jr.

Further Resources:

Live stream worship services at St. Stephen's, Sundays 8 & 10, Wednesdays at 5:30pm
ststephensbmt.org

From *The Episcopal Diocese of Texas*, "Coronavirus Guidelines within the Episcopal Diocese of Texas"
epicenter.org/health-resources

From *The Episcopal Church and Presiding Bishop Michael Curry*, "Concerning COVID-19"
episcopalchurch.org/concerning-covid19

From *Episcopal Relief & Development*, "Faith Based Response to Epidemics"
episcopalrelief.org/what-we-do/us-disaster-program/faith-based-response-to-epidemics

From *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, "Coronavirus Disease 2019 Frequently Asked Questions and Answers"
cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html