



Christ Episcopal Church

The Rev. Emmanuel A. Mercer, *Rector*

Established 1727

May 3, 2020

Dear Friends:

At our recent Vestry Meeting, the Registrar, Ron Couch, read an article by a pastor who is a close family friend. Like many other members, I was moved by that article and the inherent call to rethink how church would be different going forward. The question the article highlighted was “What would you do if you were not afraid?” Fear debilitates and reduces our capacity to be transformational, to launch further afield and deep.

Myself included, we have been sore afraid of what the future holds for us, our loved ones, our community and our beloved Christ Church. As your Rector and Wardens, we write to you to express our collective grief and sadness over the uncertainty that has engulfed our world because of the pandemic.

Over the past several weeks, the Bishops of Maryland and Diocesan officials have been meeting with clergy and senior wardens of the Diocese of Maryland. These weekly check-ins have proven to be emotionally and spiritually sustaining for many of the clergy and wardens of the diocese. These meetings have also provided the platform where the Bishop of Maryland shares the vision and collective thoughts of other organs of diocesan leadership, and most importantly update us on the path forward.

The truth is that things will not be the same in our church life over the coming months. It is highly unlikely that any church would be able to hold in-service worship by the mid-May target date. Subject to consultations with civil authorities and health experts, the bishop has laid out a process by which individual churches may hold services upon the approval of the bishop. Some of these include holding in-person services with restricted numbers, social distancing and the requirement that all attendees wear masks.

We are presently developing plans to seek permission from the bishop, should that opportunity become available. Part of the plans under consideration would involve holding multiple services on Sunday-to accommodate parishioners who hunger to worship at New Brick. We would continue livestreaming as many of these services on our website, Zoom, YouTube and Facebook. There would be limited interaction between parishioners at worship; Eucharist would be in one kind, parishioners would be required to sign-in to indicate which worship they plan to attend. There will not be Sunday School or Adult Formation. These are but a few of the many changes under consideration, and until such a time that a vaccine is developed, this will be our reality.

We are grateful to the Women of Christ Church for their kind and generous donation of a high capacity laptop to augment our weekly livestream worship out of New Brick. The Rector and Vestry are also working to develop ways to support every aspect of our church life during this period.

We understand that we all are grieving in some way over the changes in our church lives and in the difficulties that this virus has created in our personal lives and in the life of our nation and the world. You should be aware that Father Manny is available to provide spiritual support to each of you and, as always, we pray for our entire church family.

The Treasurer reported at the Vestry Meeting that under the present circumstances we are doing fine. Our financial situation, as might be expected, is not doing as well as we had planned before the pandemic. Yet, we are thankful for the generosity of our congregation. Many of you have found new ways of giving to support our common life.

It is humbling to know that those who are financially able have committed to meeting their pledges and have made additional gifts to support our common life. As difficult as it may be, we are deeply aware that not everyone of us would be in the position to give at this moment, however, we encourage each one of us with the noble idea that every little bit counts and every little bit makes a big difference. As at this time, we have successfully applied for the Payroll Protection Program and we should receive the loan before you read this letter.

It is gratifying to note that the Diocese of Maryland has reduced our annual assessment by 10%. We have been able to keep and honor our financial commitments to our dedicated staff who have been kept busy during the pandemic. Over the coming months, the Vestry will reconsider the budget and make the necessary adjustments without sacrificing our support of the congregation and of the community. In sum, we do face some significant financial challenges, but we do not believe they are unsurmountable

So, considering the above, "What would you do if you were not afraid?" I have little idea about what we would do. But I am assured by the fact that for almost 300 years, this parish has been here, ministered to countless souls, faced challenges great and small, some greater than what we face today. Prior to when the pandemic struck, we were stronger than we have ever been. With your continual support, prayers and the grace of God, we hope to come out of this crisis even stronger than we have ever been. Why? Because our desire and task is to embrace the future without any fear and to minister with a much deeper sense of love and compassion.

As we welcome the unknown future, we would need every single one of you to share thoughts on what we would do if we were not afraid. This shouldn't be the work of any one individual, it should be our collective communal task, and so we invite your thoughts.

Please do not hesitate to communicate with us your fearless thoughts, ideas and any concerns you may have.

Faithfully,



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