

My Dear Friends in Christ,

So many things about this COVID-19 crisis has been creating anxiety. Not only in us as individuals, but in our Diocese as a whole. Everything about how we do church has transformed in the last few months and as Canon Catherine said in her letter last week, we cannot let that go. COVID-19 has forced us to go inside, our homes and our hearts, in a way that we can take into these reopening procedures.

Catherine's message last week was about finding new and imaginative ways to encounter God. Our goal in reopening is not to "go back to normal" *because we can't*. Normal doesn't exist anymore, and as scary as that is, it's kind of exciting and challenging too. When I was a Resident Staff person at Camp Galilee, we were taught that the perfect intersection of challenge and skill is called **Adventure**. So, let's adventure forward into this new world, with a new understanding of what and where church is and who God is calling us to be.

At the following link, you will find a list of requirements and expectations when it comes to worshiping God together, in person. Allow me to break it down a little bit first. Each parish will be expected to submit a proposal for reopening to the Diocese to be reviewed by me and our lovely Chancellor for approval. There is comprehensive list of things that we hope you will include in your plan. We are asking each Parish to apply individually because each building, each county, each town, each congregation, is vastly different. This diversity has been our challenge as we have been thinking about resuming community gatherings since this all started back in March.

As you consider if it is time for your congregation to submit a proposal for reopening, I challenge you to think about something else. What are you doing now that's working really well? What kind of world and community has your congregation transformed into over these last several months? And what spiritual food are you going to feed the world going forward?

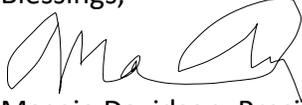
We are Episcopalian and Eucharist and community worship is hugely important as we think about how we interact with God, but these last months have taught us that we can have a more quiet and contemplative engagement with our Lord. How are you going to use this new found spirituality moving forward?

To me, these are more important questions than who are you going to hire to do the deep cleaning of our gathering space. So please, consider your options about gathering. Maybe small groups in homes is a better option for now. Maybe it makes more sense for you to meet outside at this time. Maybe, just maybe, what you are already doing is creating spiritual change in your flock in a way that you had not previously expected.

That all being said, I recognize that anxieties are running high and I fully anticipate that many of you will submit proposals within the week. Please be patient with as we review them. We will get back to you as soon as possible with our responses and questions.

Be thoughtful. Be patient. We are all just doing our level best.

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Maggie Davidson'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Maggie Davidson, President of the Standing Committee