COVID-19, CORONAVIRUS UPDATE #3
from The Rt. Rev’d. Laish Boyd
Bishop of the Diocese of The Bahamas and The Turks and Caicos Islands
Wednesday, 18th March, 2020

My Dear Sisters and Brothers,

As the people of God we continue our journey amid the challenges of life. Hurricane Dorian struck last year and Covid-19, Coronavirus is our mammoth challenge this year. In every age, God has helped the Church through many a crisis. The words of the Psalmist are true: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble…” (Ps. 46:1)

These situations of life, call us to employ an age old method available for solving the problems of life. God has created the world and everything in it. God has revealed Himself to us in many ways and continues to do so. God has allowed human beings to excel in every area of skill. We must take the best advice of these disciplines which God created and inspired, and through which God works regularly in our lives.

Conclusions coming from persons in science and public health in The Bahamas and The Turks and Caicos Islands, and in other countries around the world, indicate that the virus spreads more in gatherings of people. Therefore, we have been encouraged to practice social distancing and to minimize gatherings. This is why the Governments of The Bahamas and The Turks and Caicos Islands have closed all schools, and this is why the Prime Minister, The Most Hon. Hubert Minnis, in his national address on Sunday evening, actually said that large public gatherings have been shown to be linked to the spread of the virus, and discouraged these.

As the Bishop of the Diocese, I therefore ask that we observe the following additional TEMPORARY measures:

(A) We will suspend all Church services, Bible Studies and meetings for two weeks from Thursday, 19th March to Saturday, 4th April, in the first instance. As the situation with the virus is evolving, we will evaluate the matter before we move forward. I repeat that is a TEMPORARY measure.

In the meantime, Parishes may keep their Church Office open, and the Diocesan Office will remain open. When the Government directs that all but non-essential services close, then we will close our offices as well. We note that business places are already putting staff on staggered hours or closing.
These measures may seem drastic, but in many areas where the infection is now widespread, nations now regret not instituting stricter measures earlier. In many areas strict measures have caused infection to be more contained. As Bishop, I believe that it is our best stewardship at this time. These practices will help to “cut off the head of the monster” before it can grow stronger. By us practising containment and social distancing, that does not allow the virus to spread as much as if we act like it is “business as usual”. These actions are making sure that we are our brother’s and our sister’s keeper, and that we are helping to care for each other as Jesus expects of us.

(B) As we suspend public worship for a time we become a different sort of Church than we are accustomed to being. We are still God’s People. We continue to have hope and confidence in an all loving God, even as we adopt these temporary and unsettling measures.

As Anglicans we encourage our people to continue their devotions at home. God is present everywhere and He will meet us wherever we are when we pray and worship. God will keep us in these extraordinary times as we continue to trust Him and to remain faithful to Him.

(C) Clergy and Parishes are encouraged to communicate with their Parishioners via telephone, social media, and the use of technology, where possible. This may include contact and prayers, or streaming morning and evening prayer and/or the daily mass. This will ensure that members do not feel cut off, and that clergy and lay leaders do not feel as if they are not paying attention to the flock.

(D) On Sundays, 22nd and 29th March, the Diocese is asked to focus on ONE Eucharist, from All Saints Chapel, Addington House, that I celebrate and preach at, and that will be broadcast via ZNS and Cable television and Streamed Live on Facebook and the Diocesan webpage. This Sunday (22nd March) the mass will be aired on ZNS TV at 11 am and on Cable TV at 2 pm.

(E) In keeping with the protocol of limiting gatherings, I ask that, in the case of weddings that have already been planned, we ask persons to (a) reschedule the wedding for a later time, or (b) reduce the number of guests attending the wedding to a bare minimum (since gathering in large numbers increases the threat of contamination, especially when packed into close quarters). In other words, until this current crisis passes, have a small and “private style” wedding.

(F) In the case of funerals, please seek to have the family (a) postpone the funeral to a later date, or (b) arrange a family only funeral, with social distancing being highlighted.

Conclusion

These measures may seem extreme, but they are necessary in the SHORT TERM. They demand HUGE adjustments from us all, and inflict a great deal of discomfort.
I know that as clergy these measures are traumatizing to us and highly upsetting. However, as Bishop, I must make decisive steps to assist in protecting our flock and in taking steps that will reduce the spread of this virus. The URGENCY of this matter demands the utmost COOPERATION from us all. The Church also has a responsibility to contribute to national efforts to ensure well-being.

One thing that we know is the fact that this break in normal Church activity and routine, WILL NOT harm the Church or diminish her. In many periods of history, the Church had to go underground, limit her scope of activity and movement, and endure far worse, even persecution and suffering, - and the Church has come out stronger and uncompromised. Let this time drive us closer to our God rather than draw us away from each other or from the Church.

Covid-19, Coronavirus is upsetting and frightening but scripture challenges us to “fear not!” This does not mean that we must not or will not be afraid, because fear is a normal human reaction; it is an unpleasant emotion caused by danger or threat. “Fear not” means that we must not be overcome by panic, hysteria and the loss of control. Why? Because God has given us cognition, learning and wisdom to moderate and subject fear, and that is what we must employ in this challenge.

The Coronavirus and its implications test our faith and challenge us, but, with the help of God and His Grace, God will bring us through.

Please make use of these and other prayers.

1. **A Prayer for The Presence of Christ**
   Book of Common Prayer (BCP) page 84 #32

   Come to us, Lord Jesus Christ, in your understanding love when all around us seems dark and uncertain, when our faith is low and we cannot feel you near, and we find it hard to pray. Come to us then, dear Lord, as you came to your disciples in the darkest hour of the night, and let the light of your presence dispel our fears, renew our trust, and bring peace to our hearts, for your tender mercies’ sake. Amen.

2. **A Prayer for Strength**
   BCP page 79 #2

   May the strength of God pilot us.  
   May the power of God preserve us.  
   May the wisdom of God instruct us.  
   May the hand of God protect us.  
   May the way of God direct us.  
   May the shield of God defend us.  
   May the host of God guard us against the snares of evil and the temptations of the world.  
   May Christ be with us, Christ before us, Christ in us, Christ over us.
May your Salvation, O Lord,
be always ours this day and for evermore. Amen.

3. **A Prayer for Courage**

Grant to us, O Lord our God, the spirit of courage and hopefulness. Teach us so to live that we may be enabled to help to face life more bravely. Let no shadows oppress our spirits, least our gloom should darken the light by which others have to live. Say to our souls, "Be of good courage; fear not, for I am with thee"; keep us ever strong and joyful in the consciousness of thy presence; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

4. **A Coronavirus Prayer**

Jesus Christ, you traveled through towns and villages “curing every disease and illness.” At your command, the sick were made well. Come to our aid now, in the midst of the global spread of the Coronavirus, that we may experience your healing love. Heal those who are sick with the virus. May they regain their strength and health through quality medical care. Heal us from our fear, which prevents nations from working together and neighbors from helping one another. Heal us from our pride, which can make us claim invulnerability to a disease that knows no borders. Jesus Christ, healer of all, stay by our side in this time of uncertainty and sorrow. Be with those who have died from the virus. May they be at rest with you in your eternal peace. Be with the families of those who are sick or those who have died. As they worry and grieve, defend them from illness and despair. May they know your peace. Be with the doctors, nurses, researchers and all medical professionals who seek to heal and help those affected, and who put themselves at risk in the process. May they know your protection and peace. Be with the leaders of all nations. Give them the foresight to act with charity and true concern for the well-being of the people they are meant to serve. Give them the wisdom to invest in long-term solutions that will help prepare for or prevent future outbreaks. May they know your peace, as they work together to achieve it on earth. Whether we are at home or abroad, surrounded by many people suffering from this illness or only a few, Jesus Christ, stay with us as we endure and mourn, persist and prepare. In place of our anxiety, give us your peace. Lord Jesus Christ, heal us. Amen.

Source: The Jesuit Review

Yours in Christ,

The Rt. Rev’d. Laish Boyd

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