

Dear siblings and friends in Christ:

I'm sorry that I wasn't with you in worship on Sunday, but all of the reports I have received are that Fr. Rudacille did his usual amazing job as celebrant and preacher of the Good News, and that the adaptations I described last week were followed with graciousness and patience. I am thankful for those who attended, and equally so for those who felt led to stay safely at home

In the several days since my last update on the situation surrounding COVID-19, as I'm sure you are aware, practically every sector of our society has announced new restrictions on gatherings of people with the goal of preventing/slowing the spread of the virus. Local and state governments are continuing to give new directives, many with the force of law, with the same intent. Hillsborough County, for instance, has cancelled practically all in-person governmental activities and opportunities for public gatherings until mid-April (including, by the way, our shelter rental for the early service on Easter morning). Although my understanding is that St. John's was the only Episcopal congregation in Tampa to cancel in-person worship this past Sunday, local clergy have been communicating as to the need to take that step moving forward, as well as other actions designed to keep our members and community members safe and healthy.

Therefore, I am announcing that, effective at the close of the primary election this evening (Tuesday, March 17), all activities at SJHOP will be suspended until Easter Monday, April 12. This includes worship (see below), meetings of groups, rehearsals, etc.

This does not mean that the Church is stopping its work! If anything, we are called to intensify our prayers, our concern for each other and the wider communities and world in which we live, and our generosity as stewards of all that God has provided. In particular, we are called to exhibit the faith, hope, and love which lie at the center of our faith in Christ in this time of upheaval and uncertainty.

Here are the details as to plans for us to continue to be connected in Christian community, fellowship, and mutual care during this extraordinary time:

1. The plan is that our Sunday worship will be offered online each week. I am in the process of getting that set up from the technical side, and will be in touch with a few folks later in the week to help conduct the services. Instructions will be sent as to how to access the service once the platform and other details have been finalized.
2. Likewise, the meetings of certain groups such as the Vestry will be held online via Zoom. Details are forthcoming. If you would like assistance in setting up an online meeting of other groups or organizations, please let me know.
3. Please reach out by phone to other members of our parish, particularly those without online access! This is a time when our prayers "for our families, friends, and neighbors, and those who are alone" must result in being the hands and feet of Christ, especially toward the most vulnerable among and around us.
4. I will be available by text/phone (407-340-8489) or email to provide needed pastoral care or any other assistance I may be able to give.
5. Please take advantage of the multitude of online resources available to support your spiritual life and practice.
6. Lastly, please keep in mind that the expenses of the congregation, with very few exceptions, will continue despite our inability to meet together. Work is ongoing to enhance online giving options.

Know of my continued and constant prayers for all of you. May you be blessed with continued health, and may we all look with confidence and in the spirit of peace to the One who holds us all in the arms of divine love.

Your fellow-servant in the Lord Jesus,

Fr. Steve+