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| **Volume 3, SPECIAL ISSUE** |

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| **St. Mark's in the Community and****the Community in St. Mark's** |

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| Pastoral Letter to the Congregation of St. Mark's Episcopal Church To the faithful people of St. Mark's: I am writing to you in response to an outbreak of Covid that has affected a high number of St. Mark's congregants. Over the last several weeks, but last week in particular, we observed parish members and their families contract Covid at a high rate. It is clear, from our experience at St. Mark's, and from what we are hearing of spread in other parishes and within local families not associated with St. Mark's, that our area is experiencing a surge in cases and that we need to once again put into place safety protocols. I am grateful that all the cases I am aware of were short lived, relatively mild for most, and no hospitalizations were required.  Covid is going to be with us for the foreseeable future, and we need to be prepared for spikes to occur and learn to live accordingly. At the end of the day, **the spread of the disease is controlled by responsible behaviors in response to the risk of infection and spread**.          In consultation with the Sr. and Jr. Warden, and having taken into consideration the safety concerns of the vestry, I have decided not to shut down St. Mark’s at the present time and worship will continue without interruption. In the last 18 months I have sought to maintain a consistently safe worship experience and the wardens and I remain committed to that course.           However, no one is required to attend or participate in worship if they are uncomfortable doing so. Some have expressed discomfort in performing their lay ministries and I have released them from those responsibilities until they feel comfortable resuming them. This may include members of the tech team; which means we cannot promise streaming live for the time being but will do so as the team feels comfortable. Many find solace and help in the in-person service during a time of uncertainty and crisis and it is the church’s work to provide worship and spiritual guidance and will do so with safety protocols in place as necessity dictates. If each of us takes full responsibility for ourselves by following all the safety protocols of the CDC and stipulations outlined below we will weather this momentary storm by limiting our risk of exposure and curtailing possible spread.          The wardens and I wish to convey the following stipulations which are effective immediately: 1. We anticipate that many of you will opt to stay home for the next several weeks. With lower numbers in the sanctuary the risk of Covid spread is greatly reduced, but this is only true *as long everyone practices social distancing, wears masks properly over nose and mouth, and uses hand sanitizer frequently; while those who are symptomatic and/or are awaiting a covid test result remain at home.**2.*We encourage you to manage your risk responsibly in all areas of your life, including with your family.  "Bubbles" of familiar people with whom you are in contact are not exempt from Covid infections. St. Mark's has had a number of families in which most, if not all, became ill. 3. Several of those currently infected with Covid reported very minor symptoms that were attributed to other things in the early stages. Therefore, we urge you to self-monitor with keen awareness of all your symptoms, no matter how mild. Err on the side of infection, follow the CDC guidelines, and **stay home!**4. We ask that everyone who is representing St. Mark's in public to social distance and wear a mask until further notice. 5. If you have been exposed to someone with Covid we request that you do not attend worship and follow the CDC recommendations or that of your health provider. 6. The Passing of the Peace, Holy Water, and Chalice have been discontinued until further notice at Sunday services. 7. Coffee hour is discontinued though June and will be reassessed for July.8. Singing of hymns will continue with everyone masked. 9. Readers may unmask while reading but must be at least 10 feet from the congregation. 10. I will be reconsidering my preaching location and wearing a mask throughout the service, except when speaking, so there is sufficient distance between myself and the congregation. *Please be aware that due to the safety protocols regarding the location of the speakers the online sound may be affected adversely.* Let us continue to abide with one another in Love and showing the mercy of God in all our interactions during these turbulent times as is our Christian calling and obligation.  Yours in Christ,Rowena+ |

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