



# St. Mark's Episcopal Church

315 East Pecan Street, San Antonio, TX 78205-1819

*“For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.”*

-Jeremiah 29 :10-14

September 25, 2020

Dear People of St. Mark's,

It has been profoundly hopeful to me during this time of being separated from one another to remember that exile is not new in the human experience. The prophet Jeremiah after encouraging his people to build houses and plant gardens in a foreign land, reminds them that there will be a time for return. Of course they, and we, probably would have preferred a specific date. We as a community have charted a cautious course, given the risk profile of our congregation, and I have been grateful for the expertise of our parish subcommittee and the leadership of the Vestry as we have looked to the future. I'm also unbelievably grateful for the creativity and hard work of our staff who have worked mightily to provide meaningful and consistent opportunities for us to worship online with one another.

With San Antonio currently in a less active phase of COVID-19, we are ready to try some modest opportunities for resuming modified in person worship in October. We still encourage you to carefully consider your own risk factors before participating, and we will continue to have our main worship service on Sundays at 10.00am online. We also ask you to sit with these plans “lightly” as we will continue to monitor the numbers and may have to make changes. We are going to try this for the month of October, during which we will survey the congregation to get a better sense of what people's needs are. As a community accustomed to planning at least 18 months ahead, this is not a comfortable place to reside. We have learned that being flexible and nimble is more important than casting long-term plans.

## **Drive-Through Pet Blessing on October 4, 4.00pm-6.00pm**

So, let's start with something fun! On Sunday October 4, between 4.00 and 6.00pm, we encourage you to load up your car with your pets for a drive-through pet blessing in our parking lot! We will include a blessing during the Sunday morning online service as well, but if you're up to driving downtown, the clergy will be masked and ready to share a blessing with you and your beloved pets who have been working overtime during this pandemic to comfort and accompany you. Stuffed animals and pictures are always welcome as well for those pets who prefer to remain at home. Enter the parking lot at the east entrance on 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and roll down your windows to receive the blessing, but please stay in your vehicles. Our kitchen staff will be there to pass out some goodies as well!

### **Modified Holy Eucharist Wednesday and Sunday Evenings at 5.30pm Starting October 7**

Then we will offer small, socially distanced, modified worship on Wednesday and Sunday evenings at 5.30pm starting on Wednesday, October 7. The Sunday and Wednesday services will use the same readings and space is limited, so please only sign up for one service each week. Much will look different; we will send out a video next week that will help you prepare for what to expect. Most importantly you need to:

- Sign up ahead of time on the website using the “In-Person Worship” button on the homepage ([www.stmarks-sa.org](http://www.stmarks-sa.org)) which will be available on Friday, October 2.
- Wear a mask on campus at all times.
- Keep social distance with those not in your immediate family group.
- Remember that we are not able to gather socially before or after the liturgy.

### **Abbreviated Outdoor Communion for Those at Higher Risk**

For those of you who are not comfortable coming to services inside the building and who are at higher risk, we will also offer an abbreviated celebration of Holy Eucharist for up to 10 people, to be held outdoors at someone’s home. If you would like the opportunity to worship this way, please contact the church office at 210-226-2426 and one of the clergy will reach out to you to schedule a service. Please keep in mind:

- This is for groups of 10 or fewer persons, who will be spaced 6 feet apart by household (i.e. spouses/family members may be seated together).
- Masks will be worn by all persons throughout the service, including clergy.
- This is not an occasion for fellowship and hospitality beyond the liturgy—no refreshments or meals are to be served.
- Any person experiencing COVID-like symptoms, or with known exposure to the virus, should refrain from attending.

Our hope is that you will choose the worship option that best speaks to your spiritual needs and comfort level.

Dear ones, together we are the church. Through the Holy Spirit, we share joys and sorrow side by side, even when we are physically apart. We proclaim the hope that God is in Christ making all things new. What does your spirit need, in these unusual times? What gifts would you like to offer, to bring hope and comfort to others?

I look forward to hearing from you in October’s survey as we continue to monitor the public health situation and assess the needs of our community. I miss you all and look forward to these modest ways of moving forward.

Peace,



The Rev. Beth Knowlton, Rector