



# St. Mark's Episcopal Church

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

May 14, 2020

Dear People of St. Mark's,

*"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."*

-1 Corinthians 12:4-7

When I first came to St. Mark's almost six years ago, we engaged in small group conversations with the theme of One Body, Many Members. Using our Core Vocation of *Feeding San Antonio with the Bread of Life*, we were able to set priorities with one another. We had a similar process just last year where we continued to seek God's movement within our common life. After the scaffolding damage challenged us in new ways this past fall, we have continued to look at creative ways to carry out this Core Vocation.

Now with the onset of COVID-19 we have been even more profoundly challenged. The basic building blocks of how we gather have been disrupted, and we all long to gather again in the church in the ways we so deeply miss. There are many competing voices out there about what we should do, what is safe to do, when we should start doing it. Rather than rushing to next steps, we need to take the time to carefully discern the best way forward for St. Mark's, noting that what may be best for other faith communities may not be best for ours.

We have several sets of constraints and best practices that will guide our decision-making regarding resumption of worship. We have carefully taken our cues from the best public health data available from our city in terms of numbers of people that may safely gather, and will continue to do so. We also have very specific guidance from our Bishop, including the suspension of public worship until we have seen 14 consecutive days of decreasing cases in our city. The most important thing to realize is that even then, when we enter what is being called PHASE TWO, these diocesan requirements will not allow for a return to "normal." A summary of those guidelines is [available online](#), or you are welcome to read the [full guidelines online](#). It's also important to note that in PHASE TWO, along with extremely modified in-person worship, there is no allowance for in-person meetings, formation, nursery care, or any social gathering time before or after the service.

We face some particularly complicated challenges as a large parish when it comes to safety and the overall make up of our congregation, including having to discourage at least 35% of our community from in-person gatherings because they are in a high risk category due to their age alone. I've called together a workgroup

made up of our senior staff, which includes our clergy, Jon Johnson, and Dina Aboul Saad, along with three members of our Vestry: Ann Leafstedt, our Junior Warden; Dr. David Ross; and Dr. David Byrd to review all guidelines and best practices and make recommendations to our Vestry about worship. We also think it is important to hear from you, so we have scheduled three webinars to

- ground us theologically
- share what we have learned about music and singing
- review diocesan guidelines for reopening
- answer your questions

Please join us for one of the following webinars: Sunday, May 24 at 11am; Tuesday, May 26 at 6pm; or Friday, May 29 at 12pm. [Visit our website](#) for more information on how to be a part of these webinars.

After we have a chance to hear the workgroup's recommendations, and receive the fruits of the webinar conversations, we will make decisions with the Vestry, which then will be communicated both to the diocese and our congregation. While this will take some time, it is consistent with how St. Mark's operates in regard to our common life and our responsibility to one another as a faithful community.

Meanwhile, our staff will continue to offer creative and meaningful worship online. I am incredibly grateful for their hard work to make this possible along with the formation opportunities that are keeping us connected each and every week. We hope to expand opportunities for ongoing fellowship over Zoom and are looking at summer offerings that will continue to keep us connected.

Please know my deep gratitude for each and every one of you. I pray for you each day and covet your prayers for our leadership as we seek to be faithful in these times. I am grateful for your patience and participation as we engage these important questions in the coming week. I trust our community and have faith that God will continue to allow us to serve in new ways. We walk the way of Jesus Christ in faith and know that we have the gifts needed to continue as his disciples.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Beth" followed by a small cross symbol.

The Rev. Elizabeth Knowlton  
Rector