



Episcopal Diocese of Western North Carolina

April 25, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today, I write to provide you with a brief update on where we are as a diocese in response to Covid-19 and my hopes for in-person, public worship.

As you already know by now, earlier on Thursday, April 23 North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper shared an update to his Executive Order (EO120) which extends the Stay-at-Home mandate until May 8, 2020. He also further outlined the necessary metrics and a gradual three-phase approach to reopen our state. If our situation in North Carolina meets these metrics, the state will enter Phase 1 on May 8. This phase will last two to three weeks with specific indices before entering Phase 2.

According to the plan offered by state public health and medical professionals, houses of worship could begin offering in person worship in Phase 2 with specific safety guidelines. So, based on this proposed timeline, at the earliest, we might be able to begin offering some form of public worship Memorial Day weekend. We all must also anticipate that should the situation not improve, we will need to wait until a later date.

While none of us can predict with certainty the exact dates for any of these phases, I have already begun, with the input from other bishops, the Presiding Bishop's Office and numerous health officials, to formulate necessary guidelines for when we are allowed to return to public worship. As soon as there is clarity on the possible guidelines, I will begin to schedule conversations with the clergy and lay leaders of the diocese to discuss the proposed plan for resuming public worship.

At this time, until we know more, I am extending my current directive to suspend all public worship from May 10 until the end of May. If state officials indicate a more favorable timeline, I will be revisit this directive. In communion with the other bishops in North Carolina, I am committed to following the leadership and guidance of state medical officials in order to ensure that we come together in a responsible manner to care for all our neighbors.

I am so incredibly grateful and proud of the many ways each our clergy and lay leaders are utilizing technology appropriate for their church in order to provide heartfelt and transformative worship as well as build community. I am also appreciative for all the countless, creative ways you are staying connected and serving those in need.

Know you all remain in my prayers as we continue to walk together in the fellowship of the Risen Christ.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "José A. McLoughlin".

The Rt. Rev. José A. McLoughlin
Bishop
Diocese of Western North Carolina