

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

A few weeks ago, as I was taking the train from NY to Baltimore to have my Visitation at Emmanuel, Keyser, there was the initial discussion of this strange 'thing' that was making people ill.

At that time, we were discussing the use of the Common Cup/The Chalice at celebrations of the Holy Eucharist. In retrospect, how simple that all seemed.

Since that time (just 3 weeks ago) the world has changed. Thousands have died worldwide. Hundreds of thousands have been infected. Businesses are sending workers home, and businesses are now working from scattered workplaces – or especially from home. Restaurants are, for the most part, shuttered. Faithful employees around the country are now applying for Unemployment Benefits, due to being laid off. People in various cities and States are being told to 'shelter in place,' and not to go outside except for essential matters.

And Churches around the world have ceased holding Public Worship Celebrations. Even parish meetings are being canceled or delayed.

Two weeks ago, I wrote and directed that all public celebrations should be canceled.

Some questioned my judgment call, while others applauded it. Today, it appears that this was the right course of action.

At that time, I wrote and said that this would be for the foreseeable future, with the hope that we might resume after 2 weeks. Obviously, this will not happen! The Presiding Bishop has encouraged us all to continue with no public worship gatherings through at least Easter. I agree and extend my direction to cease holding public worship services/Holy Eucharists through Easter Week! In addition, I am asking the Diocesan Staff to work from home. The Office will be closed until at least mid-week next week, and possibly longer. The staff will be answering emails and doing as much as they can from various locations. Some of us will be in the office, from time to time, to make sure that other matters are handled.

I realize how drastic this move is, but it is in keeping with the Presiding Bishop, as well as in agreement with the Roman Catholic Church, and Faith Community gatherings around the world.

I know that there have been some who are considering trying to be physically creative – by having 'drive through' Eucharists – consecrating the elements in one place, and having people drive through the parking lot. This is NOT to be done, as I see this as only 'splitting hairs' and still creating a situation where the virus could potentially be transmitted. Again – such activities are not to be done!

There will come a time when we can all come together again and celebrate!

This is the most serious and drastic actions any of us have taken in anyone's memory. It is done out of an abundance of caution. We are to be reminded that more than 50% of West Virginia's residents/population are in the higher risk for complications from this virus. Although – this past weekend we have been told that it is not the problem for older people. This virus is dangerous to all ages! So – potentially 100% of the population is at risk, and our goal is to protect those for who we are charged to care.

I am reminded that while this virus is calling us to 'Be the Church' in the 21st Century, we can also draw from successful operations of the past. How many of us remember the Telephone Tree? How many of us remember the Prayer Tree? Using the Telephone Tree – one person calling 3 people who call 3 more – parishioners were as well connected as anyone could hope. It was long before emails and the Internet, and yet people were held in prayer, and made known that they were remembered by their parish families.

I call upon each of our parishes and missions to restart the Prayer Chains and Telephone Trees. Connect! Be intentional about our communities.

I have seen more and more that our clergy and lay leaders are becoming creative about use of Zoom...Facebook Live...and other options of technology.

Let us continue to safely worship Christ our Lord.

The Church will always be the Church. We will be the Body of Christ, spread around the field, to bring hope and love to the world.

Please be assured of my prayers, all the more.

God bless you.

Faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a small cross symbol followed by the letters 'W', 'M', 'K', and 'J' in a cursive style.

The Rt Rev W Michie Klusmeyer
Bishop of West Virginia