

May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Dear friends,

My greetings to you all in these pandemic days. I first want to thank the many of you who have been working so hard to keep Holy Innocents thriving as a community. We have never been “closed”. In many ways, we have been more open than ever before! We’ve streamed, zoomed, made phone calls, emailed, done errands, supported community groups, and are still developing new ways to engage.

I also know that after nine weeks of this ‘shelter in place’, many of us are hungry to be worshipping together again in our beautiful space with our beloved community. We can remember so tangibly how good that felt – and we’re ready to have it back!

There is much talk about beginning in-person worship in our sanctuaries. On Monday, Governor Newsom issued guidelines for congregations to resume services. Here is the link: <https://covid19.ca.gov/pdf/guidance-places-of-worship.pdf>

The Episcopal Diocese of California is in no hurry to open the doors of its churches, and for one simple reason: safety. From a theological perspective, it is all about love:

*“Jesus said: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself. (Luke 10:27)*

Our gospel mandate is to love each other, and we will only begin opening our physical doors when we believe that we have created the environment and the protocols that maximize the safety of all who choose to come. Bishop Marc has said that we will not resume in person worship before Sunday, June 28<sup>th</sup>, and very possibly not even then.

Our services will be different, there is no doubt about that. And we all will grieve those things that will not be possible. I have faith, however, in the vibrancy and warmth of our congregation that we will be able to make compensations and still feel that unique Holy Innocents welcome whenever we are together. If we can do it ‘virtually’ I do believe we can do it with the worship changes that have to be.

When we resume in-person worship, we will have a 9am and an 11am, and maybe an additional Office of Evening Prayer. There will be a number restriction (initially, a maximum of 25% of total capacity, i.e. 30 people) at a service. There will be much sanitizing and disinfecting. Individuals and family groups will all maintain as much physical spacing as possible (at least 6 feet). We will all wear masks. There will be no congregational singing (a ‘superspreading’ activity). There will be no touching, and there will be minimal moving around. Our Eucharist will continue to be ocular and spiritual, ‘*by heart and with thanksgiving.*’ We will also continue to create a live-streamed video of at least one of the services, maybe both.

For the foreseeable future, we plan to continue all our virtual offerings of Sunday morning Coffee Hour, Morning Prayer, small groups, Wednesday evening conversations, and Friday Games Nights

I thank Fabienne Blanc-Quarterman and John Gruenig, Michael Spinella, Cary McCullough, Ellen French, and Sr. Pamela Clare who have agreed to be the Holy Innocents Regathering Team. Together we will consider the many issues and how best to manage them for the community and our outside groups. We will share our plan for Regathering when it is created, and we will ask for your support in carrying it out.

When all the congregations of the Diocese of California have worked out how they can safely welcome people back into their sanctuaries, then, unless we're 'sheltering in place' again, Bishop Marc will give us permission to begin regathering.

I do have some good and uncomplicated news to share. Many of you know that we received a most generous bequest from the estate of Darrell Hudson at the beginning of May. While most of that will be invested to provide Holy Innocents with endowment income going forward, we will be able to accomplish some much-needed work in the sanctuary. We will be plastering and painting, in addition to putting in a sound system and upgrading the lighting. We anticipate this work will begin in the middle of June and will take three to four weeks. When you return to Holy Innocents in person, I think you will be pleased with how it looks!

I give thanks for you all, and especially for your warmth, generosity, and patience.

With love,

Jane+