



Saint Anne's Episcopal Church
15 E. Green Street
Middletown Delaware 19709
302-378-2401
www.SaintAnnesChurchDE.org

October 8, 2020

Dear People of Saint Anne's,

Because of Saint Anne's sacred commitment to health and well-being, the Vestry and I have agreed to suspend in-person worship at least until January 19, 2021, the date of the January 2021 Vestry Meeting. At this meeting, the Vestry and I will evaluate the state of the COVID-19 pandemic and decide then about whether to introduce or to continue to suspend in-person worship.

Since March, the Vestry and I have made decisions about re-gathering for in-person worship on a month to month basis. We considered offering outdoor worship at Old Saint Anne's Church in September but at that time learned that several parishioners had been recently diagnosed with COVID-19; fortunately, these parishioners have recovered.

As of today, 649 Delawareans and 211,132 Americans have died from COVID-19, and currently Delaware is experiencing increasing numbers of COVID-19 infections and hospitalizations. Without a vaccine or effective medical treatments, COVID-19 remains a significant threat. Although the safety protocols recommended by the CDC—washing hands, using hand sanitizer, wearing a mask, keeping physical distance—have proven effective in slowing the spread of this virus, COVID-19 continues to be highly infectious and dangerous. It not only causes illness and possibly death but may also cause long-term harm to our internal organs, immune system, and cognition.

A person can be infected with COVID-19 and be symptom-free for up to fourteen days; and as gathering indoors increases the risk of transmitting COVID-19, one symptom-free person infected with COVID-19 can infect multiple people, even if we are following the safety guidelines perfectly. Regrettably, such infections have occurred in churches that have gathered for in-person worship. As one of my friends from seminary said recently: "I do not want to open the church today only to do multiple funerals three months from now." To my friend's statement, I would add: I love you all too much to gamble with your lives.

Lastly, I recognize that the requirements for keeping safe—staying home, limiting social interactions, maintaining physical distance—can be exhausting, stressful, and can even lead to depression. *If you are experiencing any debilitating symptoms, such as depression, or if you need financial assistance, please reach out to Celeste or me or to a trusted family member or friend immediately.* Saint Anne's is committed to the health and well-being of everyone. Please let us know if we can help you.

If you have questions or concerns regarding this decision, please call me. Truly, I am glad to listen and to talk with you. Further, I understand the desire to worship in the sanctuary with family and friends, to hear the new organ, and to receive Holy Communion. I too am waiting eagerly for the day when we can all gather again safely.

As we await that day, I pray: God bless us and keep us. God bless Saint Anne's, the Church throughout the world, and the leaders in America and around the world. May we be united in our commitment to overcome this virus and to strive with all of our heart, mind, strength, and soul to love God and to love one another as Christ loves us. My sisters and brothers, please stay safe, stay well, and the Blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be upon you this day and every day.

Faithfully,

Russ+

The Rev. Russell Bohner, TSSF
Rector