

Dear saints,

As we live in unprecedented times of fear, anxiety, and uncertainty, I remind you of Jesus' Easter clarity: "Do not be afraid." Who could have imagined that one of our greatest acts of love and courage would be our physical isolation from one another and our parishes? I am truly grateful to each of you for heeding this difficult call to physically isolate, even as it means we must continue to forego sharing the physical sacrament of the Eucharist. On the other side of this quasi-monastic stint, we will have learned what it means to embody the sacrament of Eucharist in our hearts and our lives. We will surely have a renewed understanding of what it means that we – Christ's Church - are the Body of Christ. I know it has not been an easy transition, and so I applaud and thank you for switching to Morning Prayer online and at-home worship. We are in this together, and we will journey together as the body of Christ. I believe that we can come through this pandemic with a stronger spiritual core.

I have received requests to engage in versions of virtual Eucharist. While each of them is creative, I wish to take the opportunity to say something about the essential aspects of the Eucharist, as I see it, especially at this historic moment. When Jesus was tempted, he first clarified that we do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4). Because the Eucharist is spiritual food for us, the Church has come to identify it as part of the word of God which gives us life. This is not theologically amiss. But in his teaching about the word of God, Jesus was constantly referring to our transformed lives that are enlivened in our baptismal theology! In other words, Jesus was pointing us to the crux of the Word, the word that comes from God's mouth. This is the word that feeds us even as it enables us to feed others. It enables both our spiritual and our physical devotion to God, to our neighbor, and to all of creation. Every word that comes from the mouth of God is a kind of Eucharistic food for us, and we will surely need it as we undertake the journey into the uncertainty of the coming months! We will surely need this Word if we are to journey with a mindful, authentic and balanced Baptismal and Eucharistic spirituality.

By the grace of God, we have been well fed with daily or weekly Eucharistic meals over the years. Have we been nurtured to live into our Baptismal identity for such a time as this? Could God be sending us forth from the table with strength and courage to live into this transformative work God has given us to do? Perhaps this is the hardest work of all, a work we would not have foreseen: foregoing this special meal together as we continue to love and serve God and the world. Can we trust that God has, in fact, fed us with the spiritual food and granted us the strength and courage to do just this? To forego our special meal until we are all able to gather safely, physically, and *together* as the One Body? What a blessed season of feasting that will be! Trusting in God in whom we live and move and have our being, and in Christ whose presence both incarnates and transcends our sacraments of Eucharist and Baptism, **I have made this decision: We will not celebrate the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist symbolically, virtually, or in person, nor will we distribute pre-consecrated communion in the diocese at this time until further notice. The only exception to this is Last Rites!**

Let me add to my theological reasoning for why I ask us to proceed with no Eucharist for Easter and the foreseeable future.

Let us keep a fast to break the cycle of dangerous infection(s).

We traditionally fast through Lent and break our spiritual fast on Easter Day. This year, in response to a global pandemic, the Episcopal Church has moved quickly into a spiritual fast from Holy Communion (and public worship) during Lent. The secular world is often surprised when it witnesses any kind of alliance between religion and science, but the Episcopal Church listens to facts and science! That is why we must keep this fast now and extend our fast beyond Easter Day. We extend our fast also because of who we are called to be as Church. We are not following the two great commandments if we are knowingly putting others and ourselves at risk. Our spiritual filters help us to frame this fast less as an imposition and more as a motivation to act out of love of self and neighbor. Acting out of love of self and neighbor in this iteration of our fast includes the following:

- Giving up gathering together in person, maintaining physical boundaries, and staying wherever “home” is at this time.
- Taking on washing hands with soap or disinfectants frequently, and wearing masks to protect each other.
- Giving up shaking hands and hugging.
- Giving up physically gathering for worship.
- Taking on worshipping from our homes using prayer liturgies.
- Giving up Holy Communion throughout our diocese .

This is a fast, where my destiny is intricately connected to yours, using the South African wisdom of *Ubuntu!* I am because you are! We are fasting as followers of Jesus with one goal: to break the cycle of this invisible killer called COVID-19. In spiritual terms, we are working together to ring in a new creation beyond despair, death, and destruction. What other personal and social infections need our mitigation? It is inspiring to see reasonable people throughout the world playing their part to slow the spread of this virus by “giving up” on their privileges. We shall overcome all kinds of dangerous infections going forward! We are all in this together!

Let us extend our fast into Eastertide since WE strive to be sacrament!

The purpose of Holy Eucharist and Holy Baptism is to bear the fruit of the sacrament, which is to live out the way of Jesus, the way of love. When we practice this kind of fast as the body of Christ, the ongoing result is intentional Eucharistic/Baptismal behavior or dynamic Eucharist/Baptism. The fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-26) is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. When these are practiced, it is like the Eucharistic/Baptismal community “infecting” the world! We are infecting negative energies of the world with the positive, good, and proactive antibodies of love. As the Baptized, we feed on Christ to become more like Christ! This is proactive work beyond breaking the cycle. During these past few weeks, we seem to have moved from doing church to being church. Much of humanity is behaving differently than we have in recent decades.

- We are striving to respect every human being with dignity more than ever before because poor or rich, homeless or otherwise, we are all infection-prone-carriers. Yet, the burden of this crisis seems to fall heavier on the poor and under-resourced such as migrant farmworkers, and the homeless. It is also falling heavily on higher-risk jobs—healthcare workers, grocery store workers, garbage collectors, mail deliverers, etc. Less vulnerable are the privileged, who can

better isolate themselves. We hope we will treat the poor and those who do “unskilled” essential jobs among us with greater respect and equity on the other side of this pandemic.

- We are respecting creation by pausing emissions that pollute our island home, thus giving mother earth her much needed Sabbath. We hope we will be better stewards of our earth and all creation on the other side of this pandemic.
- We are showing more respect for physical and spiritual healers, scientists, poets and educators among us who have been mostly invisible because their work is so behind the scenes. Perhaps on the other side of this pandemic, we will have a deep and renewed appreciation for these sustainers of wholesome life among us.
- The priesthood is being reframed in this season of physical distancing in that we are calling all people to introspection, prayer, and becoming more of a priesthood of believers. We hope this practice of shared stewardship of care with the tremendous gifts of the laity is nurtured even more on the other side of this pandemic.
- We have never before realized on a global scale how closely interlinked, we are. We pray that our interdependence will be a lot more pronounced in our policies and practices on the other side of this pandemic.
- We have seen how obsessive greed has blinded and consumed us. How our economy, nationalism, and violence have become our idols in the ways we have justified their value over the value of human life and this earth. We pray that we will accentuate other economies like equity, unity, hospitality, kindness, and mercy on the other side of this pandemic.
- Most importantly, I pray that we do not forget this season and return to the way of life as we knew it before COVID-19!

In discipleship terms, we are striving to become who we are. Hopefully, we will behave less like the Empire and more like the Body of Christ: interconnected and interdependent! Before COVID-19, we had the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. Today, WE are sacrament! Embodied sacrament is a work in progress. The body and blood dwell in each of us, causing us to live and move and have our being as a living sacrament! The prayers we pray, the healing God emanates, and the generous love we share are all fruit of our Eucharistic formation and Baptismal enlivening as followers of Jesus. We are all in this together!

Let us wait to keep the feast of transformation together!

I cannot wait to have us all gather across the diocese as soon as it is safe. We will come together then, as one body of Christ, a people of the Incarnation and as bearers of God’s image (imago Dei), for a grand Easter celebration. We will grieve those we have lost, but with Easter hope! We will celebrate Easter not in chronological time, but in Kairos time, a time of God’s favor! We will do this as Easter people with greater meaning than we have ever before! It is worth waiting! Oh, what a glorious season that will be!!!

When we’re able to gather again in person, let us make sure that all members of the body of Christ are present physically and spiritually. We will invite those who found us online and welcome them face to face! We will welcome with open arms people who had given up on church for whatever reason to learn with and from. We will welcome people who have found us online who had stayed away from the Episcopal church because we are perceived as a church only for “people of means.” Members of the body who are homebound will be able to

join the liturgy of the Word online more easily and then have the Eucharist brought to them wherever they are so, we can feast together. Hopefully, more folks can join us online even for the liturgy of the Word and be part of the Eucharistic Community without necessarily partaking of the Eucharist. This will be a newfound joy on the other side of this pandemic!

- Let us wait until all of us - not just some of us – can gather at the altar until we can feast at the table together at Christ’s banquet.
- Let us wait for a glorious reunion face to face because disembodied Eucharist outside of the gathered community of believers is gimmicky and idolatrous!
- Let us wait until we can do this together in the “upper room” where it happens!
- Let us wait until that glorious time to feast together!

Therefore, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”—Colossians 3:16-17. We are in this together! We will journey through this pandemic together! We will come out of this pandemic with a deeper hunger and determined will to become more of the Beloved Community God intends for us to be. God is with us to strengthen us through it all. Blessings of Holy Week!

With affection,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A.L.S.' followed by a stylized flourish.

Prince