

"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." -- Paul's letter to the Philippians, 4:13

January 27, 2021

Dear St. Mary's Parishioners,

We've all needed to draw on the strength God gives us as we've coped with the challenges of the last year. The pandemic, in particular, has altered our lives dramatically. Among other things, it has forced places of worship, including St. Mary's, to close their buildings to prevent the spread of this deadly virus.

Yet God gave us strength and hope—and continues to! We found new ways to worship together. We gathered online and on the lawn. We explored less-familiar services from *The Book of Common Prayer*, such as Morning Devotions and Compline. And we'll soon introduce additional innovations intended to help meet our need for spiritual enrichment and community while following diocesan and public health guidelines.

Unfortunately, it is still not possible to open St. Mary's for in-person worship. The Standing Committee of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut strongly recommends that parishes abide by the guidelines of the Connecticut Department of Public Health. These guidelines call for churches in so-called "red zones"—areas with high numbers of COVID cases—to refrain from holding indoor services. Manchester is in a red zone. Plus, most of our parishioners are older and therefore at high risk of COVID. Although the decision is painful, we must remain closed. We will revisit this decision in May. If the positivity rate goes down dramatically before then, we'll certainly reconsider this time frame.

On the recent CAT survey, parishioners stressed that worship is a top priority. So we are striving to offer meaningful worship opportunities without risks to health.

- We'll continue to hold 10 am Morning Prayer via Zoom on Sundays in collaboration with Concordia Lutheran Church. Participants say they find that the service, largely from *The Book of Common Prayer*, is fulfilling and offers a level of fellowship not found in a recorded service.
- We'll continue to offer Compline on Zoom at 7:30 pm on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, except on Wednesdays during Lent.
- At 7 pm on Wednesdays during Lent, we'll have special shared programming on Zoom with Emanuel and Concordia Lutheran Churches featuring lay preachers from each congregation.
- In February, we'll begin posting a service of Holy Eucharist with Spiritual Communion, recorded in our main sanctuary, every Sunday morning on our YouTube channel. (Please see YouTube directions below.) This is possible because of our newly acquired technology and the efforts of our new Tech Team. Because of the time commitment required of the Tech Team, we will discontinue Thursday Morning Devotions.

- Beginning in the Easter season, we hope to offer communion to-go, as some other Episcopal churches are doing. This will enable parishioners to receive consecrated bread and wine in a drive-through fashion. More details will come soon.
- As the weather gets warmer, we will reintroduce outdoor services in some form.

Like you, we are doing our best to weather these difficult times while seeking spiritual replenishment and the fellowship of a faith community. With the support of one another and the strength that comes from God, we look forward to the day when we can worship in person once again.

Sincerely,
St. Mary's Executive Team

The Rev. Ann Lovejoy Johnson, Rector
Mechelle Olórtegui, Senior Warden
Sarah Tierinni, Junior Warden
Gene Marinelli, Treasurer
Joy Dorin, Assistant Treasurer
Jo-Ann Swanson, Clerk

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- St. Mary's YouTube Channel is the second channel down on the page. It has a circular image of the church on the left-hand side. Should look like this →
- Click the red subscribe button across from the image



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