The
Episcopal Diocese
of **New York**

March 16, 2020

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am writing to announce the immediate suspension of public worship in the Diocese of New York. This reflects a change from my last communication on Friday.

At that time, I asked that clergy make decisions about keeping your churches open that were appropriate to your local circumstances, and I made no diocesan-wide policy. I think that that decision was correct at the time, and a fruit of that policy was that I got to see the incredible conversation happening in a great email stream since Friday as clergy across the diocese shared with one another the decisions they were making and how they came to them. It seemed that most churches were going to be closed on Sunday, but not all, and the sensitivity which you all showed to one another, and the respect you gave to one another's choices, and to the sacramental and pastoral demands of your congregations, was inspiring. You were kind. You were smart. You showed your love of God. You shared spiritual, theological and pastoral resources with one another, you prayed for each other, and you demonstrated throughout those communications the integrity that brings honor to your priesthood. You make me so proud, and so grateful to be your bishop.

Last week, we were advised not to have gatherings of more than five hundred people. This morning, the CDC is advising that groups be limited to fifty people, and that that advisory will stand for at least eight weeks, which takes us to the middle of May. These policies of social distancing have proven themselves effective in slowing the rate of infection during epidemics, and adapting our practices to these guidelines not only serves the protection of our own congregation, but of the wider community as well. Bishop Mary Glasspool and I have both consulted with a member of our diocese who is a prominent epidemiologist and a faithful Episcopalian, and she has given us wise counsel. I have also been in daily conversation with both Bishops Mary and Allen, and we are coming to these decisions together. So, with them, I am now calling for the complete suspension of public worship for the coming eight weeks (up to May 17), but with a review of the policy immediately following Easter.

I am acutely aware of the toll that all of this is already taking on you. The extra stresses being placed on you by this unprecedented epidemic are extreme and undeserved. You have my most heartfelt thanks for the work you are doing, and for the quality of your leadership and care of your parishes, and I ask you to take care of yourself and your families, and do those good and necessary things you need to stay well and healthy. Know that I am praying for you, that I am grateful for you, that you are continually in my thoughts, and that I love you.

Everyone on my staff is working from home and will monitor their email and voicemail throughout the day. It is clear that that situation will continue longer than I had planned or hoped. But in the same way, please close your own offices for the foreseeable future. Cancel or postpone all unnecessary meetings and events. Conduct any necessary meetings by Zoom or FaceTime or other online services. Suspend public worship, even as you explore ways for alternative or virtual common prayer and spiritual helps. Work from home as much as you can, and have your employees work from home. Stay home. Again, if you have the capacity to offer, and are offering, live streaming video of Sunday worship, please post them on the diocesan website so that we can publicize that across the diocese (see below). May God equip us for the work we are being given to do. May God make us brave and strong and faithful to face and meet the challenges and opportunities before us. And I remain

Yours,

The Right Reverend Andrew ML Dietsche
Bishop of New York

Please post online services on the "Churches Offering Online Services" calendar on the diocesan website, assigning the category of "Online Services."

Post at www.dioceseny.org/list/