A pastoral message from the Bishops of California
May 22, 2020

“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)"

From the beginning of the pandemic, our Episcopal congregations and our respective dioceses have been strengthened by prayer, study, and praise. In this time, our churches have never “closed” or ceased in teaching, fellowship, prayer and service to our communities; we have simply continued our gatherings on-line and in homes, bowing to Christ’s authority and the teaching that we are to act out of love for others.

As the weeks go on, the weather is nicer, and our solitude continues, there is pressure to get out, be among people and gather. Churches are a place where we feel that pressure intensely, for we are a people that is embodied and communal, and we often refer to ourselves as “family.”

Over the past few weeks, we have carefully considered how and when we will re-gather in person. We recognize that our plans are not as simple as unlocking a door and walking in. All of our congregations are actively making plans centered spiritually on our love for others, and scientifically on the realities of disease. The
reminders from the CDC, and state government tug us into the reality that we still do not know enough about COVID-19 to gather safely in the same ways as before; we need to find new ways to keep our people safe.

We are grateful for our rights as Americans and as Christians. Even so, we put priority not on standing up for those rights, but rather on having the mind of Christ and becoming servants of God, of our congregation, and of our community. (Philippians 2:5-11)

For these reasons, each of our dioceses will follow its re-entry protocols as planned. We are carefully monitoring directives from local governments and especially the State of California, which will not permit in-person worship until stage three. When the time comes, we will make decisions that we and our discernment partners think best for the diocesan families we serve. For now, we will not re-gather in our church buildings but will continue to attend church virtually in our homes, greeting each other via technology, and loving God and our neighbor. We will continue to protect, serve, and advocate for the most vulnerable among us. (Matthew 25:31-46)

The way in which each of us loves our neighbor is sacrificial; it is a holy offering not only for our faith communities, but also and very importantly, for first responders and health care workers who are putting their lives on the line. As God’s people, we make this profound offering prayerfully and reflectively, knowing that in God we live and move and have our being.

Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated to you; and then use us, we pray, as you will, and always to your glory and the welfare of your people; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

In Christ,
The Right Reverend Marc Handley Andrus, Bishop of California
The Right Reverend Lucinda Beth Ashby, Bishop of El Camino Real
The Right Reverend Diane M. Jardine Bruce, Bishop Suffragan of Los Angeles
The Right Reverend David Rice, Bishop of San Joaquin
The Right Reverend Susan Brown Snook, Bishop of San Diego
The Right Reverend John Harvey Taylor, Bishop of Los Angeles
The Right Reverend Megan McClure Traquair, Bishop of Northern California