



THE RT. REV. STEVEN ANDREW MILLER, D. D.

BISHOP OF MILWAUKEE

To the Clergy and People of the Diocese of Milwaukee

March 17, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ,

Grace to you and peace in this holy yet most unusual season. We live in a time that requires more of us than most of us could have imagined.

I write you today as your bishop, chief pastor and canonical overseer. With the direction from the Center for Disease Control to limit gatherings to no more than ten people, I am directing the clergy and churches of the Diocese of Milwaukee to suspend public worship indefinitely. On March 31, I will reassess this situation in light of developments and give directions for the future. We fully expect that this closure will remain in effect through Holy Week and Easter, and that our traditional gatherings for that season will be canceled or postponed until the time of social distancing can be ended. This also extends to the following:

- No funerals may take place and must be postponed to a later date. Clergy may officiate at graveside services, being cognizant of the number of attendees. When possible, interments should be postponed to a later date.
- No groups of more than 5 may meet in our churches. An exception is given to 12-Step programs that meet in our buildings. If possible, 12-step meetings should meet in larger rooms that allow more distance between people.

These directives apply to all our congregations, clergy and licensed lay ministers.

Please know that it pains me to make this decision, but I believe it is for the best of all. Loving our neighbor requires giving up for the sake of others. Even if we are in a low-risk group, our thoughts and concerns as followers of Jesus must be our desire to limit the spread to the most vulnerable. Something which at this point only time and social distancing may provide.

Earlier today I met with many of the diocesan clergy in a Zoom video-conference to discuss creative ways to minister and be the church in a time such as this. As always, the creative gifts of our clergy community were freely and graciously offered to one another. We discussed ways of offering online worship and formation. In addition, the diocese has expanded its capacity to host online meetings

through Zoom. As this crisis continues to unfold, I will be meeting with the clergy weekly in Zoom conference.

I am well aware that this time may cause some economic hardship in our congregations. I encourage you to continue to meet your pledge commitments to your parish and give faithfully and generously to those in need. I ask that parishes observe the following hierarchy of expenditures: clergy and staff payroll, necessary expenditures and then the diocesan assessment.

As I prepared to write this letter, this thought came to my mind. Over recent years what is considered regular attendance at worship has shifted from every Sunday to bi-monthly or even monthly for many. Could it be that this necessary fast from public worship will give us a new appreciation for our parish communities and the joy of worshipping together freely? That is my prayer.

Please know of my prayers for you all as this pandemic unfolds. Pray for all who are most vulnerable, especially the poor, the elderly, the immuno-compromised and all members of the health care profession.

Grace to you and peace.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Steven Andrew Miller". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

+Steven

The Rt. Rev. Steven Andrew Miller
Bishop of Milwaukee