



May 15, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We have been navigating through challenging and strange times during the COVID-19 pandemic, and it is certain that there is more for us to face as we move ahead. The life of the church and our personal lives have been changed in ways we may not yet fully understand.

It is without question that despite all of the change and challenges, God has remained steadfast in His love for us. The Bible tells us that *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever*. And while we are all still adjusting from the suspension of in-person gatherings for worship, fellowship, and ministry, we will need to continue to adjust and adapt **as we provide guidance on what re-gathering across the diocese will look like.**

As many of you know, **a Diocesan Committee has been hard at work on a re-gathering plan to reopen churches and church offices.** We should all be grateful to the members of this important Committee: The Rev Canon Jerry Smith, Chairman, The Rev Steph Britt, The Rev Hugh Chapman, The Rev Jon Davis, The Rev Adam Greene, The Rev Matt Marino, The Rev

Ronnie Willerer, Rhonda Masters, James Pierce and Mary Call Proctor.

**This reopening cannot be an all at once or one-size-fits-all approach.** The decisions and the types of gatherings we can consider will depend on the incidence of the Coronavirus in our many communities and upon the best guidance of public health officials at all levels. Even as we begin to regather, we must all be prayerful and nimble as we adjust course.

Though the State of Florida has lifted or eased some restrictions, please note that *almost all safeguards are still strongly recommended—including physical distancing, hygiene and cleaning practices, and limiting gatherings.* As the Committee approached the guidelines it seemed appropriate to break it into phases. **I ask that you please read the phases carefully and with an open mind and heart, knowing that we all long to be together in our churches again but knowing, too, that we ought to be cautious out of love for our neighbor.**

Regathering will be more complicated in some of our churches than in others, and I expect some congregations will be ready to reopen before others. **The Diocesan Guidelines will not solve every problem or address every situation.** Early next week we will have an online resource center that will address frequently asked questions and ways to contact the Diocesan Office if you have specific questions.

Week after week I continue to be encouraged by the signs of hope and by the ingenuity, hard work and optimism of our clergy and parishioners. I have seen a core commonality across churches in our diocese, big and small, city and rural: **Everyone**

**of us feels that worship matters to us, and that being together as the Body of Christ truly is at the very core of our life.**

*“May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.” Colossians 1:11-12*

Faithfully,  
John

The Rt. Rev. Samuel Johnson Howard