Dear Beloved St Paulines –

Though still technically on sabbatical through the end of the month, I wanted to write to you about the current COVID-19 situation, and in particular about how it will shape our life as a church in the coming weeks.  This is a difficult time for all of us; I share your anxieties and worries.  I’ll be praying for you and I hope you will be praying for me.

By now, many of you will have learned that our bishop has required all parishes to cancel any public meetings, including worship, through at least May 17 (you can read the bishops’ statement here: <https://www.episdionc.org/blog/bishops-coronavirus-response-0317/>).  The bishops made this decision to accord with state law and guidance given by the CDC. I and St. Paul’s senior warden, Raymond Boutwell, will keep you up to date with further developments. For now, **there will be no meetings of any kind at St. Paul’s through, at least, May 17.**  The bishops also suspended “all home visits **…** while the Diocese researches best safety practices and alternatives to allow the pastoral care to continue without undue risk to either party and, by extension, the wider community.”  That means no lay Eucharistic visitation, no home visit by a priest, etc.

I will end my sabbatical from St Paul’s April 1, and from that date I will be available to you for phone conversation, and by email.  Should the bishop authorize in-person home visit/pastoral visitation, I will also be available for that.

Beginning April 1, I will be sending out – for Sunday April 5, for Holy Thursday (April 9), Good Friday (April 10), and then each subsequent Sunday until we are able to again worship together in person  -- a short liturgy, one or more of the day’s appointed Scripture readings, and a brief homily.  I encourage you to read and prayerfully respond to what I’ll be sending.  I imagine the diocese may also be making available additional at-home Holy Week/Easter materials, and the senior warden and I will get those to you as they are available.

Between now and April, here are two suggestions for your own Sunday worship:

1.      Pray the prayers I’ve attached to this email; the scripture readings for Mar 22 are here: <https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Lent/ALent4_RCL.html>

Scripture readings for Mar 29 are here:

<https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Lent/ALent5_RCL.html>

Pray these alone, or with your family, or with whatever friend you are keeping socially distant company with.  Perhaps share a loaf of bread and a bottle of wine with that friend.

2.      Many churches are also making services available by Zoom.  Should you wish, for example, to follow the Sunday service of the National Cathedral, you may do so here:  <https://cathedral.org/worship/weekly-services/>

Let me say personally that I feel pretty heartbroken that I will not be able to clap eyes on you beginning in early April.  I have so appreciated my sabbatical, but have so very much looked forward to being together in person, in worship.  That will have to wait.  I hope for many phone reconnections beginning early April – you needn’t have a pastoral crisis; you just might feel, as I feel, a desire to reconnect and get caught up.

Finally, these words from Psalm 91 have been good company for me of late; I commend them to you:

 He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High
         abides under the shadow of the Almighty.

He shall say to the LORD,

         "You are my refuge and my stronghold,
         my God in whom I put my trust."  (Psalm 91:1-2)

With love from your Vicar,

Lauren