



THE
EPISCOPAL
CHURCH[®]
IN MISSISSIPPI

THE RT. REV. BRIAN R. SEAGE
Bishop

December 2, 2020

Dear Friends,

Earlier today, Dr. Thomas Dobbs, Mississippi's State Health Officer, issued a Public Health Guidance advising that **“all residents of Mississippi should avoid any social gathering that includes individuals outside of the nuclear family or household”** (emphasis original). This recommendation specifically extends to and includes “in-person church services.”

For weeks, I have been monitoring the confirmed case totals, deaths, and the number of our fellow Mississippians who are hospitalized. Recent increases in these categories have been dramatic and personally alarming. In Mississippi, confirmed cases have increased 29% over the past 14 days, while during the same time period the number of persons hospitalized in our state has increased 36%. Today, the Mississippi State Department of Health reported 2,457 new confirmed cases of COVID-19, the largest number of cases reported in our state in a single day. I continue to be in contact with several health professionals who have helped provide interpretation of these and other statistics and offered me guidance relative to the pandemic. I am grateful for their assistance, wisdom and advice.

Based on the statistics and today's Public Health Guidance, I am formally adopting Dr. Dobbs' recommendation. Accordingly, effective immediately all in-person worship in the Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi is suspended until further notice. All other in-person gatherings in our churches (vestry meetings, Christian Education offerings, and the like) are also suspended.

I continue to encourage clergy to use social media and other technology to broadcast worship services to church members and virtual visitors. Only those persons essential to the production and broadcast of livestreamed services are to be physically present, and are required to be masked and remain socially distanced at all times. Vestry and similar meetings are to be held virtually. Funeral services (preferably graveside) involving close family members only are permitted provided that all persons are masked and socially distanced.

While we are not presently able to gather in person to worship, the work of the church continues. I encourage you to stay in contact with your parishioners, and fellow clergy via calls, texts, email and the like. We need one another's support now more than ever. I bid your prayers for the wellbeing of our people and communities, for the sick and those who care for them, and for our elected and appointed leaders.

It breaks my heart to make this direction, especially now, during Advent. This holy season of preparation always brings me hope and joy. I know that even in this uncertain time God will lead us from darkness into light. Whether lay or ordained, I believe the days ahead will continue to require the most unique and creative pastoral and sacramental ministry of our lives. Thank you for your ministry.

Peace be with you,

+Brian

The Rt. Rev. Brian R. Seage

BRS:pj

JOHN MAURY ALLIN EPISCOPAL DIOCESAN HOUSE

P.O. Box 23107, Jackson, MS 39225-3107 • 118 North Congress Street, Jackson, MS 39201-2604

Phone: (601) 948-5954 • Toll-free: 866-550-0872 • Fax: (601) 354-3401 • E-Mail: info@dioms.org • Website: www.dioms.org

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