



RE: Being Church in a Pandemic

Dear All Saints' Family and Friends,

Although we have not been able to gather in person, please know that you are being thought of and that All Saints' is rapidly adapting to our new situation. The challenge we face is serious, but we are most confident that Jesus will use it for his greater glory and our beloved church will emerge stronger than ever. We need to prepare for the current conditions to last longer than any of us would wish. As a parish we have three priorities right now: Preserving continuity in our worship and spiritual practices, overcoming isolation, and care for the sick.

We have received many positive responses to the first of our online worship services and accompanying church school. This week it will be followed by a 20 minute online coffee hour! Worship is our core reason for being and I encourage you to lean into it more than ever in the days ahead as a source of relief, care, and hope. The online church school classrooms were particularly effective. Feel free to share what we are doing with friends and neighbors who may not be members of our church, but could benefit from these connections with us. This is all the more true of children whose schools are closed and may enjoy being welcomed into our church school in this way.

Although few things could be more disruptive to our ordinarily lives than what we are experiencing, keep in mind that the fundamental tasks of the Christian life remain the same as they have always been for you:

- **Continue to be curious** and learn everything you can about your faith and the world around you (expect to receive, before long, a curated list of online and written resources that will keep even the most industrious of us occupied for a long time).
- **Continue to pray.** When you feel anxious or fearful about something or someone, consider it to be the Holy Spirit prompting you to pray. Respond by praying and presenting what concerns you to God and then listen. (Repeat).
- **Give and give some more.** While there is an understandable tendency in crises to hunker down and hoard, the Christian tradition insists that we are better off confronting adversity with open hands. It is remarkable how the audacity involved in giving during times like this lifts the spirit and strengthens the heart. Our usual expenses at All Saints' continue unabated and we anticipate some new ones as new needs present themselves, so please mail your pledges and offerings to the church regularly or do so online at <http://onrealm.org/allsaintschelmsford/give>.

One of the things All Saints' does best is break down the barriers that separate us from one another and connect us to any number of people we would not know otherwise. Our lives are enriched by this in innumerable ways. The social distancing that has become a necessary aspect of our common life is a challenge not only to the many, many, individuals who will struggle with being cut off from their usual social support, but also to our mission as a church. Expect to see as a consequence a sizable All Saints' campaign to reach out to one another through phone calls, social media, handwritten cards, etc. If you don't have a parish directory, feel free to call the office and we will mail one to you (and look for information to access our new online directory). If you do have a directory, please use it! Let's use this moment to tap into the creativity we have in our parish. Flip through the directory and look for people who live by you. Go ahead and call members of All Saints', even if you don't know them, and introduce yourself. Write notes. Pray for people whose names are listed in it. If you receive a call from a fellow All Saints' member, please receive it joyfully in the assurance that we are in this together.

Care for the sick is a longstanding Christian commitment. It is possible that many of us may get sick. ***I ask that anyone diagnosed with COVID-19 or is hospitalized call my cell phone directly.*** I will keep all names in confidence, but it will enable me to understand the extent the virus is present in our community and coordinate our efforts to support those in need. We are assembling a robust pastoral care team so that we can assist however we can our members who are most deeply affected by this crisis.

Finally, this is a fast moving and ever-changing situation so we will continue to keep our website and Facebook page up to date. We also continue to send updates out in email and, occasionally, make announcements during our online Sunday morning service. If you feel called to be involved in one of the ministries named here responding to this crisis and you have not heard from us, please reach out to me or other leaders at All Saints'. In the meantime, stay safe, use all precautions necessary, look out for the most vulnerable, and love one another. Our prayers are with you and your families as we all work through these extraordinary times together.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Paul +". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

The Rev. Dr. Paul Kolbet
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