

Monday Video Message
Bishop Sally Dyck
March 23, 2020

Introduction

Last Friday Governor Pritzker ordered us to “stay at home,” or, as it’s more commonly called, shelter in place. Sheltering in place is for our own health and safety as well as the health and safety of others. But remember we have another shelter: the shelter that comes from God. I’ve always loved these verses from Psalm 91: 1-2 (and you may be familiar with them from the song “On Eagle’s Wings”):

*You who live in the shelter of the Most High,
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,
will say to the Lord, “My refuge and my fortress;
my God, in whom I trust.”*

Let us trust in the shelter of the Most High, in God who will carry us through this time.

Yesterday I was so proud and pleased with how many of our clergy and laity worked to provide some form of worship for their communities. Some of you live-streamed; others sent out hard copies of your sermon and worship; some had the means to send a phone call to everyone; and yet others posted pre-recorded messages. I have no doubt that many in our congregations (as well as others who “tuned in”) were blessed by them.

Thank you! And may God continue to bless you through your creativity and inspiration!

Please know that you all are in my prayers—for safety and health. I am also praying that we will truly be the church through this time.

Today I want to address a few practical things that I know some of you are wondering about as we are in sheltering in place.

Worship:

As I said, I am delighted—and energized—with the innovation our clergy and churches have shown already in providing ways to worship in this coronavirus age. The NIC FB page has added a UMC Resources Group which you can join. This past week clergy and laity across the conference were engaging in conversations about how to be in ministry, not just through worship but also

through our outreach programs that care for the homeless and those who suffer from food insecurity.

There's an old saying that the wisdom that we need is in the room; I would say that the wisdom and insight that we need can be found on the FB page as you engage with each other. I celebrate how nimble some of you are being, and encourage any other clergy and laity not to sit it out because this is going to be with us a while.

Please join the page – NIC UMC Resources Group. You'll learn a lot, get to know each other better, and have some gems to contribute. Let's keep connected! Who knows? Maybe this experience will help us as the UMC to become more connectional!

Appointments:

Some of you have been wondering, especially now that we are under the "stay at home" order, how it will impact appointments this year! While we were still under the gatherings of 10 people and under, we had a plan for that! But now that we are to stay at home, we may have to put some introductions on hold. The cabinet meets each Tuesday morning via Zoom and we'll keep figuring out how to move forward.

However, those appointments that have already been made will continue to be on the July 1st change of appointment schedule...unless/until something changes and keeps us from that schedule. We'll proceed for now but will obviously monitor the situation and keep you updated.

Communion:

On the NIC UMC Resource Group FB page last week, I got a robust conversation going about whether to do online communion. There are a lot of compelling arguments to do this or not.

On the one hand, online communion could be the connection and the means of grace that people need right now.

But I'm urging the NIC not to do online communion at this time. First of all, in the 27th Article of Religion in the BOD, it says that "the communion elements are consecrated and consumed in the context of the gathered congregation." It acknowledges that the table can be extended to those who are unable to be physically present but the process is to have laypeople distribute consecrated elements to those who are unable to be present. Admittedly, it didn't anticipate the internet! Or a global pandemic!

But this is our historic sacramental theology, doctrine and practice. I don't think it's wise to fundamentally change our "Methodist way" too quickly even in these extraordinary times.

We are in the season of Lent. Lent is a time of sacrifice and fasting. Fasting is not something we're eager or adept at although JW fasted regularly in a variety of ways. Perhaps we need to think of fasting during Lent this year in terms of the Eucharist. When we break the fast—when we can finally come together again in gathered congregations-- we may find that we have a renewed, richer and profound experience of the Eucharist.

Finances:

As we all know, this is a very turbulent, even scary, time in our economy. Some people are being laid off with no income at all. Some are worried about their assets. Part of our ministry right now needs to be figuring out how we can alleviate the suffering of those in our churches and communities.

But I know you are also concerned about the financial health of your congregation. How long will be able to go on like this without gathering in light of our financial health? What does each church decide in terms of maintaining support for staff? Yes, even paying the clergy.

As every church reaches out to its members with spiritual support, it's important that every church have a mechanism to receive offerings regularly from its members.

Now is the time, if you haven't already, to make sure that you utilize electronic fund transfer tools. Check out the NIC website, specifically under "apportionments." There are resources for you, including ACH, a tool for managing your insurance, pension and apportionment resources. We will be providing a webinar in the near future for how to use these, and other means to enhance giving during this time. I urge every church that isn't doing it already to participate in these webinars.

Our Conference Committee on Finance and Administration will be meeting soon and will be communicating directly to you about our AC financial plans.

Keep your church financially healthy and that means you'll have to talk about giving!

Charge Conferences:

Specifically for those of you who are due to renew your Red Door loan, you will need to have a charge conference to do so. We almost had a plan for that when

we could still meet with 10 people but I'll get back to you about how to have those charge conferences.

General Conference:

As you probably know, GC has been officially postponed. The GCGC is trying to figure out when it can be rescheduled. As a global pandemic with health travel bans in a global church, it's complicated. I don't expect to hear anything in the near future but it will be big news when we find out!

Many of you have been frustrated and angry at this delay, but NIC has demonstrated how it's possible to live together as one in spite of our differences, especially now in these extraordinary times.

Annual Conference:

We are still monitoring the situation and I think that within the next couple of weeks we'll know whether we can go forward with our sessions together in early June or not. The Renaissance/Schaumburg Convention Center is willing to work with us in terms of rebooking our time there if needed. We'll keep you posted.

Conclusion:

This is a lot...and yet there are still so many questions and decisions to make about how we proceed into the future. But this I know:

I am the church; you are the church; we are the church together.

It's a goofy little tune but the theology is spot on.

One verse goes like this:

*And when the people gather, there's singing and there's praying,
There's laughing and there's crying sometimes, all of it saying...
I am the church, you are the church, we are the church together...*

That is our hope and vision: we will yet come together again to be church as we stay connected one with another. Work to keep each other strong!

You're in my prayers! Be smart! Be safe! And stay at home!