



THE EPISCOPAL
DIOCESE OF OHIO



**The Diocese
of Southern Ohio**
Episcopalians in Connection

To the Episcopal congregations in the state of Ohio, greetings.

Our two dioceses, Ohio and Southern Ohio, have long valued the spirit of collaboration and consultation that reflects our collective histories and our shared commitment to the common good. The COVID19 pandemic has once again brought that spirit to the fore, now evidenced by our working together to develop guidelines and directives for a physically regathered church.

Such conversation and consultation have been significantly enriched by renewed attention to our dependence on one another across the Episcopal church and beyond. As your bishops, we have benefitted during this crisis from meeting weekly with the other bishops of Province V, learning from our ecumenical partners in the Ohio Council of Churches, and collaborating with our Evangelical Lutheran Church of America counterparts, with whom we enjoy a formal relationship beginning to bear fruit in blended congregations rooted in both traditions. We give thanks for all these reminders that we are one body in Christ. We also wish to express our gratitude to Governor DeWine and Dr. Amy Acton for their leadership in guiding the people of Ohio as we try to bring this pandemic under control, and to the Center for Disease Control for its scientifically informed recommendations, which greatly benefit our governmental and ecclesial decision making.

We are writing to you at this time to let you know that we take very seriously our responsibility to support and protect the spiritual health and physical safety of every congregation that is in communion with our respective diocesan conventions. This is not our responsibility alone, of course. It is a responsibility that is conferred on every Christian in Baptism, the exercise of which falls in particular ways on the elected lay leaders, deacons, and priests we choose to lead us in what it means to be the body of Christ. There are times, however, when our tradition, with its sometimes challenging and fruitful dispersion of authority, expects its bishops to offer clear directives. This is one of those times.

To that end, we seek to speak with one voice as we approach regathering physically in our places of worship. Our respective staffs have reviewed the current regulations of our Governor and the recommendations of CDC, understanding that such directives remain fluid and are changing almost daily. We respect and appreciate the authority of the state in all matters of public wellbeing, and acknowledge its responsibility to restrict our actions where wellness and safety are concerned. We also affirm that the church sometimes has the responsibility to surpass government expectations for resisting behaviors that jeopardize and harm the public, especially those who are most vulnerable. We envision the possibility that, as Episcopalians in Ohio, we may choose to restrict our physical presence to one another in worship, not only for the sake of our own safety, but for the safety of the neighbors who surround us. We view this as a moral imperative.

On that basis, we are expecting and requesting the following as required practices for worship, direct group church work (e.g., community meals, homeless support ministries), and independent but congregation-related ministries on-site (e.g., 12-Step groups, Scout Troops, pre-schools):

- Social distancing
- Facial covering
- No singing
- Disinfection of all high-touch surfaces (including restrooms) after gatherings

The implementation of these basic requirements may be extended, or perhaps returned to in the future, at the discretion of each diocese, even if the state lifts certain restrictions.

Here it is important to note that differences of opinion are part of the Episcopal ethos, just as is the deep intention to be one body. That is one of the creative tensions at the heart of our tradition. Even now, as with regard to Eucharistic practice, there are theological and emotional issues to be acknowledged and worked out, which may be specific to our distinct and particular contexts. With that in mind, each diocese will provide an individual document outlining specific policies regarding regathering for worship and ministry in its congregations, with this cover letter attached. These protocols will be very similar in both structure and content, with likely only a few variances regarding liturgical practice and timing of implementation.

Please know that you are all in our prayers, as we trust we are in yours.

Faithfully in Christ,



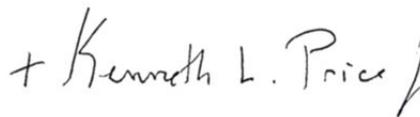
The Rt. Rev. Mark Hollingsworth, Jr.
Bishop Ohio



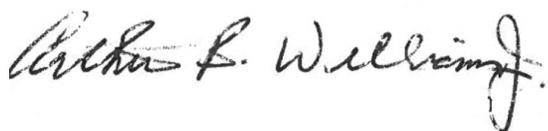
(The Rt. Rev.) Thomas E. Breidenthal, D. Phil.
Bishop Southern Ohio



The Rt. Rev. William D. Persell
Bishop of Chicago, Retired



The Rt. Rev. Kenneth L. Price
Bishop Suffragan of Southern Ohio, Retired



The Rt. Rev. Arthur B. Williams, Jr.
Bishop Suffragan of Ohio, Retired



The Rt. Rev. Bavi Rivera
Bishop of Eastern Oregon, Retired