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| |  | | --- | | *An important message from the Bishop regarding worship and COVID concerns:*  Aloha,  I have received requests from two diocesan leaders that I deeply respect asking me to consider closing public worship in the entire Diocese. They are rightly concerned about the recent local spike in positive COVID-19 tests. After today’s report of 42 new positive COVID-19 tests in the Islands, I too am deeply concerned.  As of right now (Saturday, July 11, 2020, at 2:30 PM), I’m not convinced that it is necessary to stop public worship in all of our congregations. This is especially true if a congregation has adequate space and airflow (ideally meeting outside), and is closely following the guidelines/recommendations in the [Diocesan Customary in the time of Pandemic](https://www.episcopalhawaii.org/uploads/2/5/4/8/25486559/customary_in_the_time_of_pandemic_2020-05-22_update%5b1%5d.pdf) (the 2nd edition will be coming soon and the guidelines will even be more explicit). Many of our congregations have good plans in place and are being diligent in practice. At this time, please follow the path of caution. Everyone needs to be masked [in a cloth mask and not a face shield alone (as of now)]. During in-person worship, please no hymn singing and no congregational responses.  No one who is vulnerable in terms of age or health should attend public, in-person worship (clergy and/or lay). Anyone who is sick should stay home (including clergy). There are many [options for virtual online worship in the Diocese](https://www.episcopalhawaii.org/coronavirus.html).  The religious community outbreaks on the mainland have tended to be in large evangelical churches who were not following the CDC recommendations about masks, social distancing and disinfecting. Locally, the church related outbreaks have been focused on home gatherings. The leadership in each of our congregations must seriously consider the space constraints (size and airflow) of their sanctuaries. The clergy and wardens should evaluate whether administration of Holy Communion is prudent every week (My first four years of ordained ministry was as the Curate in a church that had Morning Prayer as the principle form of worship at the third Sunday service, three Sundays a month. I found those services both edifying and prayerful. Having Morning Prayer on Sundays is part of the Anglican tradition. It is not ideal, but it is acceptable.). If a congregation is unable to fulfill the guidelines in the Customary or there is particular presenting issue, I will support discontinuing public worship at that site. (It is the call of the priest-in-charge or the Bishop’s/Senior Warden when there is no resident priest-in-charge.). I have asked the person in charge to let me know if a congregation is discontinuing in-person worship.    I will also respond to directions and guidelines from the Counties and State.  In the Islands, I suspect things will get worse because people are not following the basic CDC guidelines. Remember, this is without a major influx of tourists. We are experiencing local community spread of the virus. I will continue to monitor the CDC, Counties and State. We must be very careful and engage the required level of heightened diligence. I have asked the clergy and lay leaders to keep me informed about local communities and to share with me any word received from the County officials. We must be prepared to cancel in-person worship at a moment’s notice.  Pastorally, I think our current situation is a profoundly spiritual and theological one. The failure to wear a cloth mask, to practice social distancing, and to wash our hands (and disinfect public areas) is a violation of the Great Commandment. It is about SIN. In the Church, that means we must all give up hymn singing, the common cup at Holy Communion, and physical social interaction. We are doing this for the good of our neighbor and out of our love of God. I think this is an essential message to be shared with God’s people in our congregations. This is not a political issue for us, but one of our relationship with God and our neighbor. The common good is more important than our personal comfort or desires. We must engage this COVID-19 reality on the assumption that it will be with us for a very long time and we must model a new “normal” to help change the daily behavior of God’s people – and hopefully our local communities – in a profound way for the common good.  I am particularly concerned that Episcopalians in Hawaiʻi bear witness to how we must live at this time to fulfill the Great Commandment.  I have also urged the clergy to stay home if they are ill. God’s people need them to stay healthy.  Everyone, please stay safe. You are daily in my prayers. Please pray for me.  Yours faithfully, | |

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