



# The Diocese of Fond du Lac

*The Episcopal Church in northeast and northcentral Wisconsin*

The Rt. Rev. Matthew Gunter, Bishop

[mgunter@diofdl.org](mailto:mgunter@diofdl.org)

November 23, 2020

Dear Members of the Diocese of Fond du Lac,

The good news is that it appears effective vaccines against Covid-19 will be approved and made available in early 2021. This is encouraging and signals a hoped-for control of the pandemic that has shaped so much of our lives this year. The bad news is that for the moment, the rate of infection is getting worse and continues to affect our ability to gather for worship. Sadly, that means we are unlikely to gather safely to celebrate Christmas in our church buildings this year.

Given the alarming spike in Covid-19 cases in Wisconsin and the strain it is putting on our hospitals and health system more generally, continuing the suspension of larger gatherings for a while is the more responsible and faithful thing to do. It is not only about the risk any one of us might be willing to take for ourselves, but the potential risk we might be to others. It is also an act of neighbor-love to do what we can do to prevent further strain on the health system until we are on the other side the current spike. Even the with social distancing in larger buildings the risk of being together for extended periods of time increases the risk.

I would like for our congregations to be able to meet more fulsomely. Gathering for worship, fellowship, study, and service is what the Church is about. Not doing so does risk lost momentum and the weakening of connections.

I recognize the strain that not gathering in-person puts on our members, clergy and congregations. I miss very much my normal rhythm of visiting congregations and seeing the people of the diocese. I know that not leading worship and celebrating Eucharist with more of the congregation is discombobulating to our clergy. I know members of our congregations miss each other and miss the Eucharist. I know that no matter what we do during this pandemic some members will feel left out, either because they do not believe it is safe for them to attain in person or because they are unable to attend virtually. I know it means clergy and members of each congregation need to be more intentional about reaching out by phone and other means to connect with fellow members and to attend to pastoral needs. I also know that our clergy, lay leaders, and members have risen to the challenge of being the church despite all of these circumstances.

More importantly, I am confident that God is faithful. The Church has persevered through challenging times before and experienced that faithfulness. Christ is present with us and he will see us through this difficult season. As Deuteronomy 31:8 says, “It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.” So, we go forward in faith.

The Covid-19 Task Force continues to meet weekly to assess and reassess where we are and advise me as to the options, we might entertain to be the church faithfully and responsibly. Please pray for the Task Force. Pray for the clergy and lay leadership of your congregation. All of us are learning and trying to make the best of a difficult situation. Know that you are in my prayers.

Under the Mercy,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "+ Matthew Ryan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Bishop Matt