

[God says]: "When the earth totters, and all its inhabitants, it is I who keep steady its pillars." (Psalm 75:3)

Yesterday Gov. Ralph Northam of the state of Virginia announced a mandatory stay-at-home order effective until June 10 in an effort to stem the tide of rising coronavirus cases and deaths during the global pandemic. Many have asked how the governor's order will affect churches in the Diocese of Southern Virginia. The order does not change the guidelines that have previously been given except to say that they are now mandated. To that end, the following directives for our churches are and remain in effect:

- Church services continue to be suspended until further notice and likely not before June 10. Churches are encouraged to provide on-line worship experiences of their own if they are able, and to employ and make available for home use resources accessible through the diocesan website [here](#). If you need assistance, the diocesan office stands ready to help you.
- Parking lot gatherings in cars for worship or otherwise, or any gatherings of more than ten people, are not permitted. As reported in the Virginian-Pilot following the governor's press conference yesterday, Gov. Northam "said Monday that Virginia isn't looking to put people in jail, but that anyone gathering in groups larger than 10 could be charged with a class 1 misdemeanor, which carries up to a year in jail and a \$2,500 fine." The governor emphasized that "we are in a public health crisis, and we need everyone to take this seriously and act responsibly," stating that "our message to Virginians is clear: stay home." We model being Christian citizens when we adhere to the governor's order.
- Church offices may remain open to respond to the indigent who are seeking assistance, so long as not more than 10 people are present at one time and they maintain six feet of physical distance from one another.
- Food and clothing banks and other outreach efforts that address basic human needs may remain open subject to the same restrictions on social distancing and numbering of staff and guests.
- Clergy, musicians, lay ministers and audio/visual technicians may continue to go to church to record or livestream services provided that are 10 or fewer are present.
- Day schools are to remain closed. Childcare may remain open with priority given to children of workers deemed essential, subject to the same limitations on social distancing and number of staff and children.
- FUNERALS: In the event of a parishioner death, families should be encouraged to delay funerals. Funeral homes have been mandated to offer services only to immediate family members (to include spouses, children, parents, grandchildren, siblings in that order and limited to not more than 10). Churches are directed to do likewise.

It does seem perhaps that the earth is tottering and the people are in turmoil. We must remind each other that God established the pillars of this earth and holds them firm. God keeps us steady even if we are tempted to be afraid. Let us not forget the source of our strength and pray for His love and mercy on a daily basis as we continue to be the church during this confusing time. May God bless you and continue to hold you steady and firm in His most loving, all-encompassing hands.

Yours faithfully in Christ,
+Susan

[Click here](#) for a joint statement of the bishops of Virginia, Maryland and Washington DC (in English and Spanish)