



The Episcopal Diocese of Western North Carolina

December 18, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As many of you know, the winter wave of the Coronavirus pandemic is dramatically affecting all of North Carolina and it is having a tragic impact on the rural areas of our state, especially in the western 28 counties that comprise the Diocese of Western North Carolina. We are experiencing record high cases of the virus; our hospital systems are nearing capacity of ICU beds and medical staff are stretched thin. According to state reports, 19 of the counties in our diocese are in the critical category.

As the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement in this beautiful area of God's Kingdom, we have the opportunity to continue modeling Jesus' love of neighbor and self by wearing masks, honoring physical distancing and, when necessary, suspending in-person worship.

After much prayer and conversation with lay and clergy leaders in the Diocese as well as consultation with public health advisors, I am asking all Episcopal Churches in Western North Carolina to begin suspending public, in-person worship beginning Sunday, December 27 until the end of January 2021. Indoor prerecorded or livestreamed services may continue, however, only ten people (or preferably less if possible) are allowed to assist in such gatherings.

I know that this decision may not be well received by some, but my intention is that together, as the newly authorized Covid-19 vaccines are making their way to the most vulnerable sectors of our communities, we all can participate in limiting the spread of the virus over the next month.

Please know that I will continue to monitor and evaluate the situation and I will provide updates as necessary.

And finally, please know that you each remain in my prayers. I am grateful for your faithful service and ministry.

Faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "José A. McLoughlin".

The Rt. Rev. José A. McLoughlin
Bishop, Diocese of Western North Carolina